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RLN welcomes story ideas, news items and other input. If you want to be involved in this media ministry, please be in touch with the editor.

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Cover: Jacob & Joseph Kusa, from St. Mark's, Winnipeg, imagine our 2000-year-old story happening again today.

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CONNECTING CHURCH AND COMMUNITY

Allison Chubb



Can you believe that December is already upon us? The Christmas bazaars and luncheons, held in so many churches across the Diocese, are being replaced with Advent Lessons and Carols. St. Andrew's on the Red is hosting its first old-fashioned Christmas, with carols and goodies and sleigh rides through the snow. We asked our companion diocese, Central Buganda, to give us a snapshot of what Christmas looks like in their part of the world; they surely don't have sleigh rides? You will find their response on page 14.

Over the past 15 months, I and those I work with each month – our designers, writers, diocesan staff, the RLN advisory committee, clergy, and others – have worked hard to continue bringing you the kinds of stories and updates which connect our Church and our communities. We now have 600 people subscribed to RLN Weekly and many others connecting through social media, the new website, and the online magazine.

Still others are reading

the magazine in print form, whether it is printed off at home or by their friends or parish family. We are working together to make this process even easier for those who are still getting used to downloading the magazine or who do not have internet access. After Christmas, a workshop will be announced for anyone interested in a basic internet tutorial where you can bring all your questions.

The cost of approximately \$2,500 each month to make all this happen has been supported by readers like you in 2015. Although there is no longer an official subscription fee or donation, we rely on both regular and one-time

donations towards the ongoing costs of our media and communications ministry in Rupert's Land.

To give a Christmas gift to Rupert's Land News, please click on the ad on this page and make an online donation, or mail your gift to the Anglican Lutheran Centre at 935 Nesbitt Bay, Winnipeg, R3T 1W6.

Wherever you find yourself this season, may you feel blessed and surrounded by community, family, and friends. Remember to connect with those in your community who may feel alone or less than cared for this season. And may you and those you love have a very blessed Advent and a Merry Christmas! 

It costs \$2,500 a month to operate Rupert's Land News

Will you give a Christmas gift to connect our Church and community today and into the future?

Donations of \$20 or more will receive a tax receipt.

GOD WITH SKIN ON *Donald Phillips*

There is something very special about flesh – human flesh. Think of the relief you feel when you return after a long trip and can embrace your family, or of the comfort you bring when you can scoop up your child (or grandchild) and comfort him or her after the little one has been hurt. Conversely, think of how quickly you apologize when you unintentionally make contact with the flesh of someone you don't know.

There is something deep and profound about our flesh and our bodies. They are capable of communicating so much – both who we are to others and who they are to us. Even one of the creation stories in Genesis identifies this unique treasure. When, for the first time, the man is introduced to the newly-created woman, he exclaims with delight, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23).

But because of the powerful potential of the flesh to both express love and to inflict pain, our flesh, our bodies, have always been held with some degree of suspicion in many world religions and philosophies through the ages. Often, the world of the flesh and the world of the divine were seen to be completely separate – like water and oil.

This understanding of an impenetrable boundary existing between the flesh

of the worldly realm and the spirit of the divine realm was part of the common Greek philosophies of 2,000 years ago. This is the philosophy that stands behind the majestic words of the opening verses of John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Word was the divine, rational principle through which the creation was made by God, and through which God continues to sustain the world and everything in it.

Many of us are familiar with this glorious story and can recall many Christmas Eve services where we listened to the Prologue of John's Gospel being read. The first thirteen verses paint the picture of the divine Word interacting with the creation in a way completely congruent with this understanding.

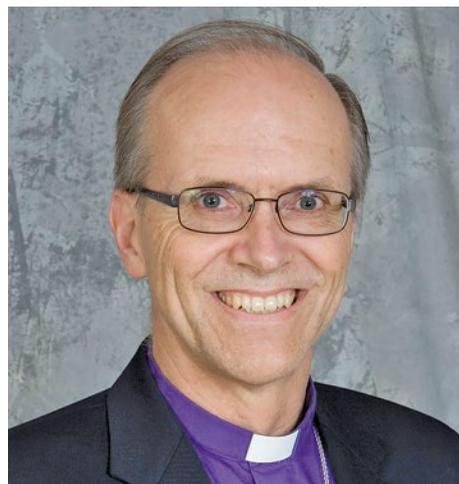
Then, suddenly, this lofty philosophy comes to a grinding halt in verse fourteen: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us." This claim, at its best, is completely irrational; at its worst, it is a bizarre affront to the foundational philosophies of existence. It is simply not possible – the divine becoming a human being?

It was this very "impossibility" that every human being who encountered Jesus had to deal with. Many of

his contemporary religious and state leaders dealt with it in the only way they knew how: they got rid of it... on a cross!

But for many, the power of this person's flesh, his amazing understanding of what it was like to be human – while being God – totally transformed them. As John's Gospel puts it, they were given "power to become children of God" (John 1:12).

There is nothing quite like the touch of another. And when that touch is God's, it carries a life-changing love and power that knows no bounds and defies description. God continues to give God's self, in the flesh of Jesus, to every human being. This is the gift we celebrate on December 25. Merry Christmas! 



△ *Donald Phillips,
Bishop of Rupert's Land*

UPDATE FROM BUGANDA

Christmas

In Buganda and Uganda at large, Christmas is festive. Preparations for Christmas begin early enough, whereby the head of the family begins saving and reserving funds for the Christmas feast. This is when each member of the family (especially the mother) expects from the family head at least a new attire as a gift for Christmas. Some local women may even choose to break off the marriage if not given a new attire!

On Christmas eve, the head of the family is expected to stock different types of food and beverages he can afford, all to be feasted on during Christmas and the following day. The mother and the children wake up very early on Christmas to start cooking and preparing the big Christmas meal, a quarter of which is served at breakfast and the rest to be feasted on after Church.

After breakfast, the family dresses up, each in his or her new attire go to worship the birth of Jesus. Among them are nominal Christians who go to show off their new attire, while others are constant Church attenders.

After Church, all rush home to feast. After the feast, some may choose to go for a walk, others to the cinema, others for local drama, and others for booze or any entertaining function. Some



△ *Jason Musoke and Alvin Jacobs (from Rupert's Land), with a group of the children from the Orphans' Program*

may even pass the whole night boozing!

On Boxing Day, some sober ones may go back to church, while the boozers spend the day time sleeping or they go back to sober up.

If you want to enjoy Christmas to the maximum, please come to Buganda, Uganda.

The Orphans' Program

The congregations, and especially the most compassionate and loving people, of Rupert's Land Diocese support 138 helpless and very needy orphans in terms of school and boarding fees, school materials, school uniforms, medication, and the general up-keep while in their guardian's homes every year.

It's the Diocese of Rupert's Land which educates and cares for the 138 orphans, right from primary

one to senior six (the higher school certificate).

So far, 77 program orphans have completed HSC and some have joined trade schools (motor mechanics, carpentry, tailoring, design, hair dressing, etc.), while 33 of them, luckily, joined university on full scholarships in Mauritius (off the eastern coast of Madagascar). All are very happy and very appreciative.

The Bishop of the Central Buganda Diocese, Jackson Matovu, all the congregations of the Diocese, and especially the beneficiaries, greatly express our heartfelt gratitude to the Bishop of the Rupert's Land Diocese and all the compassionate donors for all your ever supportive and prayerful friendship. May the almighty God continue blessing and providing for you more and more abundantly. 

HOSPITALITY NATION?

Many of us have been raised to think of Canada as a country built of refugees and other immigrants. When we think of the nation's history, early religious refugees come to mind, as well as waves of newcomers following the World Wars, the Vietnamese boat people, and others fleeing tragedy in their homelands. In recent years, Canada has gained an international reputation for allowing increasing numbers of sexual minority refugees to settle here. Considered around the world as one of the best countries to live, applauded for its diversity and multiculturalism, most of us like to think of Canada as a place of homecoming and welcome.



Photo: Terry Fincher, 1968

In recent decades, however, Canada's image as a nation of hospitality has slowly begun to crumble. Some of this has been caused by exposing the truth of the past, such as the boats of Jewish refugees turned away during the Second World War. It is also a result of a series of changes to our national immigration policies. Tom Denton of Winnipeg's Hospitality House explains that the biggest change occurred in 2011, when the federal government put a cap on the number of privately sponsored refugees they would allow into the country each year: just 6,500 privately sponsored refugees from coast to coast.

Under the previous federal administration, however, the number of privately sponsored refugees actually coming into the country each year was closer to 5,000. With 34,000 claimants currently in process, it would take six years for them all to arrive if no new applications were accepted.

On the door of Hospitality House's cramped office at the Catholic Centre for Social Justice, there is a letter in red font explaining why they cannot currently accept new refugee applications. With such a backlog in the system and so much work to be done to process the ones currently on file, it's futile to add more claims.

Only 2,000 new applications were accepted into the national system last year, and the staff at Hospitality House worry that flooding the system further will make it even more difficult for current claimants to get through.

This problem was well underway in Canada before the wave of Syrian refugees began to flood Europe and the world started to ask how it can aid so many in finding safe places to call home. What is the solution? For Tom's colleague, Karin Gordon, the answer is simple: the federal government needs to replace the annual cap. Under this model, private sponsors would continue to pay the costs of supporting newcomers for their first year in the country, but if the money could be found, the people would be allowed to come.

In the next month, some families will be blessed by being ushered through the system at record speed, thanks to the new federal administration's promise to bring an additional 25,000 refugees to Canada by spring. This number is in addition to any others already coming through, causing refugee resettlement organizations across the country to call all hands on deck, even suspending staff Christmas vacation time. Manitoba's share is approximately 6%



Photo: CARE Canada, 2013

of this number, or 1,500 newcomers.

For the staff at Hospital-ity House, who are always concerned about the long-term implications of refugee policies, there are questions about how the government will respond when those 25,000 come to Canada and, in turn, want to begin sponsoring their own extended families. Will the system develop an even more impossible backlog, or will this new government lift some of the current restrictions on numbers coming into the country?

Many refugees are turned away by immigration officials because they cannot prove their identity or their status as refugees. Proving who they are is a near-impossible feat for a person who has been driven from his or her home. Hussein Sheik, for example, featured in the Rupert's Land News' November magazine, came from Somalia, which has not had a stable government to issue identification for

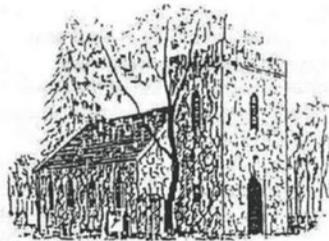
decades. In a small act of mercy, our new government has agreed to allow Syrian and Iraqi refugees into the country without full documentation, although they still undergo screening.

For two Syrian families, now resettled in the West Broadway neighbourhood of Winnipeg, being chosen by Canadian immigration was like winning the lottery. For their 12 children, born amidst war, fear, and hunger, the yard where they play at Mulvey School every day is like a dream land. Unbeknownst to them, their presence enriches the lives of

their Canadian neighbours, who must wrestle with the chaos of the world arriving on their doorstep.

Refugees grow our children's understanding of the world, says Tom. Economically, they "are like a kind of fertilizer," bringing with them great ambition and a desire to succeed. A return to greater numbers of refugees will mean a return to the Canada we stood at attention for in grade school. Who are the true Canadians? They are indigenous peoples and newcomers. There is no one else. [itn](#)

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*Saints' Stories:***OANH PHAM, 1982-2015***Remembered by David Ball*

A shared basement kitchen was at the heart of St. Matthew's, Winnipeg's, promising conversion into affordable housing a year ago. It was the first space in the church to be renovated, and a year later, one of its most-used fixtures.

For many who live in the WestEnd Commons, sharing food is the centre of their community, whether it's weekly communal cooking sessions, or monthly potlucks in the central courtyard.

One resident who attended almost every meal and group meeting was Oanh Pham. The 33-year-old mother shared a suite with her daughter Hannah, who is nearing two. On July 30, tragedy hit the community when Pham was struck by a dump truck and killed while walking to her volunteer co-ordinator job at Siloam Mission. Today, Pham's parents are raising Hannah, but they've brought her back to the historic church building for a street party and barbecue – they know the close connection she shared with the children and families there.

As Pham recounted in an interview two months before her death, the pair lived for years in insecure and crime-ridden public apartment complexes. In WestEnd Commons, little Hannah



Photo: David Ball

finally learned to trust her neighbours.

Two months after Pham's death, the surviving residents of the building continue to mourn. But they're also reflecting on what she offered the fledgling community. Pham, they realized, was a reminder that affordable and secure housing is about much more than a roof over your head or a government funding agreement, as important as those are. Truly secure housing is about creating a healthy and supportive home. And that requires warm community and hard work.

"It's a big loss not to have her in the community anymore," said Erika Frey, a young mother living upstairs from Pham. "She was very instrumental in the building."

The two became close friends soon after moving in

within weeks of each other in 2014. Despite their different household incomes, both struggled to find child care in the neighbourhood so that they could work. For several days every week, Frey and Pham would drop their child off at the other's apartment. They began approaching nearby organizations to propose a new daycare program to address what they saw as an obvious need in the low-income neighbourhood.

But it was the community kitchen program every Tuesday that really excited Pham, Frey said. The two attended regularly, learning to cook food from many cultures. After cooking, everybody would eat together.

"Oanh could see how important that space was," Frey recalled. "It was not just about having a meal on

Tuesdays. It was an opportunity to teach each other, and sharing stories from our own life experiences and families."

As with most drop-in programs, the community kitchen depended on money – funding for food and supplies, and a budget to pay a part-time staff co-ordinator. When the funding ceased, Pham wouldn't let the project stop. She decided to lead a session herself and make food from her own Vietnamese background.

"Her role modelling inspired the other people from different cultures to serve their recipes and share their own knowledge," Frey said. "We all learned that we have more things in common as newcomers and First Nations than we had thought.

"We couldn't all provide all the ingredients for each session – we're cooking for 20 to 25 people – but at least we could provide the role of facilitator and our more cultural ingredients. Even if we had absolutely no funding to do something like that, everybody brings what they can."

Oanh Pham's 31-year-old sister, Uyen Pham, said her older sibling always had a "drive to get things done." But despite facing a series of setbacks in her adult life, particularly in finding suitable and safe housing in which to raise her daughter, Oanh wanted to use that drive to help others.

"She volunteered a lot of her time," Uyen said of her

sister. "At the end of the day, she could go home knowing that she'd made a difference in someone's life."

So when Oanh and Hannah were accepted to move into the new WestEnd Commons last year, she was exhilarated. Oanh always invited Uyen to join them for community kitchen or pot-lucks and to meet her new neighbours.

"This was more about community than just an apartment complex," Uyen said.

According to Jenna Drabble, the WestEnd Commons manager and community connector co-ordinator, the goal of the project from the outset was to become a community where residents could know their neighbours and feel supported, safe and included.

"It would be more than just the bricks and mortar of housing," Drabble said in an email. Pham fit right into that vision, she added, by building a "special relationship" with most of the building's tenants.

"Every community needs people like Oanh in order to thrive," she added. "Oanh had a good understanding of what it takes to create a strong community: hard work, patience, presence and of course kindness – all of which seemed to come naturally to her. Her absence is deeply and profoundly felt by everyone there."

Frey remembers one of the last community activities that she and Pham participated in together. Parents

and children all made little cement hearts, and the plan was to place each heart outside when a new outdoor play area is completed this fall.

The community's been referring to the new area as the Elders' Space, but discussions are afoot to name the playground in memory of Pham and to place her and Hannah's little hearts there. It will serve as a perpetual reminder that housing is about community. And community is about heart.

"Here, we check on each other," Pham said in her interview this summer, hugging Hannah as her daughter giggled in their brightly-lit new home. "If someone is sick, especially the kids, we make sure they're taken care of.

"When you're in apartment housing, you kind of keep to yourself. None of us lived like this before. But this is how life should be." 

This article was originally published at tyeesolutions.org by David Ball. The series is produced by Tyee Solutions Society. It was made possible through the support of the Real Estate Foundation of B.C., the Catherine Donnelly Foundation, Vancity Credit Union, the Aboriginal Housing Management Association, the Vancouver Foundation, and in partnership with Columbia Institute. TSS funders neither influence nor endorse the particular content of TSS reporting.

PARISH NEWS ROUND UP

▷ St. Benedict's Retreat Centre

There will be a Christmas craft show at St. Benedict's on December 5, 10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. [See the website for details.](#)

▷ St. John's College

A short festival of lessons and carols service is being held at the College on December 13 at 3:00 p.m. with the Friends of the College Choir. For a list of carols services being held across the Diocese, [visit the website.](#)

▷ St. Andrew's on the Red

Join Rupert's Land's oldest parish community for an [old-fashioned Christmas celebration](#) on December 12, 12:30-4:00 p.m.



▷ Diocese of Brandon

Our friends to the west have elected a new bishop, Bill Cliff, currently serving as the chaplain at Huron College in London, Ontario. Bill will be consecrated and installed as bishop at the Cathedral in Brandon on March 1, 2016. Congratulations, Bill and the people of Brandon, on this new partnership.

▷ St. Peter's, Dynevor

The old stone church in East Selkirk is hosting their annual series of choirs for Advent, December 4-6. [Visit the Festivals of Lessons & Carols page for service details.](#)

▷ CLAY 2016

The Canadian Lutheran Anglican Youth gathering for 2016 will soon be accepting applications for the conference in Charlottetown next August. If there are youth in your congregation ages 14-19, [check out the news post for details](#) or [contact Tyler Gingrich](#), who will organize the Lutheran and Anglican group going from Winnipeg.

▷ New Book: Exploring Philemon

Roy Jeal, a parishioner at St. Margaret's, Winnipeg, and Professor of Religion at Booth University College, has released a new book entitled, *Exploring Philemon: Freedom, Brotherhood, and Partnership in the New Society*, published by SBL Press.

The Letter to Philemon entered the world of the ancient Mediterranean and the early church with a dramatic and powerful rhetorical force. Its careful interweaving of textures was meant to produce a profound effect on Philemon and on the church that met in his home. *Exploring Philemon* demonstrates that many striking and subtle features work together to present a rhetorical argument that the new Christ-believing society must be one of freedom, brotherhood, and partnership, and not just for the powerful, but for all.

▷ **The Episcopal Church**

A new Presiding Bishop and Primate was installed in The Episcopal Church in the U.S. on November 1, 2015. Michael Curry replaces outgoing Primate, Katherine Jefferts-Schori, as the spiritual leader of an Anglican province covering 109 dioceses in 16 different countries. "The choice is ours: chaos or community," he declared in a moving sermon on the day of his installation, "And I believe Jesus has shown us the way to community." Curry, a gifted preacher and beloved pastor, is The Episcopal Church's first black Primate.



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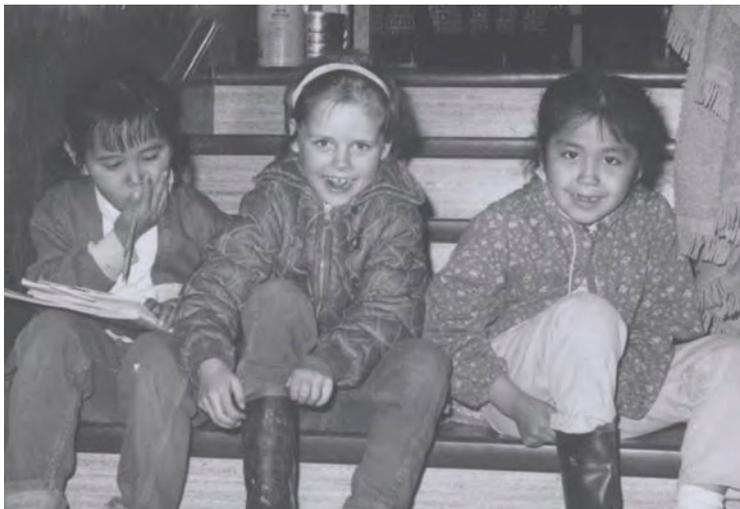
▽ *On November 15, St. Andrew's celebrated their 8th anniversary of becoming a Sudanese mission. Congratulations!*



MUKLUKS AND GIGGLES: MY YEAR AT STRINGER HALL *Rod Clifton*

The letter arrived at Old Sun, the Anglican Residential School on the Blackfoot Reserve, in early August, 1966. I had been offered a position as the Senior Boys' Supervisor at Stringer Hall, the Anglican Residential Hostel in Inuvik, Northwest Territories, for the 1966-67 school year. I was looking forward to having a job that would help me understand indigenous students better.

Two years earlier, in 1964, I began studying to be a teacher in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. After completing my first year, I joined a group of other young student teachers in a new cross-cultural program preparing us to teach in northern and reserve schools. A requirement of this program was to complete an internship, and I was assigned to the Blackfoot Reserve (now called the Siksika Nation), east of



Calgary, from the beginning of May to the end of August. I worked in the office helping Siksika staff members, registered reserve children for kindergarten, acted as a truancy officer, helped local ranchers bail hay and brand calves, and many other things that would enhance my understanding of aboriginal people.

During that summer I boarded at Old Sun. When I arrived in May, there were

Siksika students in residence, but after the end of June there were only five people living there: the Anglican priest, three young orphaned Cree girls from Hobbema (a sad situation), and me. Mrs. Red Gun came in every day and made meals for us and cared for the three little girls.

Unfortunately, at the end of July, Indian Affairs had not paid me the stipend promised, so I decided to work for a year before returning to university. Fortunately, I was paid in November and I paid the debt I had for room and board at Old Sun.

The Residential Supervisor's position at Stringer Hall was exactly what I needed to expand my understanding of aboriginal people — so I thought at the time. It was a fascinating experience, and I took copious notes and photos of the things that happened, all of which have been filed with the Truth and





students in residence: 73% Inuit, 16% Dene, and 12% Caucasian or Metis.

Many of the children arrived at the hostel wearing the same institutional clothing they wore when they went home in the spring, not having bathed or changed in a couple of months. Some children had been standing in smudge fires trying to keep the hordes of bugs off them. Even so, a number of children arrived with infected insect bites in their scalps, and others had ear infections so bad that pus was running down their necks. Fortunately, Stringer Hall had a young nursing sister, Ms. Rosalind Malick, who had just arrived from London, England. She treated these children with great compassion and effective antibiotics.

In early December, when the sun had already sunk below the southern horizon, a senior boy said that he was too sick to get up for school. Some boys, of course, would feign illness during these dark days so they could get a day off from school, but

Reconciliation Commission.

In late August, 1966, I boarded a DC-4 at the municipal airport in Edmonton, and 12 hours later landed in Inuvik after stopping at many small communities along the Mackenzie River. I was met by the Hostel Administrator, Rev. Holman, and we drove to Inuvik, where I settled into my room at Stringer Hall.

The next day, I toured the hostel and was told what the job entailed: caring for 85 senior boys, from 12 years of age to about 21, in three dorms, for 6 days a week, and being on duty for about 22 hours a day. Most days I did not need to look after the boys during school hours, but if students were too sick to go to school but not sick enough to go to the infirmary, they were in the dorms and I was responsible for them.

Within a few days, students began arriving. Some came by aircraft from small coastal communities —

Tuktoyaktuk, Sachs Harbour, and Cambridge Bay, for example — and others came by boat or aircraft from communities along the Mackenzie River, such as Aklavik, Fort McPherson, and Fort Good Hope. In the far North, all students, aboriginal and non-aboriginal, went to residential school if they resided in small communities without day schools. By the beginning of September, when classes began at Sir Alexander Mackenzie School, there were 280

**Is there something exciting
in your congregation others
should know about?**



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this young fellow was not one of them. I helped him climb the stairs to the infirmary, where our nursing sister assessed him and quickly made arrangements for him to be admitted to the local hospital. His appendix had ruptured and it was removed in emergency surgery. A week later, he was back in residence; if he had been out on the trap line with his parents, he would have surely died.

For many children, the time they spent in Stringer Hall was the only time they slept in a bed of their own. In fact, some of them had been physically and sexually abused in their home communities, and residential school saved some of them from continued abuse.

At Stringer Hall, two of the six supervisors were young Inuit women, Annie and Lucy, who spoke to the young Inuit children in their mother tongue. Mrs. Thomas, a Dene woman, also lived in the hostel with her 4 year old daughter. She was the seam-

stress who made parkas and mukluks for the students.

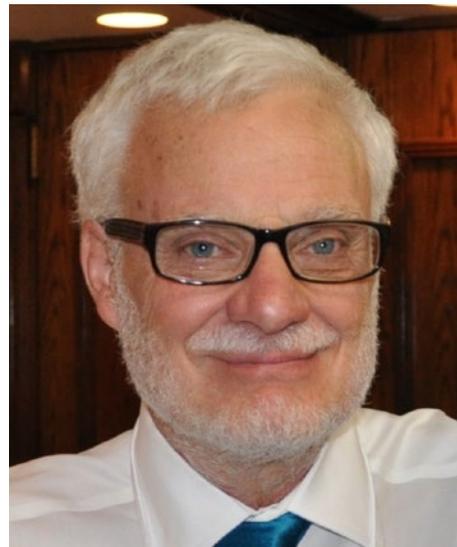
I fondly remember the young Inuit children coming to my room on Saturday afternoons to take Ms. Malick and me for walks. Often, we would climb the hill behind the hostel so the children could slide down the snow-covered road on cardboard boxes. Other times, we walked out on the ice of the Mackenzie River, keeping off the dog sled trails used by people going to trap lines, hunting camps, and traveling to other communities. The Inuit children knew how dangerous a dog team could be because they all knew people who had been attacked by dogs. During that winter a young child was killed by a dog team in Fort McPherson.

It is true that some children were abused in residential schools, both by other students and by supervisors. All people who brutalized children should be punished for their crimes, and so should administrators

from both the churches and the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, who covered up these crimes.

However, most of the people working in the residential schools, at least those I knew, wanted to help the children receive a good education preparing them for the modern world. Most of these people also wanted to fulfill their Christian calling to help the poor, tend to the weak, and treat the sick.

Forty-nine years have slipped away since I spent that eventful year in Stringer Hall. In writing this story, I reviewed the photographs of the students and I still fondly remember many of their names and the communities they came from. It was an experience — a positive one at that — that I have not forgotten. 



△ *Rod Clifton is a parishioner at St. Margaret's, Winnipeg, and Professor Emeritus at the University of Manitoba. He welcomes comments, criticisms, and suggestions: Rodney.Clifton@umanitoba.ca.*

CARAVAGGIO AND THE DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY

Jane Barter Moulaison

Jane Barter Moulaison is currently writing a book that takes up the Christian doctrine called anthropology, or the doctrine of humanity. Below is an excerpt in which she argues that the New Testament understands the human creature primarily as one who is called by Christ and called to respond to this calling.

In San Luigi dei Francesi hangs an enigmatic painting by Caravaggio titled "The Calling of St. Matthew." A group of tax collectors are seated around the table in a dark and austere tavern with books opened for reckoning and coins splayed for counting. Suddenly, Jesus and Peter enter and disturb their commerce and announce a light that contrasts wildly with the bleakness of the room. Though Jesus points to just one of them, all are visible in the bright light of the door that he just opened. All stand before his light exposed: some appear to be captivated by his appearance, while others refuse to answer his gaze.

Only one seems aware that this house call is, in fact, a summons, and that it is one specifically intended for him. While drawing away from the too-bright light of the



△ *The Calling of St. Matthew, by Caravaggio (Photo: Boston College)*

open door, he also dares to look directly at Jesus, and responds with brows raised in inquiry and a tenuous finger pointed to his heart. "Me?" "Yes" is Christ's reply, given in the subtle lift of his countenance. In a moment Jesus will speak those terrible and

Caravaggio captures the human response to this divine initiative

wonderful words to Levi/Matthew: "Follow me."

Several art critics note that Jesus' hand cast toward Matthew is reminiscent of that of Michelangelo's God pointing actively toward

the first man in the Creation of Adam (Fred S. Kleiner, 2009). Nevertheless, the flex and arch of the self-same hand also echoes the hand of Adam. Christ is at once the one who calls Matthew to life, but the life he gives is formed in relation to him, who is also man, the second Adam, and who thus makes possible the way of following.

The doctrine of humanity in the New Testament is replete with the ambiguity of The Calling of Saint Matthew. Humans are called by Christ and given a new standing and identity before

him. Such an identity stands in marked contrast to the life that they once led, but it is also an identity that is formed and shaped in accordance with him. Thus, Jesus does not leave his followers bereft of identity as he calls them; he instead calls them — tax collectors, prostitutes, sinners, the poor — to become like him and to become one with him.

Caravaggio captures the human response to this divine initiative that is central to New Testament conceptions of the self. To answer Christ's summons is not merely to respond in blind obedience. It is the furtive and yet bold trust that enables Christ's followers to match his gaze and respond, even in clumsy and tenuous gestures.

Behind the raised eyebrows and uncertain hand lies the heart and mind of a creature who knows that Christ's calling has profound personal implications. It is also to know that the "I" who is called is called toward something — to the light that breaks upon a shadowed present. To echo Psalm 36: 9, in his light we see the light of humanity. We also, as in Caravaggio, see our human weakness. In his light we see our eyes cast steadily down upon our lucre. We acknowledge our defiant, apathetic, or merely curious gaze. And above all, we see our hesitation, and we feel the anxious inertia of

Matthew whose query is frozen in time as a sign of all the hesitation, fear and exhilaration of being called.

While the question of human nature is not a prominent theme in the New Testament, and clearly of far lesser significance than Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension; nevertheless, the New Testament has much to say implicitly about characters such as Matthew, who are gathered in bleak rooms, engaged in questionable activity and who (whether they know it or not) long for the light of the world to enter in. And, therefore, it also has much to say to us today. 



△ *Jane Barter Moulaison is Chair of the Department of Religion and Culture at the University of Winnipeg and an Anglican priest.*

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