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FAITH TIDES



Image credit: Andrew Stephens-Rennie



Bishop's Column: The life and legacy of Arthur O'Meara

Provincial school graduates first cohort, enters third year

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The life and legacy of Arthur O'Meara



Arthur O'Meara (back row far right) pictured here in 1907.
Image courtesy of Hamar Foster.

By Anna Greenwood-Lee

As I was preparing for the presentation on the colonial history of Cowichan that I gave at St Peter, Quamichan on Sept. 30, the name Arthur O'Meara kept coming up. O'Meara was both a lawyer and a priest of this diocese. From 1910, when he was transferred to this diocese from the Yukon, to his death in 1928, he was at the forefront of legal efforts to assert Indigenous Title in British Columbia and helped to draft the Cowichan Petition.

Over a century later, as issues of Cowichan Land Title are now front and centre once again, it is worth reflecting on the life and legacy of this Anglican lawyer, missionary and priest.

So who was Arthur O'Meara?

Arthur Eugene O'Meara was born in 1859 in Port

Hope, Ontario. His father, Frederick Augustus O'Meara, was Irish-born but emigrated to Canada to work as a missionary among the Ojibway. He is credited with the first Ojibway translation of the *Book of Common Prayer*.

Unlike his brothers, Arthur O'Meara did not immediately follow in his father's footsteps and take holy orders. Rather, he studied at the University of Toronto and was called to the bar in 1885. From 1890–1891 he practised with the Toronto law firm MacDonald, Marsh and O'Meara, with MacDonald, the senior partner, being none other than Sir John A. MacDonald.

After twenty years as a lawyer, O'Meara could resist the “family business” no longer and in 1906, he was ordained as a deacon. He took a call in the Diocese of Selkirk (now called Yukon), where he led worship in tents and travelled to mining camps as a missionary.

The London Delegation and the Cowichan Petition



1906 was also the year that

Chief Charley Isipaymilt (left) and Chief Joe Capilano leave Buckingham Palace. Archival

newspaper cover via Knowledge Network.

Sk̓w̓xwú7mesh (Squamish) Chief qiyəplənəx^w (Capilano), Quw'utsun (Cowichan) Chief Charley Isipaymilt and Secwepemc (formerly Shuswap) Chief Basil David, having already advocated for better treatment and for Land Title for decades, travelled first to Ottawa and then to London (this became known as the London Delegation).

They sought to address their communities' concerns regarding land claims, regulations on fishing and hunting and the banning of the potlatch. Despite the protests of the Canadian high commissioner, they had a fifteen-minute audience with King Edward VII in the throne room at Buckingham Palace. They petitioned the King saying, "We have our families to keep the same as the white man."

Despite the considerable efforts and expenses of the 1906 delegation, little progress was achieved. The Cowichan decided they needed to beat the English at their own game and bring in legal counsel. Methodist missionary Charles Tate, who was active with the Cowichan, called upon O'Meara to use his legal experience to help draft what became known as the Cowichan Petition. O'Meara delivered the Cowichan petition to the Privy Council in England in 1909.

The full ten-page text of the petition is worth looking at and [can be found here](#). The Cowichan Petition is the first instance of English law being used to defend Indigenous Title. It asserted Cowichan possession and occupation of their land since "time immemorial." It argued that Indian Title was established in the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and that in British Columbia, the Cowichan never ceded their land, nor were they compensated for the loss of their land.

The Privy Council was unsure how to respond to the Cowichan Petition and tried to turn the matter back to the Canadian government. Lawyer Tom McInnes was asked, by the federal government, to provide a legal opinion on BC land title issues. McInnes's one-hundred-page report largely upheld the legal arguments in the Cowichan Petition and said that the federal government, "as trustee of the Indians," was under a legal obligation to put forward a case on their behalf, defending them from the province's incursions on their lands.

BC Premier Richard McBride was vehemently against this, saying it "would jeopardize the very large sums of money already invested in the province by English and other investors" and that the issue of Aboriginal Title was "too serious a matter to be submitted to any court."

As cases could not be brought to the Supreme Court of Canada without the province's consent, McBride's opposition prevented this matter from being heard here in Canada. It seemed that the only way to get the matter dealt with was to continue to try to get it before the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in England, which (up until 1949) was the final court of appeal for UK overseas territories and Crown dependencies. O'Meara laboured, until his death, to get the matter of Indigenous land referred by the Privy Council to the Judicial Commission. He believed that this strategy would, ultimately, prevail and that the Royal Proclamation would be upheld. O'Meara never succeeded.

O'Meara in the Diocese of Islands and Inlets

On Jan. 4, 1910, O'Meara travelled to Victoria for a meeting with the Bishop of British Columbia, William Perrin. Having heard from O'Meara about the "Indian

land situation” there was unanimous agreement that O’Meara should continue his work on this issue. O’Meara resigned his position in the Yukon and was transferred to this diocese.

In March, a second meeting with Bishop Perrin and others resulted in resolutions on the importance of Indian Tribes having independent legal counsel and that the federal government both be encouraged to provide such counsel and that funds be raised to assist O’Meara in this work. This was the beginning of a group that called itself “The Friends of the Indians.” The friends created pamphlets and held lectures to educate people about and advocate for Indigenous Rights.

At the same time as O’Meara was forming his Friends of the Indians, other groups were forming in BC as Indigenous Nations continued to work together to advocate for their rights. This work became especially urgent in 1912 when the federal and provincial governments created the McKenna–McBride Commission to resolve the “Indian land question” in British Columbia “once and for all.” In response, the Allied Tribes of British Columbia was formed as an umbrella group advocating for Indigenous Land Title, and O’Meara was asked to serve as their legal counsel.



The only woman to serve on the leadership of the Allied Tribes,

Jane Constance Cook, was a member of Christ Church, Alert Bay. Her grand-daughter Flora Cook, who is a faithful member of our diocese, shared this picture of her grandmother surrounded by her male colleagues in the Allied Tribes. Photo courtesy of Flora Cook.

Between 1913 and 1916 the McKenna–McBride commission held hearings across BC with the aim of adjusting the size and location of Indian reserves. The Allied Tribes organised nations to attend and speak at these hearings. Unfortunately, the commission was successful in its not very well disguised mission of favoring settlers. The commission resulted in about 47,000 acres of prime reserve land being “cut off.”

Another great injustice occurred in 1927 in the form of what historian Dr. Hamar Foster calls the “O’Meara amendment” to the Indian Act. This amendment made it illegal, without the permission of the government, for a lawyer to solicit or receive funds from an Indigenous band or member of a band. Feb. 15, 1927 transcripts of the House of Commons of Canada proceedings reveal that when Charles Stewart, minister of the interior and mines, introduced the amendment, without quite naming him outright, he definitely referred to O’Meara and suggested that this legislation would put a stop to this cleric–lawyer’s work. The amendment passed and stood until 1951.

The following year, Arthur O’Meara died unexpectedly at the age of 69. He died almost penniless. His finances, his health and his family life had all suffered due to his relentless work pursuing Indigenous Land Title.

O’Meara’s legacy

Arthur O’Meara was no saint. Records suggest he was

difficult. There is a letter from Bishop Stringer, less than a year after he ordained him priest, saying he regretted ordaining him! And O'Meara did not, in his lifetime, achieve his goal of having Indigenous Title upheld by the highest court of the day, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. As Hamar Foster asserts in his article "We Are Not O'Meara's Children," the legal arguments that O'Meara put forth in the 1909 Cowichan Petition were not really dealt with until 1997 with the landmark *Delgamuukw v British Columbia* ruling in which the Supreme Court ruled that the provincial government did not in fact, have the right to extinguish Indigenous Title.

It should also be said that while O'Meara's work advocating for Indigenous Land Title was admirable, historical records also record O'Meara's support for residential schools. He failed to see them for what they were and assumed, falsely, that educating and proselytizing Indigenous children was a good thing.

All these years later I'd be fascinated to know what Arthur O'Meara would have to say about Truth and Reconciliation and, in particular, what he would have to say about the 2025 Cowichan Decision—a decision that came some 114 years after the Cowichan Petition. Might it be that the long arc of the moral universe does indeed bend towards justice?

Acknowledgement

I am extremely grateful for the work of Dr. Hamar Foster on the life and work of Arthur O'Meara. Not only was reading some of his legal writing helpful to me in putting this article together, but Dr. Foster sat down with me in Oak Bay and shared so much more about O'Meara with me, including the tidbit that O'Meara used to live on Cadboro Bay Road.

I am also grateful to Dr. Jesse Robertson, whose work on [Our Land Stories](#) inspired this deep dive, and who also provided advice and archival documents to me.

Many thanks also to diocesan archivist Justine Soles for her work looking in our own archives for information on O'Meara.

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Provincial School for Congregational Development graduates first cohort, enters third year



Congregational development school attendees. Photo courtesy of Andrew Stephens-Rennie.

By Naomi Racz

In May, the first cohort of just over 30 students, both lay and clergy, representing all the dioceses across the ecclesiastical province, graduated from the Provincial School for Congregational Development. Starting in September 2024, the students and four trainers — Bishop Anna, Jenny Replogle, Marnie Peterson (Diocese of New Westminster) and Andrew Stephens-

Rennie (Diocese of Kootenay) — met in person in Kamloops, Nanaimo, Whitehorse, and Terrace. The group also met on Zoom.



The first cohort to graduate from the Provincial School for Congregational Development. Photo by Jenny Replogle.

The provincial school is run and partially funded by the ecclesiastical province and grew out of the provincial summit held in Vancouver in November 2023. The summit brought together the provincial bishops and council to look at ways the six dioceses could work together.

Bishop Anna and Marnie Peterson, incumbent as St. Anne, Steveson, were both present at this meeting and had both participated in congregational development programs in the dioceses of New Westminster and Olympia (Washington).

“There were lots of conversations about ways to bring people together to develop relationships, to strengthen training for lay and clergy leaders,” says Marnie. “And as the conversation was going, Bishop Anna and I were both like, ‘We actually don’t need to make this up. We already have a way of doing this.’”

“As the conversations progressed in the provincial summit, we just became really clear that [setting up a provincial congregational development school] was a

thing we should probably offer to do. And so, Anna and I had several conversations, and ultimately at that meeting said, ‘Let’s just try it. Let’s just see what happens if we launch it on a provincial scale with support from the bishops.’”

All of the bishops were on board, and all selected teams of clergy and laity to participate in the first year of the provincial school.

Now in its third school year, the program takes place over two years and alternates between the Year A and Year B curriculums. Participants can begin in either year. Year A focuses on developing an individual’s leadership skills. It covers practical skills, such as giving and receiving feedback, how to facilitate a meeting and how to plan and implement change. In Year A participants are encouraged to develop a sense of self-awareness around who they are in their church system and how their choices and behaviors can impact how their church system operates.

Year B then focuses on the church system as a whole, including different change models and how to use them. Participants also look at how to engage in ministry in their local context.

The program aims to bring people together from across the province, to share their experiences, and to feel less alone or isolated in their experience.



Pictured are (front row l-r) Marnie Peterson and Jenny Replogle, and (back row l-r) Bishop Anna Greenwood-Lee, Andrew Stephens-Rennie, and Jessica Schapp. Photo courtesy of Jenny Replogle.

Marnie emphasises that the program is not about how to grow your congregation in numbers of parishioners. “It’s all about strengthening your congregation and giving your lay leaders and your clergy more choice about how they want to or feel called to respond to God’s invitation to them wherever they are.”

Jenny Replogle believes that school is about equipping laity and clergy “to live out their baptismal ministries and build healthier parishes.

“As a church, we talk a lot about the ministry of all the baptised but we don’t always do a good job of supporting and giving people tools to do the work of leading in the church. The School for Congregational Development offers tools and a shared language for clergy and lay leaders.”

The provincial bishops and council again gathered for a provincial summit this year in Kelowna and when Bishop Anna asked whether there was still enthusiasm for the program ,the response was a unanimous “yes!”

Reflecting on the successes of the provincial school so

far, Marnie highlighted “the ways that folks have shown up and told their stories and been excited about what they are learning. I love watching the light bulbs go off, where they’re like, ‘Oh, this is something I can actually go and do when I get back [to my church] tomorrow.’”



(Left) Jenny Replogle and Marnie Peterson with a taxidermied bear and (right) taxidermied animals and hunting trophies on display at the Bavarian Inn in Terrace, BC. Photos courtesy of Jenny Replogle.

She also feels that the in-person sessions have been invaluable. “Getting to see this province and the beauty of it, and the beauty of these little churches or big churches. And, getting to see what happens there is, I think, absolute gold.” A funny example of this intra-provincial exchange happened in Terrace, during the graduation gathering at a local restaurant that happened to have an entire room dedicated to taxidermy. Marnie says it raised more eyebrows among those coming from bigger cities.

The program is now in Year A and recently welcomed it’s third cohort of clergy and lay leaders, with the first in-person event in Vancouver. For more information about the Provincial School for Congregational Development, [visit the provincial website](#).

A journey from fear to hope



Photo by [Nick Fewings](#) on [Unsplash](#)

By Soreti Hussein

My name is Soreti, and I was born in 1998 in Wachu Town, Harar Zone, Ethiopia.

As a young girl, I dreamed of finishing school and building a better future. I attended school until Grade 8, but my dreams were taken away when I was only 14 years old.

My parents forced me to marry an older man who had close connections to government officials. The reason was heartbreaking. I had been talking to a boy my own age at school, and my family believed I had brought shame upon them by having a boyfriend. In my community, traditions and social pressure often outweighed the rights and wishes of girls. Once the decision was made, I had no voice and no choice.

Before our marriage, my husband promised that I would be allowed to continue my education. After I

had lived with him for a year, he broke that promise. Instead of returning to school, I was expected to stay home and serve as a wife.

I could not accept losing my future. I escaped and returned to my parents' home, hoping they would protect me. Instead, only three days later, they took me back to my husband's house because of pressure from relatives, elders, and the community.

Soon after I returned, I became pregnant. I gave birth to my first child when I was only 16 years old. Becoming a mother while still a child myself was incredibly difficult. I loved my baby, but I felt trapped in a life I had never chosen.

I escaped once again, taking my baby with me to my parents' home. This time, my father stood by my side. He believed that what had happened to me was wrong and tried to protect me. However, our community strongly supported child marriage, and the pressure on my father became overwhelming. Eventually, I was forced back to my husband's home once again.

After I returned, my husband controlled every part of my life. He kept me isolated, limiting my communication with others and making it almost impossible to seek help. I became pregnant again and gave birth to my second daughter when I was 17 years old.

Life went from difficult to unbearable

Seeing my suffering, my father made a courageous decision. He secretly helped me escape to Adama, about 200 kilometres from our hometown, where my aunt lived. I stayed there for about three months, believing I had finally found safety.

However, my former husband was a powerful man with connections to government officials. Instead of accepting that I had left, he used his influence to have my father arrested. In my experience, people with power could use the system against ordinary families, leaving us with little protection or access to justice.

I could not bear the thought of returning to my hometown and risking my life or putting my family in even greater danger. I made the heartbreaking decision to leave my two young daughters in the care of my aunt in Adama and flee Ethiopia to seek refuge in Egypt.

The first two years in Egypt were some of the hardest of my life. I lived as a refugee, separated from my children and carrying the pain of not knowing when I would see them again. It was after I arrived in Egypt that I learned the devastating news that my father had been released from prison after one year. During his imprisonment, he did not receive the medical care he needed, and he passed away shortly after his release. Losing my father was one of the greatest tragedies of my life. I have always believed that his imprisonment and lack of proper medical treatment contributed to his death. I continue to carry the pain of knowing that he suffered because he chose to protect me.

Every day in Egypt, I worried about my daughters' safety. One of my greatest fears was that they were growing up in the same community that had supported forced child marriage and taken away my own childhood. I constantly worried that my daughters could one day face the same pressure and abuse that I had experienced. Every day, I dreamed of the moment when I could bring them to safety and protect them.

While living in Egypt, I met the man who is now my husband. He accepted my past, supported me through

my struggles, and has been a caring partner. We married after my private refugee sponsorship application to Canada had already been submitted. Because of the timing, my sponsors were unable to include him in my application before I arrived in Canada.

With the incredible generosity of private sponsors, my local community in Victoria and the Anglican Diocese of BC, I was given the opportunity to start a new life in Canada. I arrived in Victoria, British Columbia, and have now been here for more than six months.

Although I am deeply grateful for the safety and kindness I have found in Canada, my greatest struggle continues every single day.

My husband is in Cairo, Egypt, and my two daughters are currently living with my mother in Ethiopia. Every day we remain apart is another day our family is divided. I continue to worry about their well-being and safety, especially because they are still living in an environment where harmful traditional practices against girls continue to exist.

I survived forced child marriage, lost my education, endured years of abuse and control, lived as a refugee, and was separated from my children simply because I wanted the freedom to make decisions about my own life. No girl should have to experience what I did. Unfortunately, many women and girls in parts of Africa continue to face forced marriage, gender inequality and systems where influential people can abuse their power without accountability.

Today, I am trying to rebuild my life in Victoria. I am learning, working toward becoming independent and creating a safe future for my family. My greatest wish is

not for luxury or comfort — it is simply to live together as a family in safety.

I am asking for your help to reunite my family. We need to raise a total of \$32,000 for my family's sponsorship. No donation is too small.

Your kindness will bring my family one step closer to being together again and will give my daughters the opportunity to grow up in safety, with hope for a better future.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you for taking the time to read my story and for considering supporting my family. Your compassion and generosity give me hope that one day, we will finally be together again.

How to donate

Donations by cheque can be made payable to: Refugee Program of the Anglican Diocese of BC Memo: 576A – Soreti Hussein

Tax receipts are available for eligible donations.

Online donations can be made through bc.anglican.ca/giving.

To make an online donation:

1. Open the link and scroll down to click Donate.
2. Choose Donate Now or Donate Monthly.
3. Under “Apply your donation to a fund set up by this charity,” select Refugee (not General).
4. In the “Memo/Send a message to this charity” section, write 576A – Soreti Hussein so that your donation is directed to the correct refugee sponsorship account.

St. Peter's renovates its rectory for new incumbent



*Inside the rectory at St. Peter's following the renovation work.
Photos by David Duncan.*

By Naomi Racz

When Sulin Milne announced her resignation as incumbent of St. Peter, Comox, in July 2025, the church began the process of discernment and seeking a new incumbent. But they knew they had at least one thing in their favour: a rectory. As with many parts of the island, average house prices in Comox have doubled over the last decade. Houses in Comox cost in the region of \$800,000, while market rent is around \$3,500 to \$4,000 a month.

Rectories (also sometimes called a parsonage or vicarage) began to appear in England during the Middle Ages and the number of rectories in England peaked during the Victoria era. As the Anglican church was transplanted to and grew in Canada, the tradition

of providing every incumbent with a place to live also continued.

Today, our diocese is home to 13 rectories, and while we don't have exact records, we can assume that historically most churches on the island would have had one. The rectory at St. Peter's in Comox was built in 1903 — it is the oldest surviving building in Comox — and its first tenant would likely have been the Rev. Jules Xavier Willemar. Willemar served as incumbent for 42 years and is buried in the nearby St Andrew's Anglican Church cemetery.

The rectory was lived in by 13 successive incumbents, but that tradition came to an end in 1987 when Rev. John Paetku opted not to live in the rectory. For the next three decades, the rectory served instead as offices for the rector and parish administrator, as meeting rooms for parish council and other committees and as a Sunday school classroom. The top floor was also rented out to an NGO.

When Sulin Milne took up the post of incumbent in 2019, she was coming to the Comox Valley from Wales, and she asked if it would be possible for her and her family to live in the rectory. With the help of volunteers and a modest budget of \$20,000, essential repairs were made to the rectory to make it habitable as a residence. But when the job posting for a new incumbent was being written, the parish council decided to carry out a more extensive renovation of the rectory.

“We wanted to do it properly from the start, rather than patching things up piecemeal,” says Eric Macdonald, St Peter's rector's warden. The roof was replaced, all the walls were re-plastered and painted, the bathroom (which had previously been two rooms) was made into one room and a new bathroom fitted,

and the kitchen was torn out and replaced. Part of the church garden has also been fenced off to provide the family with a private yard space, and to keep people from wandering right past the rector's back door.

In all, the work cost around \$142,000 and was made possible by a bequest from a parishioner who passed away, as well as a living legacy from another parishioner. The church sees it as an investment, since even if future rectors don't want to use the rectory, they can still rent it out on the open market.

In February 2026, Bishop Anna announced that St. Peter's had appointed Francis Spencer as its new incumbent. Francis was previously the incumbent at Hay River in the Northwest Territories, where he and his family also lived in a rectory. Francis and his family moved to the Comox Valley in July.

"The work and renovations to the rectory have been a significant part of our family's transition to this community," says Francis. "Beyond the work itself, however, it was the community's enthusiastic support of the work that let us know we were welcome here. We give thanks for both of these gifts."

A Salt Spring summer retreat



Bishop Anna Greenwood-Lee presents at the Salt of the Earth Retreat held on Salt Spring Island, 4-6 Aug. Photo by Marg McKay.

By Walter Stewart

From the evening of Aug. 4 to midday on Aug. 6, 46 people joined Bishop Anna and Christine Conkin, incumbent at St. George, Cadboro Bay, for 'You are the Salt of the Earth,' a diocesan summer retreat on Salt Spring Island.

People came from 20 parishes, from as far north as Courtenay, all the way south to Victoria and the Southern Gulf Islands, together with a few people from Ontario, Alberta and the Diocese of New Westminster.

A subtitle to the retreat might well have been 'How Salt Can Lose its Savour,' as Bishop Anna and Christine focused on the history of empire and the church. One presentation slide defined empire as a "major political unit in which the metropolis, or single sovereign authority, exercises control over territory of great

extent or a number of territories or peoples through formal annexations or various forms of informal domination.” One key point that pervaded the presentations and the discussion was that empires always turn violent. We see horrible examples of that today across the globe.

The retreat focused on acts of violence in the territory of the diocese; events where justice was entirely denied to First Nations people through unfair trials, summary executions and acts of great violence.

In addition to acts of violence, settlers to British Columbia brought diseases for which Indigenous Peoples had no immunity.

From the website of the First Nations Health Authority: “Smallpox, influenza, measles, and whooping cough were recorded epidemics, with smallpox particularly recurring with devastating effects in the native population.... It is clear that in some cases entire villages were significantly reduced in single disease events, with mortality rates ranging from 50% to 90% of the population. During this time there was a vaccine for smallpox, which was discovered in Europe in the late 1700s; however it was rarely provided to First Nations people.”

Murder and disease were not the only forms of violence. Confiscation of land and property was also rife. Except for a few treaties in southern Vancouver Island, known as the Douglas Treaties, there were no other treaties in British Columbia. But even on Vancouver Island those treaties were frequently broken as land was confiscated, often under the fiction of *terra nullius* (land belonging to no one) or the fiction that the people were only hunters and gatherers. Both fictions were widely spread across the lands of the

diocese.

On Salt Spring those fictions led to the pre-emption of practically the whole island and to no permanent Indigenous presence on the island. There is evidence of major Indigenous work on the island, including several large, human built clam gardens and whole areas of land kept unforested to permit the growth of camas lilies for food.

The church is committed to reconciliation, but we all need to understand what we are trying to reconcile. As a slide in the presentation at the retreat stated: it's a sure sign you are living in an empire when there are huge parts of your history you don't know about. The First Nations are clear that they are not trying to make us all go away, but reconciliation also means restoration of dignity and a base for future opportunity.

The intemperate and ignorant outrage in some quarters at the recent BC Supreme Court decision that the Cowichan Tribes have Aboriginal Title and Fishing Rights at the mouth of the south arm of the Fraser River speaks to an attitude that reconciliation is fine as long as it is cost-free. If we are the salt of the earth, we must stand with the Cowichan people and other Indigenous sisters and brothers to make reconciliation real.

In addition to the excellent presentations and serious discussions in the retreat, there was much opportunity for fellowship, worship and good times. Let us hope the retreat becomes an annual event. You are all welcome to Salt Spring Island!

Big feelings



Photo by [Julien L](#) on [Unsplash](#)

By Lisa Alexander

Big feelings abound these days. Feelings of outrage and anger over the destruction of the environment, abuses of democracy and the bike lanes in Victoria. Loud and audible disbelief about the conduct of world leaders. Dismay about the rise in grocery and fuel prices. Rage about the ways our neighbours thoughtlessly behave to the vulnerable people of this world.

I have all the empathy in the world for big feelings. The world feels particularly perilous and scary these days. Many more people are experiencing financial hardship outside of their control, climate disasters are increasing in severity and number, concerns about AI and misinformation are growing. These are just a few of the issues with which we grapple. Both experts and observation indicate that although the health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are largely resolved, prolonged exposure to chronic uncontrollable stress during the pandemic has led to increased anxiety and dysregulated nervous systems in many people. Big feelings are the logical response to all these stressors.

The problem is that these big feelings are coming out in ways that are disproportionate to the situation. Someone cuts you off and you make a rude gesture. A person expresses something you disagree with and you resort to a snarky comment and a withering look. In my role as canon for pastoral support, I regularly hear of yelling in meetings, wildly accelerated and spreading gossip, loud outrage over decisions taken by leadership and dismissive and disdainful treatment of fellow parishioners. This is obviously of great concern to everyone.

“If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Romans 12:18) is not an empty encouragement, it is one of the many things we are called to as Christians. I believe that it is easier to control things you understand. Doing the challenging work of understanding the root of big feelings is one of the things within our control.

Why am I having such a big reaction to this inconvenience? Oh, this reminds me of how helpless I felt when I saw on last night's news another typhoon devastated the Philippines.

How come I am experiencing such outrage over the staffing change at church? Ah, I remember how powerless I felt about the fight I had with my spouse and how I couldn't make them understand my point of view.

Why am I so offended that the minister brushed off my concern? I realize this feels the same as when I hear scientists calling for specific change to slow global warming and political leaders turn a deaf ear.

The discipline necessary to become self-reflective and to self-monitor is in our control and one of the skills we are called to master. Many of us find it a disturbing

skill to learn, as we are unfamiliar with our feelings and it is easier to react and blame others.

Start small. Train yourself to notice a big feeling first. Simply identify it: *that's a big feeling*. Keep noticing each time you have a bigger feeling than expected. Next try to name the feeling. If you are interested in expanding your emotion naming capacity, search "feeling wheel" in Google.

There are lots of great resources to find descriptions beyond happy, sad, angry and fearful. As you progress, use the skill of curiosity: *What's underneath this feeling? What situation does this remind me of? What is the feeling about?* Finally, discipline yourself to distinguish between small problems and big problems and act accordingly. May the peace of Christ be always with you.
