

**FEBRUARY 2016**

**RUPERT'S LAND NEWS**

SOCIETY  
MAKES  
ME SICK  
- Chris

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Publisher | Bishop Donald Phillips  
Editor | Allison Chubb  
Accounting | Bernice Funk  
Layout & design | [cityfolkcreative.ca](http://cityfolkcreative.ca)

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#### Editorial offices:

Anglican Lutheran Centre  
935 Nesbitt Bay  
Winnipeg Manitoba  
R3T 1W6

#### Subscription queries:

Administrative Assistant for the Diocese  
(204) 992-4200 | [general@rupertsland.ca](mailto:general@rupertsland.ca)

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**Cover:** "Society Makes Me Sad," 2011, a reductive relief by Carolyn Mount, the artist in residence at st. benedict's table.



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*In Memorium*

# A WELCOME AFTER THE STORM

*Allison Chubb*



In February of 2015, Rupert's Land News released [a special edition on mental health](#), echoing calls from across the Diocese for parishes to begin placing greater priority on mental health education. February is a difficult time for many in Manitoba and northwestern Ontario, as the long nights stretch on and the cold air wears on all of us.

This year, our February edition takes a look at suffering more generally: What does it mean to be a person of faith who suffers? Is there a Christian approach to suffering? You will find reflections on addiction, chronic illness, personal pain, and the suffering of

others.

For some, the experience of great suffering has given way to great joy, either in their own lives or in their ability to assist others. On page 15, Tim Frymire quotes Kahil Gibran: "The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain." We have a small window into this contrast through the ongoing arrival of new refugees among us: the pain of what has been, and the joy of what can be.

On January 14, the Diocese had the unprecedented opportunity of welcoming 11 refugee children, sponsored jointly with Hospitality House Refugee Ministry. Gail Schnabl, the refugee coordinator for Rupert's Land, gathered with a large group of reporters and members of the Winnipeg Somali community to help 17-year-old Fathi welcome his ten younger siblings and little

niece at the end of their exhausting journey.

Fathi, who is ethnically Somali but has grown up in Saudi Arabia, was orphaned when his father died a few years ago. After learning that his siblings and he were stripped of their legal status in Saudi Arabia and to be deported back to Somalia, the oldest made a daring journey across the world, walking to Winnipeg from the boarder crossing in Emerson.

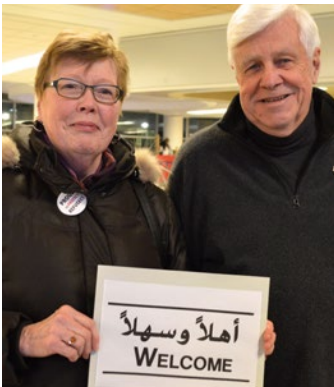
After being accepted as a refugee in October of 2014, Fathi spent the next year fighting to bring his siblings to Canada as well. The children do not speak Somali, and had they been sent back to Somalia, for which they have no citizenship papers, their future in the tumultuous state would have been precarious.

After several setbacks and disappointments, the group is excited to



The children wait for their luggage, exhausted





△ *From top-left: Fathi, right, and his 10-year-old brother, Mustafa; little Kinda is confused by her new winter clothing; Gail Schnabl waits at the airport with Tom Denton of Hospitality House; students from the General Wolfe School Human Rights Club welcome the newcomers*

finally be reunited with their brother, and hoping to be back in school at last. All 12 are living at St. John's Cathedral's Hospitality House, cared for by a foster mother from Manitoba Child and Family Services, as well as Hospitality House staff.


Ms. Schnabl is pleased with the support of Rupert's Land parishes, not only for this particular family, but also in response to the influx of Syrian refugees seeking asylum in Canada. Several congregations responded to [her open letter in August](#), either by starting the process of sponsoring a family themselves, or by partnering with others already doing so.

The Diocese has a

special ability to apply for sponsorships because of its designation as a sponsorship agreement holder with the Canadian government. When a parish contacts Ms. Schnabl for information about starting the process, she holds a meeting with the interested congregation to explain everything that will need to happen in order for a sponsorship to go ahead.

For some communities, the funding may be in place but the groundwork for hosting a family and assisting with their daily needs for the first year after their arrival is just not possible. This is why, for example, St. John's College has decided to sponsor

students instead of families. For others, it is precisely the opposite: they are having a difficult time financially, but are able to provide all the necessary love and support of community.

As a Church body, we are particularly well-positioned to work together to give as many refugees a fresh start as possible. If you or your congregation are interested in being part of this process, please be in touch with Ms. Schnabl about the various sponsorships still needing support, or to have her come meet with your community. She can be reached at [refugee@rupertsland.ca](mailto:refugee@rupertsland.ca). 

# THE REDEMPTION OF SUFFERING

*Donald Phillips*

Suffering is common to the human condition. While it is ultimately our own experience, we are also moved by vicarious suffering — when a person willingly suffers on behalf of those they love. Conversely, the agony of our suffering is increased by its diminishment or even denial by those around us. Very real for us is the experience of hundreds of thousands of indigenous Canadians, who were forcibly put into residential schools, many suffering emotional, mental, and physical abuse. The generational negative impact is increased exponentially by the attempt of many to dismiss or even deny the suffering that happened and continues in our present time.

In other situations, our actions inadvertently cause the suffering of others, like our love of fossil fuels and the resultant global warming which “preferentially” impacts poorer societies, increasing the suffering in their lives. Sometimes, learning about the consequences of our life choices challenges us to choose differently, taking greater care with the decisions we make in order to minimize the suffering of others.

But what about instances when we are faced with making choices which will inevitably result in suffering regardless of the decisions

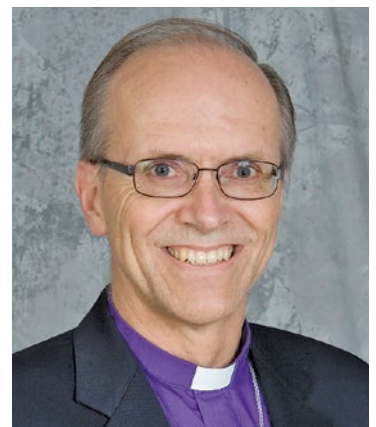
we make? It is one thing when our actions result in our own voluntary suffering, such as sacrificing a life opportunity in order to enable our spouse to pursue a long-sought-after goal. While the experience of suffering in these instances is not lessened, somehow it has worth — it is redeemed — by the knowledge and experience of the grace it gives another. The ultimate expression of such redemptive suffering is in the person of Jesus.

The situation is more difficult, though, when we are faced with decisions that will cause suffering for others regardless of the choice we make. Our Church, locally and globally, is struggling with the inclusion of LGBT persons and their relationships in our faith communities, our theology, and our understanding of Scripture. In our Anglican Church of Canada, we are challenged by the call to fully legitimize faithful, spousal same-sex relationships as part of God’s plan in our present day. At the same time, leaders and members of our Church in other parts of the world are scandalized by this possibility.

If we move to alter our doctrine of marriage, we will deeply wound some of our Anglican partners and ultimately destroy some of our current relationships in

the Body of Christ, persons and communities to which we are spiritually bound. Yet if we step back and continue with our traditional understandings, we are effectively denying the witness and experience of our LGBT brothers and sisters, deeply wounding and alienating our fellow Anglicans and their loved ones.

Is there a simple answer? No. But whatever action we take, and whatever the rationale we use to support those decisions, it must redeem the suffering. We must do all in our power to “share in those sufferings,” as St. Paul wished to share in the sufferings of Christ in order to more deeply know and understand him. The suffering must be, and appear to be, redemptive for all, especially for those who primarily bear its weight. [rln](#)



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

*St. Peter's, Winnipeg, is hosting a conference on physician-assisted dying titled "Suffering and Hope." The keynote speaker is Eric Beresford, the chairperson of the Primate's Theological Commission on Physician-Assisted Death. Below, three of the workshop presenters*

*tackle two of the many issues surrounding the primary discussion: what it means to be human and providing pastoral care to the person considering such a decision.*

*Registration closes for the Suffering and Hope conference February 12. Space is limited for the*

*February 26-27 conference, which will bring together a diverse panel of experts to discuss a Christian theological approach to one of the most important ethical issues today. [Click here for more information.](#)*

## PREPARING FOR A PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED DEATH *Glen Horst*

2016 will almost certainly be the year that Canadians suffering from severe medical problems can legally request a physician to assist them in ending their lives. If you are like the majority of Canadians, you will be relieved that this option is available. If you happen to suffer prolonged physical pain or mental anguish that seems to have no end, you may be asking yourself whether this new option is one that you want to use.

If you think that physician assistance in dying is something you may want, you have likely already suffered a lot or fear unbearable suffering in the future. You are most likely to consider physician-assisted dying when you feel that there is nothing that will relieve your suffering, or that your life has been so diminished by your illness or injury it no longer has value.

If your suffering has become unbearable, physician-assisted death may appear to be a simple

solution, offering you a way out when you feel you've had enough. A decision to request assistance from a physician in your dying has a ring of personal authority and decisive finality to it. It speaks of courage and of taking charge. You stare death down and face whatever fears you have about dying and death.

A request for assistance from a physician in your dying is not so much an endpoint as a new beginning – the beginning of a very personal journey as you prepare for death. The journey will include emotional,

spiritual, and relational challenges. How you meet these challenges may well determine whether your death is the fulfillment and completion of your life, an act of resignation, or an experience of desolation.

The challenges you may meet as you prepare for a physician-assisted death are both similar to and different from the challenges any dying person faces. They include finding companions for the journey, deciding on whether and when to use physician-assistance in your dying, and refocusing your hopes.

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## COMPANIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

Facing death is an awesome and, for many, a sacred experience. It stirs up strong feelings that can rise with surprising force. It unsettles relationships, roles, and routines. It raises questions about the meaning of life and the meaning of your life in particular. It casts doubts on cherished beliefs and sometimes cheats you of the comfort of familiar religious and spiritual practices.

To meet such challenging experiences, you need to reach deep into your spiritual and emotional resources. Sometimes, you may feel so overwhelmed that you panic and wonder what happened to your ability to cope. These are times when you need sensitive and supportive companions who listen respectfully and who reassure you that they will accompany you to the end. It may be a spouse, family member, friend, counsellor, spiritual leader, or a combination of these. Hopefully, they are people you trust and who respect and/or support your decision to use medical assistance in dying if necessary.

A decision to proceed with physician-assisted death will impact many others, particularly family members and close friends. If possible, include them in your decision by sharing the rawness of your suffering and by discussing practical aspects such as medical assistance and the timing and place of your death. You might also

want to talk about who you want to be with you and the rituals, blessings, and final goodbyes that you would find meaningful at that time. Such sharing may stir up difficult emotions, but sensitive and respectful sharing and listening will go a long way to ensuring you have the support and care of those who matter most to you.

## JUMPING THE GUN

Explore all the options available to you. Before seeking physician-assisted death, consider the following questions with your physician:

- Have all options for relieving and controlling pain or other troubling symptoms been tried?
- Might you benefit from treatment for depression?
- Are you struggling with social isolation, feelings of loneliness, or a lack of support?
- Have you explored all palliative care options?

Each of these questions is based on the conviction that life is to be cherished and that even a life burdened by suffering can be meaningful. They are worth considering before opting for a decision that ends your life.



## REFOCUSING HOPE

When you seek physician-assisted death, your hopes for cure and restored health have been dashed many times. Your remaining hopes are now focused on the specifics around your death: When? Where? Who will be there? How will it go? However, this is also a time to consider what your big or ultimate hopes are by reflecting on questions such as:

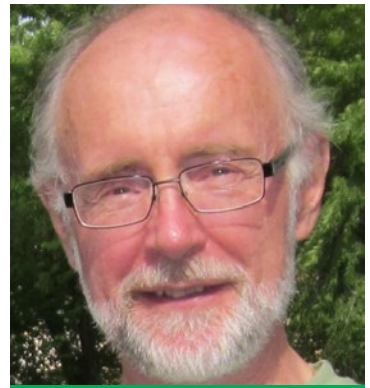
- What do you consider to be the meaning of your life and death and with whom do you want to share this?
- Who do you need to say the following to?
  - Thank you
  - Forgive me
  - I forgive you
  - I love you
  - Goodbye

- What hopes do you have for those you love most? How might you share these?
- What does it mean for you to trust in the goodness of life as you face the unknowns of death?

Conversations with a wise and trusted friend, counsellor, or spiritual leader may be helpful in your reflections.

The goal in preparing

for death is to find a hopeful and relevant perspective for affirming your life as meaningful and for accepting your death as a natural fulfillment of your life. Your death does not have to be an expression of despair or defeat; it can be a completion of its meaning and purpose. It can be a final affirmation that whether we live or whether we die, we belong to God (Romans 14:8).



△ Glen Horst is a spiritual care advisor with the Canadian Virtual Hospice

## BEING HUMAN: TELLING THE WHOLE STORY

*Aimee Patterson and James Read*

*People are healed and become more human as they enter into real relationships with others. They then discover that under all the feelings of stress, rejection and humiliation, that they are someone! Those in need and those who come to help are all being healed, and are all, together, becoming more human.*

- Jean Vanier,  
*Transforming our Hearts*

As Christians, we believe that all human beings are created in the image of God. God's image is indelible. It cannot be earned through achievement. And it cannot be taken away by ill health or poor quality of life.

To bear the image of a Trinitarian God – a God who is relational to the core – means we want others to see God's image in us. In

turn, we are compelled to see God's image in all others. Living in healthy communities is essential to life as a healthy human being.

Sadly, isolation and loneliness often partner with disability, illness, decline, and suffering. Imagining myself in such a situation, I dread being forgotten or remembered only as a burden. If I am cut off from mainstream community, I cannot be fully myself. Dignity therapy, a model of care designed by palliative physician Harvey Chochinov, is premised on the idea that mutual recognition is important to one's understanding of personal value: "The reflection that patients see of themselves in the eye of the care provider must ultimately affirm their sense of dignity. At least in part, it would appear, dignity resides in the eye of the

beholder" ("Dignity and the Eye of the Beholder").

Many characters in biblical narratives are subjected to infirmity and indifference. Many are healed by Jesus, and Jesus' healing power reaches beyond their minds and bodies. It works to restore relationships, pointing to the significance of community in this matter of being a whole human being.

Take the Gospel of Mark's account of Jesus healing a hemorrhaging woman (chapter five). From the writer's perspective, this woman is a sidetrack to Jesus' journey to heal a dying child. The woman, who is not named in the text, suffers for 12 years, bankrupting herself with medical consults. Her "unclean" condition isolates her from society. As Jesus passes by, crowds pressing in on him,






The woman hears Jesus call her out from the crowd. Someone who has been marginalized for over a decade is now the centre of attention. She approaches in fear and trembling, admitting to what she's done and why. She tells him "the whole truth" – her whole story, a story of illness, poverty, and seclusion.

Jesus listens. He takes time to welcome her into relationship, making a very public connection with her. The woman now

she touches his garment. The power that goes out from him heals her body. But that's not the end of the healing. And it's not the end of her story.

sees herself as a person of worth in the eyes of another. Someone else is affirming that she is a child of God, a human being! Jesus praises her courage and conviction,

telling the woman that her faith has healed her. This encounter makes her fully well, able to go in peace.

Every human being is a character in God's story. We are part of something bigger than ourselves. But to be a whole human being we also need to know that others recognize our value. This is especially true when disability or illness threatens. 



△ *Aimee Patterson is a Christian ethics consultant at the Salvation Army Ethics Centre and teaches at Booth University College*



△ *James Read is the executive director of the Salvation Army Ethics Centre and teaches at Booth University College*



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- 2 **ACCESSIBILITY**  
people have economic and physical access to food
- 3 **ACCEPTABILITY**  
food is culturally acceptable
- 4 **APPROPRIATE**  
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- 5 **AGENCY**  
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# THE GOD NUDGE **FACTOR**

*Diane Panting*



Has it ever happened to you where you were rushing to get somewhere and you ran into someone you knew who appeared in distress? Did you feel a little nudge to stop, listen, and love? Did you ignore this nudge and hurry away to fulfill yet another obligation and regret this later, knowing that your gift of time and prayer should have been offered? I recall this happening a while back when I should have taken the time to be present for my friend, but did not and so missed her story of devastating illness. She died three weeks later. If I had only listened to the nudge to stop, listen, pray, and love.

Another time, I listened to a gentleman whom I have known for years speak from his heart with deep caring and concern for his beloved, ailing mom. I felt a

nudge (there it was again) and heard the prompting of God's whisper to live my faith and respond. I was filled with compassion for this strong, gifted person who was living in a time of uncertainty and fear, a situation he could not control or change. I could understand this; I have been there.

As we parted company, I looked into his misty eyes and said, "I will pray for you; I will pray for your mom." We hugged and he expressed his thankfulness for the prayers and went on to deal with the matters at hand. My friend is an atheist. I continue to pray for him and his mom. I do not know about you, but my prayer list is lengthy and getting longer. The way I look at it, this is quite fine, as I extend God's love. I believe the moments we are presented with every

day provide so many opportunities to connect and respond in love and service to our sisters and brothers. There are many chances to sincerely say, "I will pray for you."

I have been nudged to write about what I call the GNF, that is, the God Nudge Factor, for a while now. This is that little voice of wisdom and encouragement that comes from paying attention with a transparent, listening heart, hearing the prompts from God. These are our hearts as transformed by a living and loving God. The GNF, when we choose to accept it, opens our eyes and ears to respond to the never-ending opportunities to live love. I think a key way to respond to the GNF is to simply acknowledge the person we are with and the concern they may have



(we do not need to know what the concern is) and to tell them, "I will pray for you" and then of course do just that. We often cannot change a person's situation or concern, but we can pray for God's blessing upon them. Knowing others care and that they are prayed for is healing in some way, in and of itself.


Responding to the GNF requires us to be vulnerable, present, patient, and attentive. It requires us to respond without judgment and to ask God to bless others and address their needs. Of course, responding to the GNF may be as I have noted here, reaching out and saying, "I will pray for you," but it includes many other wonderful and challenging service opportunities. This may include making casse-

roles, running errands for, or giving rides to, shut-ins; serving at a mission or food pantry; providing a listening heart and ear; or a gentle compassionate hug.

The sky is the limit of such opportunities. The message in the GNF is personal to you, and the key is to take the chance to respond to God's call in everyday situations in our families, with friends, in our churches and communities, in our workplaces, in the world, and with strangers.

Praying for others builds relationships and can also be contagious and encouraging. Being attentive to the GNF is good, very good. Take a chance and keep the words, "I will pray for you" close at hand. It would be very inspiring to hear your stories of the GNF at work in

your lives.

Over the years, nobody has ever said to me, "No please do not pray for me," not even my atheist friends. God's love revealed through the GNF and demonstrated human compassion is a wonderful thing. "They will know we are Christians by our love" (inspired by John 13:35). 



△ *Diane Panting is a deacon and a Human Resources Business Professional*

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# NEARER THE HEART OF OUR LONGING: **ADDICTION, SUFFERING, AND HOPE**

*Aaron Peterson*

Addiction can be a bewildering affliction. We've all heard the stories: tragic, heart-breaking accounts of betrayal and defeat, of ruin and despair too heavy to bear. It's not hard to imagine the final dissolution of a life nearing the end of that strange illness of mind, body, and spirit that is addiction, but neither is it easy to make sense of.

What could cause someone, healthy in other respects, to dedicate themselves to the pursuit of their own undoing with such reckless abandon? What lies at the root of this thing that draws men and women from every walk of life to exchange the good things of their lives for the bondage of a merciless and endless

thirst? What could it be, other than that mysterious, deadly, and undeniable brokenness that runs across every human life, and cuts through every human heart? What could it be, if not sin?

The addict cries out with St. Paul in lament: "I do not understand my own actions; I do not do what I want to do, but I do the very thing I hate!" If you have watched the progress of addiction in the life of an addict, you have seen him or her falling before the power of the sin that lives in them. And it is a terrible sight.

It is terrible because sin in the life of an addict, like sin anywhere, seeks first to twist and mar the image of God implanted in every human soul. And with ad-

diction in particular, it is the longings of our hearts that are bent and turned against us. The desires of our infant souls, the yearning to stretch and hold and embrace; these were planted within us in order to draw us ever upwards to life and to love. These longings are precious gifts. Yet they are the same desires — the same hungers and thirsts — that drive us, when yoked to our sin, to anguish, suffering, and despair.

Maybe we drink too much. Maybe we eat what we shouldn't. Maybe we lie to ourselves and to others, or we're in love with our own comfort, our own outrage, our own woundedness. Whatever the particular fault may be, the sin that lives in us will approach us there,



Photo: Marcus Gordianus



and will offer whispered promises of distraction, or security, or relief — if not forever, then at least for the moment. “And surely,” it will say, “even a moment is enough for now.”


We may relent and entertain the notion that just this one time, just this one indulgence won’t really hurt. More likely, though, there will be a vague uneasiness and a grasping in the dark after something that is always just out of reach. And the longer we endure in that futile pursuit, the deeper our souls will descend, desperate for goodness, for beauty, and truth, into a place of frustration and anguish. The way back will become increasingly obscured and even forgotten.

Being attached by habit, by need, and by desperation to the passing things of a passing world, our everlasting desires will ache and burn, but they will not lead to satisfaction, not so long as they are led by lies. Those in bondage to chemical addiction will show the marks of their illness more quickly than the rest of us, but wherever sin has taken root, there will be bondage. As long as we set our hopes on anything other than the one who has made us, we will suffer. We will hurt. We will be addicted.

But God, who has all power, is rich in mercy and perfect in love; and so there is hope for the addict and

for the sinner. There is hope for you, and for me. There is a way out, and Christ has gone before us to open the way. It may feel a lot like dying. It may feel a lot like coming back to life. It will begin to happen when we trust the yearning of our hearts to the one who has entrusted us with hearts to yearn. It will begin to happen when we trust that the desires of our hearts are not endless thirsts, but that they find their end in Christ alone, who longs to satisfy our every holy desire.

Hope, for the addict and for the sinner, does not come at the cost of our deepest desires. It comes when we are baptized. It comes when the broken pieces of our hearts are set back into place, to serve, and to


enslave us no longer. This is the longing that is set deep into our hearts, and it is God who rests at the heart of our longing. We may seek him there, and find him. We may drink deeply of him, and never thirst again. 



△ *Aaron Peterson works in health and wellness and is a parishioner at St. Mary Magdalene, Winnipeg*

## Roger Watson


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# PARISH NEWS **ROUND UP**

## ▷ St. John's College

Bible and Breakfast this month is hosting Janet Ross, the new professor of biblical studies at the Institute for Christian Studies. On February 20 at 9:00 a.m., Dr. Ross will be speaking about a biblical approach to the refugee crisis. There is a \$12 charge for breakfast; students are free. Please RSVP to [allison.chubb@umanitoba.ca](mailto:allison.chubb@umanitoba.ca).

## ▷ St. James', Winnipeg

Happy Mike's Coffee House is throwing a musical fundraiser in support of Winnipeg Harvest, February 6 at 8:00 p.m. Admission is \$5 and a non-perishable food item. [See the lineup of artists here.](#)

## ▷ Associates of St. John the Divine

The Rupert's Land Associates of SSJD are hosting a morning prayer breakfast as a guide into the beginning of Lent on February 13 at 9:00 a.m. The event will be directed by Karen Laldin at St. Andrew's on the Red. [For RSVP details, click here.](#)

## ▷ Ash Wednesday

Services are being held across the Diocese to mark the beginning of Lent on February 10. For a really interesting liturgical experience, check out a parish hosting a Burial of the Alleluia service the evening before (after pancake dinner, of course!)



## ▷ Mothering Sunday

The annual service of the blessing of the oils and renewal of baptismal vows will be held at St. John's Cathedral on March 6 at 7:00 p.m. A similar service will be held at St. Alban's Cathedral on Pentecost.

## ▷ The Anglican Communion

At the Primates' meeting in mid January, the global leaders took the unprecedented step of putting sanctions on the Episcopal Church of America. [Read the story here.](#)



## ▷ St. Peter's, Winnipeg

Biblical scholar and priest, Lissa Wray Beal, is hosting a Lenten study series on the lament Psalms, Tuesdays during Lent from 7:00-8:30 p.m. All are welcome to come explore this ancient form of prayer through Scripture. [Please see the poster for details.](#)

## ▷ St. Luke's, Winnipeg

St. Luke's continues to hold their cancer support group every first and third Wednesday of the month at 10:00 a.m. [For more information, please contact the Parish Administrator.](#)

## ▷ St. Mary's Road Parishes

The three parishes are hosting a pancake dinner together on February 9, 5:00-7:30 p.m., to raise money for the new family sponsorship program at the Aulneau Renewal Centre. [See the details here.](#)



## WHY DO WE **SUFFER?** *Tim Frymire*

Sobbing and gasping, Tom (not his real name) sat up in bed, his gaunt frame hunched forward, struggling to breathe. His scarecrow-thin arms clutched a pillow to his skeletal rib cage as he groaned with the effort of drawing air into his emaciated frame. His blue lips pursed as his short shallow breaths puffed out individual words: "Please... take... me... out... of... this... misery... chaplain... I...can't... take it... anymore".

What could I say to this worn-out 80-year-old with end stage Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)? I was a new chaplain and felt I had little to offer this desperate man drowning in his own secretions and clutching at the straw of death. This was more than 20 years ago, and the image of Tom's plea to end his life is still with me. It raises for me the question asked by every human being since we first shook our opposable thumbs at the heavens while standing at a grave site: Why do we suffer?

Asking this question is often more about the function and purpose of suffering. Traditional Christianity would say that suffering came into this world through the original fall, when Adam and Eve took bad advice from a snake and went off their divinely directed diet to eat bad fruit.



Photo: Ed Post

Others add that the purpose of suffering is to create a space for its opposite: joy. "The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain," writes Kahil Gibran (*The Prophet*, 1923). Elsewhere, he explains that, "Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars."

John Bradshaw complains that God seems to have set up a world where we only learn through suffering. He jokes that if he were God he would have made eating chocolate cake and ice cream the path to self-awareness and enlightenment. Yet we all know that suffering doesn't automatically lead to wisdom. As Anne Morrow Lindbergh points out, "I do not believe

that sheer suffering teaches. If suffering alone taught wisdom, all the world would be wise since everyone suffers. To suffering must be added mourning, understanding, patience, love, openness, and the willingness to remain vulnerable" (*Gift from the Sea*, 1955).

There are actually only two things that can lead us out of our usual ego-centered preoccupation with ourselves and our own comfort: great love and great suffering. Real love helps us take a wider view to put the needs of another before our own. Every sleep-deprived mother or father who gets up in the middle of the night to sooth a crying child knows what it is to "die to self." From taking the broken cookie to raising grandchildren when your child is unable due to

addictions or mental health issues, the sacrifice made by parents because of their capacity to love is unlimited.


Suffering too, though it initially narrows our focus to our own pain, can, if we let it, lead us to wider perspectives marked by compassion. The word “compassion” is formed from two Latin words: “cum” (with) and “passio” (to suffer). “To suffer with” is not something we usually want to do. We enter into compassion only through the two doors of suffering or great love. Nelson Mandela’s 27 years in a South African prison carved him deeper so that he could show the world a different response to his suffering that took the path to forgiveness, truth, and reconciliation.

Closer to home, the National Indigenous Bishop of the Anglican Church of Canada, Mark McDonald states, “Churches grow, especially in the context of great stress and human need, not by program but by shared suffering. This is the ministry of Christ, and it is the way of those who would follow this service and life” (The Anglican Journal, January 2016). This is not an abstract concept, as it is practically seen in the Anglican Church’s response to the issue of abuse in the residential schools. Primate Fred Hiltz, reflecting on the recent death of fellow bishop Jim Cruickshank last month, notes how

Jim presided over a time of financial and emotional suffering as the church of the Central Interior of BC tried to make reparation for pain and suffering. “Jim believed that out of its contrition the church would be renewed. It would be more humble” (The Anglican Journal). Drawing goodness from suffering has always been at the heart of the Christian story.

Another aspect of the suffering question is, Why I am suffering and not someone else? World religions have many explanations for suffering. Buddhists see attachment as the root cause of unhappiness, while Hindus believe Karma is behind much of life’s pain. Christians see in Christ’s death on the cross the ultimate template for our life and the problem of suffering. Biblical scholar Richard Rohr states that good religion teaches us what to do with our pain. Pain that is not transformed will always be transmitted. He writes that “Suffering of some sort seems to be the only thing strong enough to destabilize our arrogance and our ignorance” (Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality). Christ’s death on the cross offered a radical alternative to the perennial human habit of responding to hurt with revenge and retaliation. Jesus refuses to pass on his pain and suffering, instead transforming it by his death into a salvific act that all who follow him

were invited to copy.

I was not yet aware of all of this wisdom when, as the naive young chaplain I stood awkwardly beside Tom’s bed listening to him gasp and gurgle. I offered no words and only the morphine seemed to bring much relief. Yet I stayed with him, quietly holding his hand. At times I prayed with him, which he appreciated. Mostly I was present to his suffering, and found the strength not to run away. In the end, he was not alone with his suffering, a fact which we Christians believe changes everything. We believe in a God who is with us, Emmanuel. As followers of the Christ we are called to be with each other in our suffering. Faith tells us that will be enough. 



△ *Tim Frymire recently retired as the coordinator of spiritual care at Riverview Health Centre and a supervisor of Clinical Pastoral Education*