



IN THIS ISSUE	
 <b>New Rector at St. Alban's, Richmond</b>   The Reverend Bill Mok Induction	PAGE 3
 <b>St. Matthew's, Abbotsford</b>   Celebrating 125 Years	PAGE 5
 <b>Biblical Lessons from 80s Movies</b>   Where We Have Come From	PAGE 6

# As It Was in the Beginning, Is Now, but Hopefully Things Will Improve

THE VERY REVEREND KEN GRAY



COP30 Belém Amazônia (Day 8), PCOP briefing: VPR Press Conference. PHOTOS Rafa Neddermeyer (COP30 Brasil Amazônia/PR)

I write this column as the 30th Conference of Parties (COP30) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meets at the edge of the Amazon, in Belém, Brazil. By the time you read this article, the conference will have ended. Hope and expectation will have risen; if things follow historic patterns, discouragement and anger will re-surface following the conference as it has almost every year since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992.

Many will describe COP30 as another COP OUT. Eventually, most participants will travel home, though a sizable representation from Amazonia will remain, with little to show for their efforts apart from strengthened relationships formed in side-events—many at the local Anglican Cathedral—hosted by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and Indigenous communities including faith communities, a cluster of tireless advocates, including the Rev. Emilie Teresa Smith from this Diocese of New Westminster, who will never give up calling for justice, Indigenous, and environmental justice.

Possibly you remember the story, from *Luke 18*, where a very annoying woman pesters an unjust judge, wanting justice against an adversary. Because this judge tires of her pestilence—he wants a good night's sleep—he gives in and grants her justice. Of course, he should have done so for better reasons. The story shift comes through the unnamed woman's persistent prayer, a strident insistence that the status quo, the business-as-usual plot, will not bring God's will to fruition within God's creation. I cannot imagine a better example of how God acts through people of prayer, everywhere, even at global meetings.

United Nations' conferences are shaped by a corporate model—black suits, smart phones, PowerPoint presentations—nestled within parliamentary rules of order. On such a large scale, privileged participants can access negotiating tables; they enjoy resources such as well-paid staff, to communications technology, comfortable accommodation, and freedom to do as they please. Others do not, so they pray in protest. Their environmental experience, cultural wisdom, and sense of place are valuable, though year after year, they are excluded and despised.



COP30 Belém Amazônia (Day 10), COP 30 Global Climate Action High-Level Event: Accelerating Implementation.

Success in such meetings requires the wisdom of history as much as careful consideration of future consequences, what the Canadian Jesuit philosopher, Bernard Lonnergan called the "known unknown." Everything we presently know we receive through "memory, reason, and skill." (Sound familiar?) As we recall our origins, such a traditional view becomes a blessing when it looks forward, in anticipation of that which is to come.

The *Book of Genesis* helps us appreciate where we came from, even when our story reeks of rebellion and recklessness. The prophets call us to return and repent. Jesus' living a Gospel life helps us determine next steps, through our own trial and error, offering Himself as an example, an exemplar, and reconciler of all.

I write with so much appreciation for all those who at-

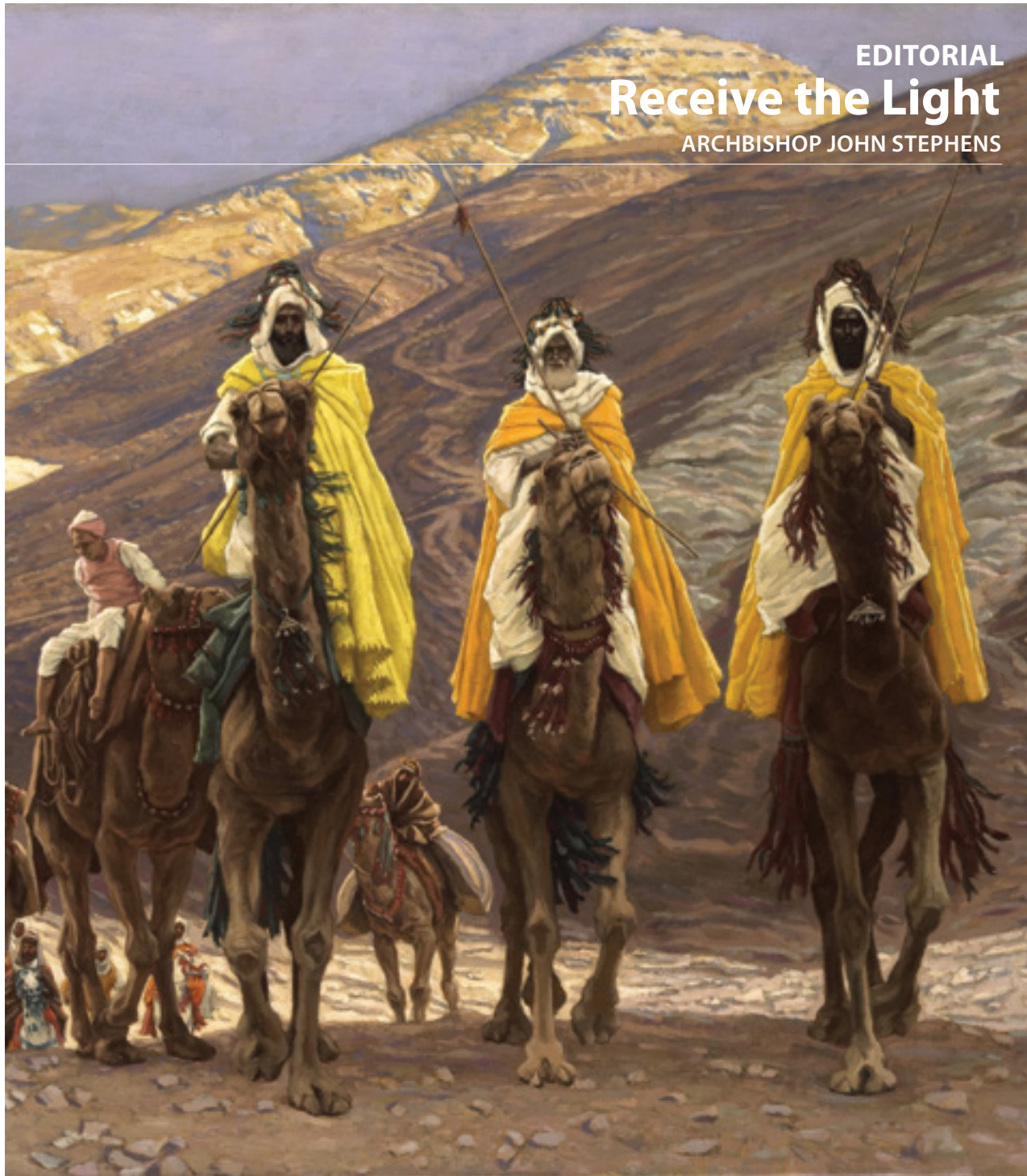
tend these global meetings, faithful witnesses who struggle for Creator's justice for all. I likewise express appreciation for those who do not attend global meetings, those of us who do what we can locally, persistently, and prayerfully. Until next year, COP is now over. Our work, however, continues. ✚

.....

*The Very Rev. Ken Gray is the former Dean of the Territory of the Peoples. He is involved in the Social Eco-Justice Group of the Ecclesiastical Province of British Columbia/Yukon. In addition to being an avid photographer, he also writes a daily blog, Take Note—take-note.ca—where he reflects on life, music, politics, retirement, and much more.*

.....





The Journey of the Magi by James Tissot, 1894. IMAGE Courtesy of the William Hood Dunwoody Fund (Minneapolis Institute of Art)

EDITORIAL  
Receive the Light  
ARCHBISHOP JOHN STEPHENS

On January 6, not long after the celebrations of Christmas have settled down, the celebrations of the Epiphany take centre stage. While many of us are still tidying the house of wrapping paper, needles from the tree and leftovers of the Christmas baking, we come to a realization that the festivities are not actually coming to an end but simply taking a different route on the road.

The Epiphany, of course, is a celebration of the arrival of the magi, as they present their gifts to the holy child, Jesus. Many of us have paid attention to this story from childhood, as we recall the gifts of gold, incense, and myrrh and wondered about their significance as they are offered to the Son of God, or the Word of God, or the Light of the World. There have been many essays and sermons delivered, giving excellent interpretations of it all. I hope that you continue your own contemplations as well.

For me, my attention at this time of year is usually focused on the night sky, to which the magi seem to pay an awful lot of attention. They had noticed a star that appeared to be leading them on a journey, a pilgrimage, a search to seek its purpose and meaning. And for reasons that only they could best articulate, they packed up their lives and these fine gifts and set out to follow the star. Presumably, they travelled for days, paying attention to the light that was leading and inviting them closer. Presumably, they had many conversations as they travelled, about the purpose of the light, the meaning of their journey and the source of it all. Presumably, they knew that they could do nothing else with their lives except follow and seek a nearness to the light and how they might reflect it in their own lives.

I have thought about this a lot, and it seems to me that we are the magi of our times. We followers of Christ in this new year of 2026 have seen that same light shining in this world. Perhaps we have not seen a star in the night sky leading us on a new path. But we have noticed the light; when we share in bread and wine, when we read the gospels, when we pray for those in need, when we seek absolution, when we offer food to the hungry. We have noticed that it is a light that we cannot simply ignore, but that continues to call us to follow. For we know that light will transform and change us. We know that light will reshape our priorities. We know that light will awaken us to the light of the world that we have seen in Jesus Christ.

At a Baptism, we hear these words as a candle is presented to the candidate: “Receive the light of Christ to show that you have passed from darkness to light.” This is the journey of the magi, and it is our path as well, with magi all around the world as we continue to seek God’s wisdom and hope known to us in Christ. Receive the light. ✦

Clergy News

Archbishop John Stephens has appointed the Rev. Ron Culmer as Rector of St. Paul’s, effective May 1, 2026. Rev. Culmer has been rector of St. Catherine’s Episcopal Church in the San Francisco Bay Area for 23 years. ✦

.....

Archbishop John Stephens has appointed the Rev. Shawn Bullock as Deacon-in-Charge of St. John the Evangelist, North Vancouver, effective December 7, 2025. ✦

Announcement

On November 27, 2025, the Council of General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada appointed George Cadman, KC, ODNW as Chancellor of General Synod. The position takes effect January 1, 2026.

Cadman has been Chancellor of the Diocese of New Westminster since 1988. He will continue in that role with the help of supportive vice-chancellors in the diocese.

Primate Shane Parker said, “I am very grateful for George’s faithful willingness to serve as our National Chancellor and look forward to working closely with him in this transformational triennium.” ✦



Growing communities of faith in Jesus Christ to serve God’s mission in the world.



Published eight times a year as a section of the *Anglican Journal* by the Archbishop and Synod of the Diocese of New Westminster.

**Editor** Alicia Ambrosio  
aambrosio@vancouver.anglican.ca

**Designer** Jennifer Ewing, BDes

**Issue** This is the 1st issue in the 57th year of publication

**Submission Information**  
Contact Alicia Ambrosio by phone at 604.684.6306, or by email at communications@vancouver.anglican.ca

**Subscriptions** Please subscribe online at [www.anglicanjournal.com/newssubscription/](http://www.anglicanjournal.com/newssubscription/)

**Address changes in writing to**  
Topic c/o Anglican Journal,  
80 Hayden Street, Toronto, Ontario M4Y 3G2

**Printed By** KT Web Printing, Toronto, Ontario

**Mailed By** Elite Bindery & Mailing Services,  
Scarborough, Ontario

**Circulation** 1,704

**The Anglican Church & The Anglican Communion**  
A global community of 80 million Anglicans in 64,000 congregations in 165 countries.

**Website** For the latest news and events go to [www.vancouver.anglican.ca](http://www.vancouver.anglican.ca)

**The Anglican Church of Canada**  
A community of 640,000 members organized into four ecclesiastical provinces, including British Columbia and the Yukon.

**The Diocese of New Westminster**  
The Anglican Church in the Lower Mainland, the Fraser Valley, and on the Sunshine Coast of British Columbia, located on the ancestral lands of the Coast Salish First Nations, consisting of 62 parishes and 4 worshipping communities.

**Contributors & Helpers for this issue**  
Sarah Autio, Ken Gray, Matt Koovisk, Shawn MacDonald, Rafa Neddermeyer, Larry Scherban, Archbishop John Stephens, and Monte Tugwete



**The Archbishop of New Westminster & Metropolitan of the Ecclesiastical Province of British Columbia & Yukon**  
The Most Reverend John Stephens

**Address**  
Diocese of New Westminster  
1410 Nanton Avenue,  
Vancouver, BC V6H 2E2

**Phone**  
604.684.6306

Thank you!





The Rev. Bill Mok and Archbishop John Stephens pose at the altar after the service formally installing Rev. Mok as Rector of St. Alban's, Richmond. PHOTO Larry Scherban

# The Reverend Bill Mok Inducted at St. Alban's, Richmond

ALICIA AMBROSIO

The induction of a new Rector is a service that at its heart is about answering a call once more. As with any calling one answers, it also means trusting God even if the path seems unclear. For St. Alban's in Richmond, the induction of the Rev. Bill Mok as their new Rector was a response by both priest and clergy to trust and say "yes."

The Service of Induction of the Rev. Mok took place Wednesday, October 23. Archbishop John Stephens presided and the Rev. Tellison Glover preached.

In his sermon Rev. Glover reflected on the moments in scripture when Jesus calls and instructs his closest followers. "If you listen closely to Jesus' words in the gospel, everything revolves around love. He doesn't say, 'Be nice to one another,' or 'Tolerate each other.' He says, love one another."

The love to which Jesus calls his followers, "it's about choosing, every day, to see one another as beloved of God, even when it's inconvenient, even when our differences get in the way," said Rev. Glover. An induction service "isn't just about installing a priest, it's about renewing a shared call to love one another in Christ."

When Jesus' followers answered his call to love, the dynamic between them changed. They became friends. The shift is significant because friends have a shared purpose. "That's a big change. Servants follow instructions; friends share purpose," said Rev. Glover.

Committing to that friendship creates space for trust, understanding and a shared sense of mission to grow.

Rev. Glover said that while the path that got St. Alban's to the point of choosing a new rector was not always an easy one, it shows the community's answer to, and trust

in, God's call to them.

*"And yet here you both are... because, somehow, God has chosen you for each other."*

*Now, God is inviting you both into a new kind of trust—trusting each other. And that kind of trust isn't automatic. It's something you grow into. It's built meal by meal, conversation by conversation, prayer by prayer. And that kind of trust, when tended well, becomes the ground where love takes root.*

*It's the love that chooses to stay at the table, even when the conversation is hard. It's the love that makes room for grace, and begins again, day after day.*

*It will not always be easy. But it will be worth it. And if you do, the promise of Jesus will come true in you: 'That my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.'*

The service continued with the signing of the Oaths and Subscriptions. Archbishop Stephens then presented Fr. Mok with his new licence. The regional dean, the Rev. Marnie Peterson welcomed Fr. Mok to the deanery. The Ven. Luisito Engnan, Archdeacon of Fraser, shared a few words welcoming the new rector to the archdeaconry.

The service continued with the presentation of the symbols of ministry and the eucharist.

After the service the parish community gathered for celebratory fellowship and the requisite cake. During the post-service celebration, parishioners spoke expressing their joy at being able to welcome a new rector. ✠

*"It's the love  
that chooses to stay  
at the table,  
even when the conversation  
is hard.  
It's the love  
that makes room  
for grace,  
and begins again,  
day after day."*

The Reverend Tellison Glover



Archbishop John Stephens looks on as the Rev. Bill Mok reads the Oaths and Subscriptions during the Service of Induction. PHOTO Larry Scherban



Archbishop John Stephen and Rev. Bill Mok look on as Rev. Tellison Glover witnesses the Oaths and Subscriptions that Rev. Mok had just signed. PHOTO Alicia Ambrosio



A parishioner presents Rev. Bill Mok with a chalice and patten during the portion of the service where the symbols of ministry are presented. PHOTO Alicia Ambrosio





The Course cadets arrive on site. PHOTO The Rev. Matt Koovisk



The Rev. Matt Koovisk and Capt. Fred Pignatel (in military uniform), the other member of Rocky Mountain Cadet Training Centre’s Wellness Team, leads a “life skills session” for course cadets. PHOTO Capt. Shawn MacDonald (Unit Public Affairs Representative, Rocky Mountain Cadet Training Centre)



More of the “life skills session” for course cadets. PHOTO Capt. Shawn MacDonald



The Rev. Matt Koovisk pauses to take a selfie outside his office. PHOTO The Rev. Matt Koovisk



The view from the doorway of the Chaplain's office. PHOTO The Rev. Matt Koovisk

# Black in a Sea of Green

## The Life of a Priest at Cadet Camp

THE REVEREND MATT KOOVISK



The Rev. Matt Koovisk pauses for a photo in his office. PHOTO Capt. Shawn MacDonald

On a Saturday morning in July, I’m standing on a military parade square watching the weekly commanding officer’s parade. While I’m wearing the traditional black clergy shirt (with white neckband), I’m surrounded by a sea of green uniforms on both cadets and officers. The parade continues in front of me with military precision, and eventually, the cadets march off the parade square. I then wander around that same parade square, greeting cadets and staff, congratulating those who have been recognized for their hard work, sitting for a moment with those I have noticed who have been struggling through camp, and greeting everybody that greets me with a “hi, Padre!” with a “hey there” back.

For the most part, the work of a chaplain is done in the quiet corners of the camp, away from the spotlight. It’s about quietened conversations with scared cadets who are away from home for the first time. It’s about teaching cadets life skills that they’ll take with them not only after they leave our camp, but also after they age out of the program. It’s about sitting in my office with a frustrated staffer who needs to be heard in a hierarchy that may not listen to their concerns. It’s even about sometimes publicly calling out somebody who’s made an unhelpful statement in the mess hall during dinner (with compassion, of course).

I’ve found that image of “black in a sea of green” helpful for the role of the chaplain because it visually sets me apart from the rest of the camp and symbolizes the unique role I hold of being a beacon of compassion, hope, and care. I am somebody who provides a safe space for people to come and rest a while (and unburden themselves from the pressures that are very much a part of cadet camp life). To be “black in a sea of green” is to be a still point in a world of motion. It is to offer a pause, a breath, a sacred space where one can lay down their burdens—if only for a moment—and be reminded that they are more than their performance. In the midst of the noise and demands of cadet camp life, I hope my presence offers a quiet reminder that there is space to be still, to be known, and to be renewed. Even here at cadet camp, God makes room for rest, and I want to remind those around me to do that exact thing, for Jesus invites us all to rest from time to time.

I can’t help but take this image and expand it into my own practise of priestly ministry outside of cadet camp. The role of the priest has us being a calm and steady presence amidst the changes and chances of fleeting world, offering a “still point” where weary people can find rest of their souls. Like the quiet conversations I share as a chaplain on the parade square, part of my priestly ministry in the parish is also to listen attentively, offer comfort generously, and serve tirelessly. Whether walking alongside parishioners in times of joy or struggle, it is in these small, faithful acts that I strive to reflect the love of Christ, guiding others to experience God’s peace and hope amid life’s challenges.

Wearing black in a sea of green is an experience like no other, to be sure, but I know that it is also a privilege like no other, and I hope and pray that in these moments at camp, I bring the love, grace and mercy of Jesus Christ to a place where while it is not expected, is very much welcomed. ✚

.....  
Fr. Matt Koovisk is sometime Chaplain and Wellness Team Lead, at Rocky Mountain Cadet Training Centre, Cochrane, Alberta, and current Rector of St. John’s, Sardis and Regional Dean of Yale.





Rev. James Hwang gives a children's talk at the start of the service. PHOTOS Alicia Ambrosio

# 125 Years of Anglican presence in Abbotsford

ALICIA AMBROSIO

On Sunday, October 26, St. Matthew's church in Abbotsford celebrated 125 years as a worshipping community. The anniversary was marked with a Eucharist service, presided over by Rev. James Hwang, the Rector of St. Matthew's. and the Ven. Nick Pang, Executive Archdeacon of the Diocese of New Westminster, was the guest preacher.

Reflecting on the Gospel Archdeacon Pang said, after the crucifixion of Jesus, after they had taken him down, laid him in the tomb and rolled the stone across it, the terrified disciples locked themselves in a room. "And of course, that's when he decides to show up. Just like Jesus, waiting for the opportune moment. Always full of surprises. He shows up, out of the blue. No heavenly chorus this time, no wise men, no shepherds with their sheep, no earthquake, no temple curtain splitting in two, nothing; he's just there. Like he's been there the whole time."

Jesus greets the terrified disciples — some of whom recently betrayed him — with the words, "Peace be with you." Archdeacon Pang said, ultimately, it is those words that change everything. "It's not the death, or the cross, or even the harrowing of hell, it's four small words that change the world. 'Peace be with you.' It's the reassurance that there is nothing, not one thing, that you can do, not even the crucifixion of God, that can take you out of reach of God's redemptive arm, stretching out, catching hold of you."

"I wonder if we do remember how much power those words hold. I wonder if it frightens us. I wonder if it's easier to proclaim Christ crucified, dead, buried, and resurrected, than it is to believe that God might love you enough to greet you with four simple words, 'peace be with you,'" the archdeacon said.

Touching on the history of the parish, he said, "This parish has had its own share of moments of doubt, and struggle. I imagine a fair few tears have been shed in this community in the past. Over the past few years, maybe things have started to feel a little bit lighter." No one would blame parishioners for wanting to lock the door like the disciples did.

"I wonder if this is the moment in the life of this parish when Jesus himself speaks to you. And greets you. With words of beauty, and truth, and goodness.

I wonder if Christ is speaking to you in the arts, through clay, through thread and quilts, through music, and social media. I wonder if Christ is speaking to you through the ways you open the scriptures, and the ways you meet together. I wonder if Christ is speaking to you through your work with the foodbank, and your support of Alongside Hope. I wonder if Christ is calling to you with words of beauty, and truth, and goodness: 'peace be with you,'" said Archdeacon Pang.

That encounter with Jesus who says, "peace be with you," is ultimately a call, a commission to go out into the world

"to bring mercy and grace to others."

At the end of the Eucharist Service a specially formed choir made up of parishioners sang a selection of hymns giving thanks for the 125 years of the parish. A small choir made of the parish's Nigerian members also sang two traditional songs of praise.

At the end of the service, Rev. Hwang addressed the congregation and thanked "all past and present who laid the foundation for the church today." He reflected on the parish being part of the wider diocese, saying, "We have a motherhouse." He said that means, among other things,

"we are supported by the diocese, and sometimes we support the diocese."

Rev. Hwang thanked all the lay people active in the parishes' various ministries. A tangible sign of the unity and vibrancy of the parish community was a quilt made by parishioners and the parish's quilt guild. Parishioners decorated squares of fabric, which the guild turned into a quilt. The quilt was used as the altar frontal for the anniversary Eucharist service.

"We are the body of Christ, and these are the people that make the parish grow," said Rev. Hwang. ✠



A choir made up of parishioners sings a selections of songs of thanksgiving at the end of the service.



Executive Archdeacon Nick Pang, People's Warden Trish Martin, and Rev. James Hwang pose after the service.



A choir made up of the Nigerian members of the congregation sings traditional Nigerian songs of praise and thanksgiving.





## CULTURE & FAITH

# Where We Have Come From & Where Are We Going To?

THE REVEREND MONTE TUGWETE

As a leadership instructor and scholar, the issue of where one is coming from and where one plans to go is a very important matter because it speaks to one's *vision*, *mission*, and *values* (VMVs). These enable one to set goals in life, in business, and anywhere where strategic planning is needed. One can never be a visionary if one moves without asking these five questions:

1. Who am I?
2. Where am I going?
3. How do I get where I want to go?
4. What do I need to get there?
5. What are the plans that I have to get where I want to go?

This reminds me of a story a friend of mine told me about overhearing his Gen Z daughter on the phone with her friend. He overheard her saying, "These 1900s people are so funny." He said to me, "Monte I felt so old because I was born in the 1900s." I comforted him saying, "Well, we the 1900s models had cool movies like the *Back to the Future* trilogy that was super philosophical and helped us have a vision for our lives.

When I was marinating ideas for this article, the 1900s folks' 1980s sci-fi classic *Back to the Future* trilogy featuring Michael J. Fox as Marty McFly, and his eccentric scientist friend Christopher Llyod as Doc Brown came to mind. So here goes the 1900s filmography:

### Back to the Future (1985)

Marty McFly is accidentally sent back to 1955 in a DeLo-rean time machine. He inadvertently prevents his future parents from meeting, jeopardizing his own existence. He must work with the 1955 version of Doc Brown to get his parents together and find a way to get back to 1985.

### Back to the Future Part II (1989)

Marty and Doc travel to the future to help Marty's kids. But their actions inadvertently create a dystopian 1985. They must travel back and forth between 1985 and 2015 to restore the correct timeline after Biff Tannen steals a sports almanac.

### Back to the Future Part III (1990)

After being stranded in 1885, Doc Brown falls in love with a schoolteacher, Clara Clayton. Marty travels to the Old West to rescue Doc before he is killed by Buford "Mad Dog" Tannen, Biff's great-grandfather. Marty has to figure out how to get them both back to 1985.

We who were born in the 1900s were so thrilled by this classic. Who wouldn't be, with a flying car, the antics of the ever-eccentric Doc Brown, his near misses and the wild hairstyle. Deep down though when you take a closer look at this movie, you would see why people were drawn to it. It addressed the five questions that I have given above, in a unique and entertaining way. Then there's the thrill of Marty McFly, racing up and down, and back and forth to try and fix things before a certain deadline. Of course,

Marty always accomplished his goal, if with nail bitingly timing.

This is the why, as we come to the end of the church year (which ended with *The Reign of Christ*) and begin a new one (which began with *Advent 1*) we ask *Where We Have Come From & Where Are We Going To?* The Word of God said we should write it down because it is our vision. When we write it down, we make it clear so that others can read it and run with it. The *Book of Habakkuk* is on point with this. It records God instructing the prophet to write the *vision* plainly so that it can be easily understood and acted upon. God insists that we write it down because it also becomes easier for us to remember it, especially if it is along what God has promised for us. When we do this then we have a clear path for action. We can get through all the gruelling times with a written reminder directing our footsteps, as these three Scriptures reveal:

### Habakkuk 2:2-3

This is a key passage on this matter. It states, "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that he who runneth with it may read it." Here, the Lord God emphasizes that the vision is for an appointed time, and though it may seem slow, it will surely come to pass.

### Revelation 1:11 & 1:19

In the *Book of Revelation*, Jesus commands the Apostle John to "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches." This shows that God uses writing to communicate God's messages and commands to God's People.

### Jeremiah 36:27-32

After a scroll with Jeremiah's words was burned, God instructed him to take another scroll and write all the former words. This demonstrates the importance of preserving

God's message through writing.

So, what we see as we ponder *Where We Have Come From & Where Are We Going To?* is that rather than being in a frenzy going back and forth in realms like Marty McFly, we should be guided by those five questions listed above. This applies to individuals, or to parishes in the Diocese of New Westminster. There is a reason the diocese, in 2016, encouraged parishes to come up with a Ministry Plan. Those five questions can guide us as we "dream" together, or as individuals write down our *vision* just as the Bible encourages for:

### Clarity & Focus

Writing it down on tablets makes a divine direction mes-sage clear and easy to understand and easy to "run with."

### Memory & Encouragement

Written down *vision*, *mission*, and *values* make for a visual reminder of what God has promised, which is especially important during times of waiting, transition, difficulty, or uncertainty.

### Accountability

Having the *vision* written down helps you and others to remember, pursue the plan by easily setting reviewable goals.

### Stewardship

It shows that you are taking the *vision* seriously and are (a) good steward(s) of what God has revealed to you.

Now, there is a lot of good to be had from those 1900s models and their retro movies! ✚

.....  
The Rev. Monte Tugwete is Rector of St. Cuthbert's, Delta.  
.....

All are encouraged to submit letters, articles,  
reports on parish activities, opinion pieces, photos,  
and more for consideration as content for Topic

.....

CONTACT ALICIA AMBROSIO, TOPIC EDITOR  
FOR MORE SUBMISSION INFORMATION  
PHONE 604.684.6306,  
EMAIL [communications@vancouver.anglican.ca](mailto:communications@vancouver.anglican.ca)

.....



# Praising God with Fidgeting & Wiggling

ALICIA AMBROSIO

At St. Mark's, Ocean Park, attending a worship service might include taking a running leap at a thick crash pad. Granted, the crash pad isn't in the sanctuary, and the congregants taking the running leap are (usually) children, who are following the service from the multi-sensory room.

The room which was created thanks to a Parish Development Grant that St. Mark's received from the Diocese of New Westminster. With the creation of the room the parish aims to bring the Gospels to life in a way in the community and be a place where families with children with diverse needs feel welcome.

Sara Autio, the Youth & Families coordinator at St. Mark's, experienced the journey of finding a parish that was a good fit for her family firsthand. Her son has autism. She realized in a typical church setting children like her son were unable to move about or get the sensory feedback they need, and the standard "Sunday School" model did not work for him.

At St. Mark's, as the Youth & Families minister, she "discovered more children with multi-sensory issues." She was given space to use her knowledge about children with special needs to build a welcoming space for them.

A child with special needs may not be able to sit still through an entire worship service. They may vocalize during the service, or they may want to get right up close to see exactly what the priest is doing. A child with diverse needs may find the music over stimulating. Or they may want to be a part of it.

None of this means they can't receive the Gospel. It means "our pre-conceived path is not necessarily the way everyone can interact with the Gospel," Autio said. She adds, "Children themselves teach us what they need."

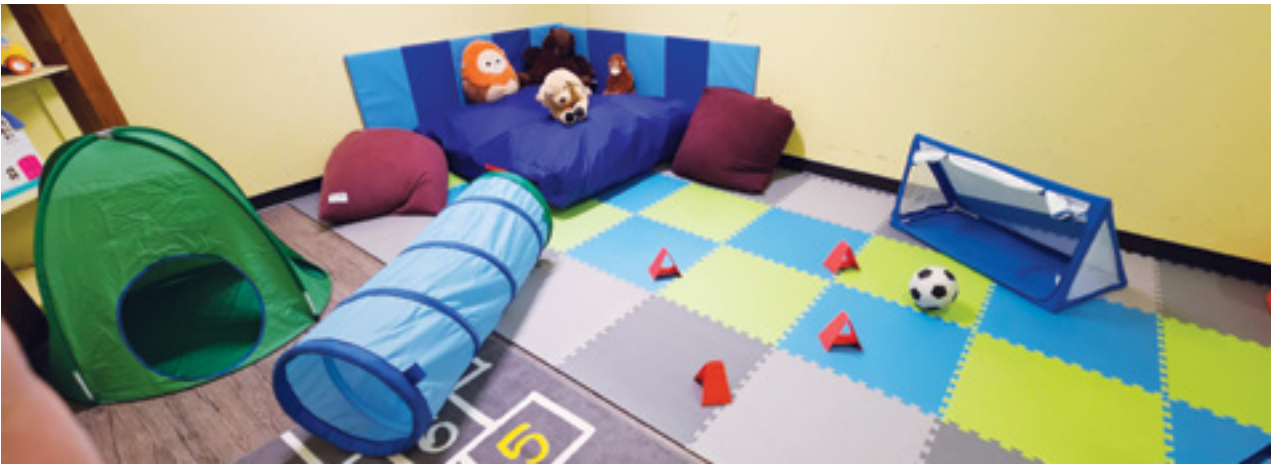
Autio started by adding some new offerings for children and youth on Sundays. She noticed many children who liked to wander and move their bodies, as well as create things. So, she started, "presenting opportunities for interaction in the way of circuit of stations."

The circuit of stations worked well for the kids in the parish with a multi-sensory needs. It led to Autio and the parish thinking about a whole room dedicated to providing the sensory feedback neuro-divergent kids need.

Going from stations to a whole room involved more work than just finding funds and buying supplies.

Autio invited a therapy centre to the church to give an in-service session to the parish. The session focused on understanding: what is autism and what is neurodiversity. An occupation therapist explained how we regulated our systems—what we do if we feel uncomfortable, or anxious, or happy—and how neuro-divergent children might do that.

The educational component helped the community understand behaviours they may see in neuro-divergent children and learn how to respond to it in the most support way possible. Autio sees this as "another calling to live



The multi-sensory room at St. Mark's, Ocean Park includes crash mats, stuffies, hiding places, and pillows. PHOTOS Sarah Autio



Tactile toys and informational wall posters in the multi-sensory room.



Multi-sensory toys in the multi-sensory room at St. Mark's, Ocean Park.

into the Gospel."

The evolution of multi-sensory offerings at St. Mark's has already borne fruit.

Autio said there are many examples of children in the parish who have been connected with the Gospel in new ways thanks to the multi-sensory tools, while others have found ways to interact with the parish community in new ways.

"We have one child who doesn't use many words. But at church he engages with the felt pieces [in the shape of biblical characters]. He looks at them and says, 'Oh! Jesus!' He knows Jesus. He knows love," Autio said.

Autio said as the multi-sensory offerings at St. Mark's have expanded, she has also seen changes in the way her own son engages with church. "I saw him go from having high anxiety, to looking bored, to actually lining up in the aisle to say, 'Thank You' to Rev. David [Taylor]. It's a big leap for him."

The difference has also been noticeable in the monthly *Wondering Sunday* services where children, especially neuro-diverse children, are intentionally included in the liturgy. Autio said the kids who usually use the multi-sensory room have become increasingly comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings during the sharing portion. Some of the children have begun shadowing the greeters and helping bring up the gifts to the altar.

Autio says the multi-sensory room has helped the neuro-divergent children in the parish become comfortable with church and helped parishioners become comfortable with the ways neuro-divergent children interact with church. As a result, "beautiful things start to happen," said Autio. ✦

Children Youth & Family Grant applications are due mid-March. If your parish has a project for which you'd like CYF funding, details and deadlines are available at [vancouver.anglican.ca/diocesan-resources/grants-loans](http://vancouver.anglican.ca/diocesan-resources/grants-loans)

mission  
CONFERENCE

MAY  
30  
2026

Moving in Mission,  
Guided by Spirit

More  
information  
coming soon



Keynote Speaker  
Archbishop Michael Curry

Venue | DIOCESAN SYNOD OFFICE  
1410 NANTON AVENUE | VANCOUVER



Diocese of New Westminster  
ANGELICAN CHURCH OF CANADA





THE SISTERHOOD OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE

# The Companions Programs

SEPTEMBER 2026 – JUNE 2027

## Residential Companions

The **Residential Companions** program is an immersive opportunity to experience a contemporary monastic community rooted in the Benedictine tradition. It is open to women age 21 and up regardless of Christian denomination.

Companions live, work, and pray alongside the sisters, learning from them but also sharing each companion's own gifts with the sisters and their ministries.

They will:

- Learn to cultivate peaceful and creative ways of living in a diverse intentional community
- Appreciate silence and solitude as well as community and service for a healthy life
- Put down deep roots of spiritual intimacy with God and each other
- Develop a personal path of ongoing spiritual growth

## Companions Online

Open to women of all Christian expressions, **Companions Online** is an opportunity to become "monastics in the world," living a Benedictine rhythm of prayer, work, study, and recreation. Online companions learn to develop practices that support and nurture their spiritual life from the comfort of their homes.

They meet regularly for classes and discussion groups, and commit to times of personal prayer at home. They share in book studies, participate in online worship, and sometimes screen a film relevant to spiritual growth and self-understanding. Online companions also developed spiritual disciplines that follow the liturgical year.

## Applications Start & End (both programs)

January 1, 2026 – May 1, 2026

## Cost

**Residential Companions**  
suggested \$150 per month

**Companions Online**  
suggested \$100 per month

*If cost is a hindrance,  
assistance is available*

**To Learn More**  
about either program,  
or to apply, contact

Canon Sr. Elizabeth Rolfe-Thomas, SSJD  
at [companions@ssjd.ca](mailto:companions@ssjd.ca)  
or phone St. John's Convent  
416-226-2201, ext. 304

All are encouraged  
to submit letters, articles,  
reports on parish activities,  
opinion pieces, photos, & more  
for consideration  
to be published in Topic

CONTACT ALICIA AMBROSIO, TOPIC EDITOR  
FOR MORE SUBMISSION INFORMATION  
PHONE 604.684.6306,  
EMAIL [communications@vancouver.anglican.ca](mailto:communications@vancouver.anglican.ca)