



IN THIS ISSUE

7 **INTRODUCING
OLD GRACE**

8 **VIGNETTES
FROM JAIL**

12 **THE AESTHETIC AND
MORAL VISION OF
DOLLY PARTON**

15 **READING THE BIBLE
AS A WOMAN**

Publisher | Bishop Donald Phillips
Editor | Allison Courey
Accounting | Bernice Funk
Advertising | Angela Rush
Layout & design | cityfolkcreative.ca

Rupert's Land News - is published 10 times per year (September - June) by the Diocese of Rupert's Land, in the Anglican Church in Canada. It connects churches and communities from Portage la Prairie, MB, to Atikokan, ON, by offering news, events, opinion, and ideas to 6,000 readers per month. RLN is available in a variety of formats:

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Editorial offices:

Anglican Lutheran Centre
935 Nesbitt Bay
Winnipeg Manitoba
R3T 1W6

Subscription queries:

Administrative Assistant for the Diocese
(204) -4200 | general@rupertsland.ca

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: Beatrix, Cecelia, and Dagmar decorate pumpkin cookies at the St. Aidan's Messy Church.

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ALL SAINTS GREAT AND SMALL

Donald Phillips



Photo: Walters Art Museum

In our Christian calendar, November 1st is All Saints' Day. Our ancestors likely woke that morning grateful that they had safely passed through All Hallows' Eve and had not been tormented by spirits from the dead. Similarly, many of us wake on this day and check to see if any nasty tricks have been played on us by roaming trick-or-treaters the night before.

So where do saints come from? Today, canonizing a new saint involves groups of devoted followers of a particular deceased person (usually Roman Catholic) who make a pitch to the Pope and Vatican to grant sainthood to this person of devotion.


But if we aren't part of a group lobbying for sainthood of a beloved ancestor, how

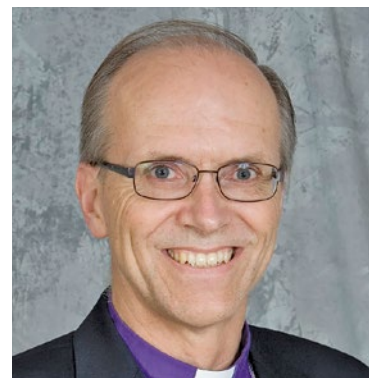
can we understand saints and how can that have any impact on the lives we lead? In the early Church, saints evolved quite naturally. When a much-loved Church leader passed away, much attention would be paid to his or her funeral — including making a record of their accomplishments and the important ways in which they showed the love and truth of Christ and the gospel.

Over time, by a process of 'natural selection', some of these saints would gain greater and wider recognition as other faith communities learned from their example and their teaching. To ensure a common commemoration of their life, a day of special devotion (often the day on which they died) was set aside and observed by the Church each year. In medieval times and beyond, as artisanal portrayals of these saints and portions of their life stories began to adorn church buildings.

It is important to realize that the recognition of saints always began with their local community. In some sense, they were regarded as "local heroes" by their communities. This was not unlike our contemporary experience in the sports world. Although these "saints" are usually still living, we emulate and memorialize great hockey players, golfers, and

olympic athletes. We establish a written record of their accomplishments and ask them to share what makes them who they are. Many of us try to follow in their footsteps.

How should we as contemporary Christian disciples engage with the saints? While we can learn from the legacy of great men and women whom the Church has named as saints through the centuries, we can also reflect on the people who have played a pivotal role in our own lives. These are people who have shown us something of the love and truth of God, and who have opened our eyes to see the world around us more fully — perhaps as God sees it. Finally — do not discount yourself. By the grace of God, and perhaps unknown to you, you may very well be another's saint. Happy All Saints Day! 



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

PARISH NEWS **ROUND UP**

▷ St. Andrew's, Woodhaven

Stop in for a [Christmas bazaar](#) on November 5, 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. There will be crafts, knitting, a bake sale, and a craft raffle.

▷ The Episcopal Network on Stewardship

Living Generously, the third annual Anglican/Lutheran stewardship event, is happening on November 4 and 5 at St. John's Cathedral. The purpose of the gathering is to learn to speak differently about generosity and stewardship in local congregations, network with others, and engage presentations from the 2016 Episcopal Network on Stewardship Conference (TENS). [See the registration information here.](#)



▷ Bishop's Dinner

The annual Bishop's Dinner is November 9 with David Northcott as the keynote speaker. The executive director of Winnipeg Harvest, Northcott has received several distinguished awards for his work and commitment to working with some of the city's most vulnerable populations. [Details and ticket information is available on our website.](#)

▷ St. Andrew's on the Red

The annual art auction will take place at the Church on [November 5, 2:00-4:00 p.m.](#)

▷ Central Buganda Visit

In case you missed them, we had six special visitors in October, leaders in our companion diocese of Central Buganda. The group of three couples – outgoing bishop Jackson Matovu and his wife Perusi, incoming bishop Michael Lubowa and his wife Janepher, and coordinator of the orphan's program Jason Musoke and his wife Faith – enjoyed the hospitality of several parishes while in Rupert's Land. The groups were welcomed to worship services, dialogues, dinners, and other gatherings, as well being present for our diocesan Synod October 20-22.



▷ The Centre for Christian Studies

CCS is hosting a leadership development day in conjunction with St. John's College called "[Becoming the Stories We Tell](#)," with guest speakers from the dioceses of Toronto and Ottawa. Join them for a day of fellowship, worship, and study as they explore what it looks like to embody the passion of Jesus.

▷ St. John's College

This month's Bible & Breakfast welcomes David Widdicombe, priest at St. Margaret's, Winnipeg, who has a PhD from Oxford University. On November 1 at 9:00 a.m., she will lead participants in a study of post-colonial approaches to biblical interpretation. [There is a \\$12 charge for breakfast; students are free.](#)

RUPERT'S LAND SYNOD

The 113th session of the Diocese of Rupert's Land took place October 20 to October 22. The theme was "Embracing the World with Christ." Delegates gathered at St. John's Cathedral for the opening worship, where Bishop Don reminded us that, "we are challenged to see ourselves, first and foremost, as stewards of God's grace." During the service, Brad Elliott, Mary Lysecki, and David Widdicombe were admitted as Canons of the Cathedral.

Throughout the weekend, delegates engaged in worship and table discussion. They heard from parishes as they shared how they were "embracing the world with Christ." Presentations were made on the new missional initiative project ALIGN, indigenous ministries, July's General Synod, Theological Education Committee, companion diocese, Refugee Committee, and the Anglican Foundation. The resolutions came out of the Bishop's address, the Truth and Rec-

onciliation Report, support for the Shoal Lake Freedom Road, and the Anglican Foundation.

Overall, Synod was a great opportunity to learn from others and worship together. Delegates from across the Diocese were welcomed to renew the sense of diocesan community and return to individual parishes remembering, together as stewards of grace, to "embrace the world with Christ."

ORDER OF RUPERT'S LAND

In 1984, the Bishop of Rupert's Land established the Order to be given during the opening service of each diocesan Synod in recognition of outstanding support and leadership in the Church. This year, the award was given to Cathy Campbell, Peter Flynn, and Gail Schnabl.

Cathy Campbell's vision and leadership were instrumental in the transformation of St. Matthew's Anglican Church into what is now

the WestEnd Commons. Previously, Cathy managed a major renovation of the church basement to create the Neighbourhood Resource Centre, providing a newly restored home to St. Matthew's Maryland Community Ministry. The WestEnd Commons is a multi-purpose complex comprised of 26 affordable housing units for families, dedicated worship space for seven different faith communities, a commercial community kitchen, and office and meeting space.

Cathy has contributed to the life and work of the Diocese generously and faithfully over her 13 year ministry. Her support and leadership have included serving as District Dean for the Central Winnipeg Deanery; membership in the Diocesan Discernment Group on Ordained Ministry; chairing the Diocesan Local Collaborative Ministry group; participation in the diocesan Theological Education Committee, and writing a portion of the report. Cathy is a nurturer of



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Peter Flynn was ordained to the priesthood in 1965, and he has always made the connection between the altar and the soup kitchen. His faith and commitment to the Church and social justice have been unwavering in spite of a number of personal challenges and tragedies.

Since the 70's, Peter has worked to welcome refugees, and has been a member of the Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council. During his years in the River North ministry, he was Director of the NorWest Co-op Health and Social Services Centre. He has often lobbied government on social issues such as French language rights, social assistance, privatization, unemployment, and casinos.

He has provided leadership to St. Matthew's Maryland Community Ministry; the Diocesan Urban Aboriginal Outreach Ministry; Sunshine House, a drop-in centre for those living with HIV and Hepatitis C; a safe house that provided shelter for neighbourhood children;



△ *Left to right: Lorna Howell accepted the award in Cathy Campbell's absence; Peter Flynn, Bishop Donald Phillips, Gail Schnabl*

and a children's community recreation program.

In 2002, Peter was awarded the Queen's Jubilee Medal for Community Service. The list of interfaith, ecumenical, and diocesan committees he has been involved in is exhaustive. His entire life has been dedicated to bettering the lives of others.

Gail Schnabl served as the chair of the Crossed Hands Refugee Committee, a joint enterprise between St. Matthew's and St. Paul's, Fort Garry, until 2010, when she became the Refugee Coordinator for the Diocese. As part of this work, Gail has attended national refugee meetings and assisted with sponsorships for a large number of refugees. She also

serves on the Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council.

Gail is the secretary of the St. Matthew's Non Profit Housing Inc., and played a central role in raising over \$1,000,000 for the West End Commons. She has organized the policy and procedure manuals for both the WestEnd Commons and St. Matthew's Maryland Community Ministry.

In her passion for justice and her willingness to serve, Gail is the Primate's Fund representative at St. Matthew's, Winnipeg, and the chair of the hospitality ministry. All this happens with calm, skill, and patience. She is able to set priorities and boundaries, making sure people feel heard and included.

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INTRODUCING OLD GRACE

Barbara Barnett is a Rupert's Lander and a member of the Old Grace Housing Co-op.

The Grace in Aging and Old Grace have come into our lives with a remarkable synchronicity – at the right time for us. Old Grace Housing Co-op is under construction on the site of the original Grace Hospital, bounded by Evanson and Arlington in Wolseley. Grace Hospital moved to its current location in 1967 and 189 Evanson became government offices. When the building was demolished in 2014, a group of people with vision and tenacity worked to bring their dream of a housing co-op to reality. Meet Old Grace.

I am reading Kathleen Dowling Singh's *The Grace in Aging* slowly, finding much to reflect on: intentional letting go and accepting life changes as they arise. My husband Phil and I are trying to look at the next years of our lives realistically. This winter we are beginning the intentional process of simplifying our lives, letting go of the belongings that surround us. We have lived in our house for 28 years. It holds many memories of family meals and growing grandchildren. We will be leaving the garden we've worked hard to create. In a year's time, we will move into our new home in Old Grace.

Our choice of Old Grace is an intentional



one. We want to move at a time of our choosing, not when we are forced into it by declining ability or health. We're letting go of the familiar in many ways. We want to embrace these changes, experiencing the inevitable sadness that will arise and enjoying being part of something new.

We will have the blessing of living with people of different ages, cultures, and family compositions. The 60 apartments will be a variety of sizes, with both equity and subsidy opportunities to meet members' financial circumstances. Policies and house rule decisions are made by all the members. Each has an equal voice and the co-op is committed to coming to decisions by consensus.

Old Grace embodies many of the values we hold dear. The board of directors has worked

hard to develop strong community relationships, and consultation with neighbourhood groups has moved hand-in-hand with development. We love that our new home is working toward LEED Gold certification. When we decide to sell our car, there will be two Peg City Car Co-op vehicles on site. We're looking forward to being close to public transit. And who could resist sharing our new home with a chimney designed specifically for the endangered Chimney Swift to nest?

Construction of the Old Grace Housing Co-operative is expected to be complete in late 2017. Membership is now open to people who would like to be placed on a waiting list for future openings. Learn more at

oldgracehousingcoop.ca. 

VIGNETTES FROM JAIL

Norman Collier

Sometimes the things he says are beautiful. He says he can see God in the sky, the snow, the trees. In another age, we might have called him a mystic.

But sometimes the things he says are troubling. God is speaking in his head and telling him to do things. He jumps up on chairs and laughs at nothing at all. He is disarmingly intense.

There is medication for these mystical outbursts, but the medication saddens him. When he takes the medication, he can no longer hear God. He says when he takes the medication the sun no longer shines on his brain.



Photo: I am Purple

says, “My mom and dad were strung out on the couch. High. There was no food in the cupboards, no clothes in my closet, no soap in the bathroom, no money in the house. So in order to get food I had to get money, and to get money I had to start selling drugs again. That’s when I got picked up.

“When I was in here, I learned how to change. I really wanted to change. But you know what? Nothing had

changed out there.”

Joe is back in jail after being in the community for only four weeks.

“When I got home,” he

The young boy is about to be released, to walk through the big metal gates into freedom, with all its promise and all its danger.

“I don’t know what to do. I’m in here because I was told to attack the next person I saw on the street. It was an old man, and I hit him with a board. That was my initiation into my gang. It was wrong, and I don’t know how to make it right.”

“When you get home, I want you to find an old person who lives on your street – any old person will do. I want you to think of

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something kind to do for that person. Maybe shovel his steps, or carry a heavy bag for him. Maybe smile at him when you walk by. Do something nice instead of something awful."

"How long will I have to do that for?"

"You will know when you've done it long enough."

Sometime it feels like I spend more time talking about the devil than about God.

"Do you believe in the devil, Mr. Collier?"

"Do you believe in hell?"

"Satan was in my dream the other night."

"Have you ever read the Satanic bible?"

It suddenly dawned on me. They see themselves as lost. They feel spiritually rejected. They believe they are damned. They have concluded that they have no right to ask anything of God.

"Congratulations! You've won a prize in the chaplaincy art contest!"

No smile. "OK."

"A cheque for \$25 will be deposited in your account."

No smile. "OK."

"You'll get your picture back from the judges in about four weeks."

No smile. "OK."

"You're the only winner from Agassiz. You've done very well."

No smile. "OK."

Afterwards, his teacher asks me, "Did he at least smile?"

No. No smile. Never.

Together, we wonder what secret, what fear, what assault has robbed him of joy. What pain, what loss, what evil has shut him down? Where is his soul? Perhaps his soul is in his art.


John wants to go to church.

A decision like this involves many layers of management, pages of applications, endless faxes to outside agencies, and a long list of rules and conditions. But the approval comes, and John can go to church on Thanksgiving weekend.

He's not sure what church to attend, so we pick the closest one we can find. He will have to walk there on his own, and he will only be allowed two hours away from the institution. His taste of freedom will be quick, but

it will be enough.

As I walk along the street toward the church, I can see him ahead of me. He walks like any teenager who happens to be in a gang – full of indifference and swagger and ownership and attitude. But then, suddenly, unexpectedly, unaware of my presence and lost in the solitude of freedom, he begins to skip like a little boy. He can see himself reflected in the store windows along the street. He stops to look at himself, and then continues skipping down the avenue.

It is a moment of grace on this Thanksgiving weekend. For a brief moment, he is himself. It is the goal of all our work. It is a gift. It is worship. 

Norman Collier is the Chaplain at the Agassiz Youth Centre and an Anglican priest.



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"THEY COME TO SEE ME SEE THEM": THE AESTHETIC AND MORAL VISION OF DOLLY PARTON

Jane Barter Moulaison

This week, a warm and gentle southern breeze blew like grace through our (already) chilly northern city: the incomparable Dolly Parton came to Winnipeg as part of her "Pure and Simple Tour." There are so many ways that she exploded all expectations, as she has been doing all her life — her graciousness was breathtaking, so was her musical versatility, and her infectious energy created an evening that was nothing short of magical.

Many commentators have discussed the supposed contradictions of Ms. Parton: of an external appearance that is judged to be at odds with her acumen and serious talent, of the kind of feminine glamour that seemingly jars with her depth as a woman. But those commentators are wrong, because Ms. Parton knows a thing or two about aesthetics. I believe that hers is a deeply (but exceedingly rare) Christian moral vision.

As she tells the story, her people were "Holy Rollers," meaning they would have so much fun singing and dancing in church that they would just roll people on down the aisle who were in the way.

Thankfully, the Pentecostals of Locust Ridge, Tennessee, were not infected by that most insidious of Christian heresies: Platonism (the idea that God is present in the spiritual but not the material). They did not look for a deeper meaning in the text or in the world. Jesus was in the word and in the Church, in the trees, in the goodness of family, and in their small town. This did not mean that any of these things were perfect, but Jesus was there just the same, his face shining off the Tennessee mountains and dancing in the fireflies:

*Sittin' on the front porch on a
summer afternoon
In a straightback chair on two
legs, leans against the wall
Watch the kids a' playin' with
June bugs on a string
And chase the glowin' fireflies
when evenin' shadows fall.
"My Tennessee Mountain Home"*

Ms. Parton grew up very poor in a family with twelve children. She tells the story of going into town with her "Mama and Daddy" in the front and the kids piled in the back of a pickup truck. One day when she was about seven or eight she saw the



most beautiful woman she had ever seen. The woman's bouffant hair was a vivid bright yellow, and her lips were an intense scarlet. She later learned that this enchanting vision was the town prostitute. As Dolly tells it, she spent the rest of her life trying to look just like that woman. Small-town prostitutes are the source of endless derision to locals, but to Dolly she was and remained patently beautiful. In an interview, [Dolly Parton shed insight on this aesthetic vision](#): "I've often said people don't come to see me to see me, they come to see

me to see them.” Parton saw this woman in all her proud garishness and it was good. It was very good:

*Honeysuckle vine clings to the fence along the lane
Their fragrance makes the summer wind so sweet
And on a distant hilltop, an eagle spreads its wings
An’ a songbird on a fence post sings a melody.
“My Tennessee Mountain Home”*

To see the world as Dolly sees it is to see the beauty of the finite—beauty on the surfaces of things. It is not to plumb into the world’s hidden depths or secret revelations. It is instead to find within the world, within this life – even in its brokenness and pain – a goodness that is also real because it has been visited by grace. Such a grace has not displaced or interrupted the thing’s identity; it has simply confirmed it. To see the world as Dolly Parton sees it is to abjure that perennial Christian sin of wishing to convert or reform; it is, instead, dwelling in the beauty of what is. It is, as

she inimitably puts it, “leaving no rhinestone unturned.”

It is no surprise, then, that her conservative Christian background did not for a moment inhibit her from appreciating her many LGBTTQ* fans. As she put it: “I’ve been around so long, so a lot of people grew up with me. I feel more like a family member or an aunt or an older sister or a friend. They know I’m a little different myself. I’ve

fought for the right to be myself, so that is one of the reasons that the gays and lesbians relate to me. They know that I appreciate everybody for who they are. We are who we are, so why can’t we be allowed to be that? I ain’t out to preach no sermons, I’m just out to do my work, sing my songs and write them, and love people and share them.”

This is not incoherence in Parton’s thought—it is consistency, pure and simple. To appreciate everybody for who they are is to see the world as one in which grace is already at work. It is to see others as requiring noth-

ing to reform, nothing to alter or curtail. The only proper response to such grace is a smear of lipstick, a large measure of glitter and rhinestones, and lavish and wide appreciation:

*Walkin’ home from church on a Sunday with the one ya love
Just laughin’, talkin’, making future plans
And when the folks ain’t lookin’, you might steal a kiss or two
Sittin’ in the porch swing, holdin’ hands.
“My Tennessee Mountain Home.”*



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

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RETIREMENT: THE END OR JUST THE BEGINNING?

For some, retirement conjures images of "freedom 55," complete with travel, golfing, and good wine. For others, it's a reminder of looming old age and a feeling of worthlessness. I asked four retired Rupert's Landers – Terry Reilly, Frank Bann, Gail Schnabl, and David Pate – to share their thoughts on entering the "winter years" of their lives.

Sometimes, retirement creates the space to get to know one's self in a way that wasn't necessary or perhaps possible when days were filled with the busyness of work and family. Although he didn't miss the long hours, David realized that he actually needed the social activity that his job provided. Some retirees find they miss work and decide to go back, but he has filled that space with things he didn't have time for in earlier years. He's learned to value community and per-



△ *Frank enjoys time with his grandkids in retirement*

sonal relationships more fully when they aren't automatically built into his routine as a parish priest.

All four parishioners have found that despite not having to show up for work, their days were quickly filled. Still in good health, their time is divided between family, volunteering, and self care. At first, Gail was surprised by her full schedule. Before retiring, she explains, "I naive-

ly thought I wouldn't be busy anymore, but I've realized that I do this to myself." Instead of waiting for a time when her schedule would be free, retirement has pushed her to create good boundaries for herself and schedule in the rest she needs.

As retirement goes on, that rest becomes increasingly important. It is naive to think of retirement without considering the parallel process of

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aging. For some, the fear of becoming “useless” is so strong that they push off retirement until the last possible moment. Our society puts so much value on paid work that it is easy for a person to feel like he or she has less value after retirement.

Yet each of the parishioners I spoke with pushed back against this perspective of human worth. They are each deeply grateful for the freedom retirement has afforded them to invest in the things they value most. As Terry put it, “I’ve had a ton of fun!” Frank notes that once his wife also retired, they were able to spend more time together and invest more fully in their relationship: “When you’re working, you spend more time with your coworkers than with your partner!”


Retirement is a prophetic gift to the Church which says that our value is not found in what or how much we do. It can give individuals the space to reflect their true identity as God’s image-bearing creation. In retirement, many are able to let go of the constant push to succeed and focus instead on the things that matter most. As Frank puts it, “I wouldn’t have traded those years with my grandson for anything.”

In the Anglican Church, we baptize babies as a sign that a person is welcomed by God because of who he or she is, not because of what they do or say. No amount of hard work or good theology can make God love a person more or less. In a sense, retirement is a sign of this too: God is unconcerned with

how busy we are or how much money we make. God only invites us to come and belong.




Ironically, it is these retired individuals who form the pillars of our parishes. As I spoke with these parishioners, it was clear that our churches couldn’t function without them. They set the altar, print the bulletin, and volunteer at the soup kitchen. They are treasurers, wardens, and Sunday school teachers. But the gift of time is not the most valuable thing they give to the Church. It is the gift of perspective.




Perhaps the most common theme across retirement experiences is the inevitable looking back over one’s life. As I listened to each retiree, they spoke of both gratefulness and regret. They have come to a more mature understanding of God and human relationship, holding their convictions a little more lightly.

“I think more about how fragile life is,” says Frank. For the most part, they are simply grateful to retire and experience life a little differently. But if they could do it again, they would try a greater diversity of things. Spend more time with family. Say “no” to things that don’t matter. 

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JOURNEYING **THE LABYRINTH**

Andrea Jackson

Earlier this year, I was stopped by a neighbour. I didn't have time to visit because I was running late for the labyrinth. "Ah," he called after me, "a mathematical trick." I replied, "No, not a maze – a labyrinth, more of a meditative walk."

The labyrinth that I walk is a monthly event. It is an indoor canvas labyrinth, with soft background music and candles. There are labyrinth keepers who lead the opening and closing of the space. Usually, during a labyrinth that celebrates the change of seasons, they guide us in short readings.

Once the evening's labyrinth has been opened, my habit is to collect my thoughts. Sitting quietly, the most pressing things going on in my life come to mind. As I begin my walk, I bring these thoughts to God. More often than not, these thoughts are of a concern that I have for someone in my immediate circle.

While carrying this concern, often made physical by carrying a small shell or pebble, I begin to pray about it. Presenting this issue and asking for guidance is a newer way of praying for me. I was reared on "earnestly imploring" God in prayer, but this time is in my own words.

Often just the process of talking it out in my head helps me reason through an




issue that has been weighing on me. The path is easily walked because there are no barriers or dead ends, so concentrating on my prayer is not difficult. Once I reach the centre, I have usually also reached a point where I'm ready to leave my concern and my thanks with God. By placing the physical object I carry in the centre, I consciously decide to "trust God with this one."

On my walk out of the labyrinth, I recite prayers that come easily. They run a loop in my brain like a piece of music on repeat. If I find my mind drifting, it can be brought back to these prayers. When the walk out is complete, there is time again to sit and be grateful.

When all participants have completed the labyrinth, we meet in the centre to close the space. We give thanks for the labyrinth itself, for all that was brought there, all

that was left, and all that was taken away. We also remember those who would have walked but couldn't. This is a prayer community.

Whatever our intention or meditation during our personal walk, we are not alone. This demonstrates that everyone is walking a path, looking for guidance, seeking solace. Hope is inspired when so many people do so in a prayerful way.

As I prepare each month to walk the path, I reflect on the desires and thanksgivings that I hold for the world, my family and friends, and myself. The act of leaving those meditations in the labyrinth's centre to offer them to God – that is prayer. 

Andrea Jackson attends St. Peter's, Winnipeg, which houses both indoor and outdoor labyrinths.

THE BIBLE AND FEMINISM(S): READING THE BIBLE AS A WOMAN

Janet Ross

While Christians through the ages have certainly found biblical scriptures that speak to the soul and inspire, there is also a complicated relationship between biblical text and those who name the Bible as sacred. Christian history reveals a long record of countless theological debates, tens of thousands of splits among Christian groups and denominations, struggles over translations — some even to the death — and it continues in our current deliberations over the biblical criteria for such things as marriage and ministry qualifications, stewardship of the land, and justice and equity for our communities. It doesn't take long to discover evidence of how the Bible has been used as abuse, how scripture has supported oppression, and how biblical text has been abused via interpretations, translations, and claims of authority.

I sympathize with the Church in this relationship of struggle. I, too, have grappled and wrestled like Jacob

with the angel over beautiful and ugly meanings of verses and words, struggling to understand an interpretation, a theology, a behavior, or mandate claimed to be "right" or "moral" or "natural" because of scripture. And like Jacob, I have been wounded from the struggle by family, friends, ministers, professors, and others by their use of scripture against women and women's roles in life.

A feature of sacred text is that, for better and for worse, the text does not stay on the page. The great temptation to interpret and reinterpret in each generation is too strong to resist. Whether we glean biblical texts for such purposes as integrity in living, authority, and/or discernment, we draw out what we can from the text to set it loose from its ancient written crypt and reveal any living wisdom we seek to find within the ink and pages.

Yet it is not simply the text with which we struggle — though that in and of itself

would be plenty for me. Reading the text as a female requires energy, strength, patience, and also anger to wrestle with the layered patriarchal culture. To read of the violence, abuse, marginalization of women in the biblical stories is to be wounded and struck again and again. To finally hear a woman's voice in the text and then to realize it is in support of patriarchal values of women as possessions, women as worthwhile only when they bear sons, or women pitted against one another to be the link in a lineage chain, is disheartening to say the least. This struggle with the written scriptures would be enough without adding on 2000 years of wrestling with cultural interpretations that have seen, and sadly continue to see, women as less-than, women still as partial characters in the story of patriarchy.

Given this multi-dimensional mosaic of biblical text and interpretation, a mosaic with awe-filled and damning pieces in it, a mosaic that has both supported and challenged (though the latter to a lesser extent) racial, class, ablist, gender, etc., oppression, what questions do we bring to bear to the text today? The significance of the questions is always of critical importance, as the right answer to the wrong



MARKS OF MISSION

share the good news
teach new believers
help people in need
work to make things fairer
look after the planet

MARKS OF MISSION ADAPTED FROM MARKETING THE
ANGLICAN WAY BY RODERICK MACKIN

question is fairly useless. If we are going to approach the text with a desire for integrity, with naming clearly what the text says and does, identifying how it has been and can be used, what will be the questions that are important for feminism and the Bible today?

A common definition of feminism is the striving for social, political, and economic equity. In essence, feminisms (as there are many) offer an alternative to hierarchy and challenge the preservation of social and power hierarchies. This latter desire to preserve social and power hierarchies has resulted in biblical interpretations that have too often been more patriarchal than the text itself, even when the interpretation is from a cultural context hundreds of years removed from the 5th century BCE early manuscripts.

For example, many bibli-

cal scriptures offer narratives of transgressing traditional gender roles, yet the vast majority of our interpretation of these narratives overlooks these occurrences. When was the last time we read biblical texts with gender-bending lenses? Saw the masculinity of Deborah, recognized the femininity of Jesus as Sophia/Wisdom? In our current biblical interpretations, it is evident that fear of gender equality is a fear of a lack of hierarchy.

Heteronormativity, or the normatisation of heterosexuality, functions as a reinforcement of a hierarchical binary gender system. Not only is the male/female hierarchy still in place today, the binary system that recognizes only male and female remains firmly entrenched. How often do we read with an intercultural lens that breaks down hierarchical interpretations that subtly,

perhaps even through our use of metaphors, reinforces ablist, white privilege, class privilege, and other hierarchies? Can we name the educational methods biblical women such as Judith, the Syrophenician woman, midwives Shiphrah and Puah and others used to teach Jesus and their communities?

How much does our own sense of and subconscious desire for hierarchy obscure what is before us in the written Torah of scripture and in the living Torah of our communities? In our biblical reading and interpretations we are witness to a long-standing effort to protect hierarchy. When interpretations of biblical texts are used to limit, exclude, or cause harm, wisdom and beauty in the text are obscured. The wisdom/sophia to be found in biblical text and the wisdom/sophia in challenging biblical text is not hidden. It is there for those with hearts open. May ours be so.

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△ Janet Ross is a member of the Program Staff at the Centre for Christian Studies.