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RLN exists to explore issues at the intersections of faith and life. In doing so we solicit and publish a range of opinions, not all of which reflect the official positions of the Diocese. We acknowledge that we meet and work in Treaty 1, 2, and 3 Land, the traditional land of the Anishinaabe, Cree, and Dakota people and the homeland of the Metis Nation. We are grateful for their stewardship of this land and their hospitality which allows us to live, work, and serve God the Creator here.

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# Branching Out

Photo: [Jeremy Santana](#)

Perhaps one of the best metaphors we could use to describe Wisdom & Youth is a tree, growing its crown of foliage into the sunlight. As we continue to branch outward in our knowledge, we remain firmly bound to the tenacious roots of our childhood. Robert Pogue Harrison, in his enlightening book *Juvenescence*, meditates on the spirits of youth and age and expands on the tree metaphor: "This vision of existential growth sees aging not as falling away from, but as a sinking of roots ever deeper into the source... The tree's crown is free to sway in the wind because its roots hold firm in the ground in which childhood first came to life and opened its eyes to the world's wonder" (39). In this metaphor, wisdom is understood as a kind of countermovement; we unfold as mature beings only as we delve into the generative well-spring of our youth.

Jane Barter offers us an example of a rooted, swaying, and fruitful tree in her tribute to the Reverend Canon Donna Joy. Barter's reverence for Joy's life and work is palpable, as she impresses on us Joy's work as a scholar, priest, mother, "life-long learner and dedicated teacher." I have never met Donna Joy, and yet her energy bursts through Barter's words like sunlight, her child-like wonderment for life speaks wisdom even as it is relayed from a second-hand source.

In her poignant piece 'A Child of Creator: The Value of Knowing & Being,' Susie McPherson Derendy recalls a conversation she had with a professor at the Vancouver School of Theology; she writes, "he spoke of an elder who said Indigenous children are born with everything they need within them...they are awakened to who they are by stories, songs, prayers, dance, gatherings, and ceremonies throughout their lives." These traditions and practices root the children in a kind of spiritual innocence that they may take with them as they

branch out into their lives, and plant a ready space in their mind or heart to which they may continuously return and experience God.

Further into the issue, we encounter an alternative environment of childhood learning and joy as Aly Vidal offers us a glimpse into the Montessori School at St. Margaret's, a refuge for creativity and growth. Then, in via media, Michael Minor brings us back to the present moment of lockdown, where the tools of technology continue to challenge our perspectives on what it means to learn well, and learn from each other within these new entangled realities of education and work, domestic life and wonder.

Minor's positive opinion of online education, in combination with the other featured perspectives in this issue, offers us a love letter to learning. Indeed, most of us have found ourselves in an overwhelming state of learning this past year, with some of us perhaps on the brink of an existential crisis. We've had to learn new modes of communication and communal belonging, new platforms for performing and sharing our creations, new methods of giving and receiving an education, and new ideas about how we inhabit our spaces with their new entanglements of work and domestic life. The amount of learning undergone in these last ten months has been alienating for many; it has also, for a number of us, been a source of wonderment and curiosity. If you find yourself in the latter camp, this issue on Wisdom & Youth is speaking to you.



Sara Krahn is the editor of Rupert's Land News.

# Life-long Learners

GEOFFREY WOODCROFT



Each disciple of the Anglican Church of Canada in the Diocese Rupert's Land has a steep learning curve ahead. The effects of what will be more than a year in pandemic mode—loss, catch-up and redemption of our common life, and previous concerns regarding Church decline—will make ministry and mission development overwhelming and daunting. To fully embrace Church development is the task of each member of the Diocese of Rupert's Land; it has always been thus.

I celebrate those among us for whom our time in COVID 19 has been an incubation tent for ingenuity, creativity, and re-engaging collective imagination. Many of our people, in a variety of age groups and settings, have been successful in establishing new programs, embracing life-long learning, and flourishing in our present Church setting. Several people have commented publicly that they are more engaged now than they ever have been. Of course, it is not like this across the board; but, it is a sign that something is shifting, percolating, or finding new birth within the Church.

Flourishing in a time like today is a strong indication that God is at home and at work in the life of the Church, and nowhere is it more evident than in the Church's outpouring of ministry and mission to the world, and the growing of many of our communities. These two indicators are intimately connected to life-long learning and ministry development engaged by disciples faithfully committed to the proclamation of God's kingdom close at hand.

The incubation process will continue a while more, and we can only guess as to what will come after the present pandemic; yet clearly, in the minds and hearts of many Anglicans, we are going to need to be ready for more changes,

ready to adapt, and most of all, ready to listen again for God's leading. Learning to live Church outside the building has taught us much; leaving normal behind has energized and activated many disciples into fulfilling ministry, and many Church members have begun to question what we took for granted as normal. I observe that the incubation has provided opportunity for disciples to be excited by re-invention, rejuvenation, and renewal. I believe that God desires the Church to resemble Jesus Christ, so that it continues to live out his life in the world.

Each disciple needs to be continually sustained and resourced for the work of the Gospel, as that work is an outpouring of God's love in mission to the world. Therefore, it is crucial that we speak and pray with one another regularly using whatever means are available to us, building-up one another in the Body to speak well about God and Jesus with our neighbours, friends, and family. We can take advantage of the amazing array of quality educational opportunities presently available on-line at minimal cost, (if not free), especially those offered by our Diocesan and Indigenous Ministry Developers

By our Baptism we expect each other to be life-long learners, disciples of Jesus. We expect one another to be a vehicle by which the Church grows and flourishes. May we be excited, surprised, and renewed as we ready ourselves for whatever comes next.



Geoffrey Woodcroft,  
Bishop of Rupert's Land



## **“A Breath of Fresh Air”: Celebrating the Reverend Canon Donna Joy’s Thirty Years of Ministry**

JANE BARTER

Long-time member of St. Peter’s, Betty Currie, remembers the first time she met Donna Joy. It was in the fall of 1988 when she was first introduced as the student minister at her parish. Young and energetic, full of new ideas, she was, in Currie’s words, “a breath of fresh air.”

The Reverend Canon Donna Joy will be retiring this summer from her post as rector of St. Peter’s, Winnipeg, just over thirty years after her memorable debut. During her long and distinguished vocation, she served as curate at St. Paul’s, Fort Garry, incumbent at St. Alban’s (1993-2005) and St. Peter’s (2010-present), and led St. Bartholomew’s (twice) and St. George’s, Crescentwood through intentional interim processes.

She was the first female Archdeacon appointed in the Diocese of Rupert’s Land (2000-2006) in the area stretching from the North End of Winnipeg to Peguis First Nation.

She both served on and led several diocesan and national committees, supervised numerous ministry students (including myself), wrote policy for the Diocese and the national church, and was a long-time assessor for postulants at the diocesan and provincial level. She was coordinator of ministry placements for the Diocese for several years. While these accomplishments are indeed impressive, what is even more impressive is the character of a woman who enacted all these things in the early days of women in ministry in the Anglican Church of Canada. She is more than the sum total of her achievements—she is a devoted partner, mother, grandmother, a faithful friend, an inspiring priest, and a wise and discerning theologian.

Donna was baptized and raised an Anglican. She left the church for a while as a young adult when she (in her words) became



"immersed in the world of the 60s." The church, however, did not leave her. When pregnant with her youngest child, Stephanie, she returned to church. Around the same time, she also returned to school and enrolled in religion courses at the University of Manitoba. With the encouragement of members of her home parish (St. Chad's), she discerned her calling into the priesthood. In Donna's own words:

**When I first began taking courses in theology, Stephanie was a year and a half; Donovan was about three and a half, Colin was just over six. ... portions of papers were written in skating rinks, dance studios, etc. At end of term when final papers were due and exams looming, the only way to balance course work as well as the children's needs was to pull the inevitable all-nighters. Oh, to have that energy now!**

Donna's experience juggling motherhood, university, and priesthood clearly has made a lasting impression, as children's faith development and continuing education have played a central role throughout her ministry. She is a long-time advocate of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, and the theologies of the wonder of childhood that undergird it. Similarly, Donna remains a life-long learner and dedicated teacher. Her colleague, The Reverend Canon Norman Collier, describes her love of theology as a wonderful resource for those fortunate enough to work with her in ministry, "You can talk about books you've read, trends in society and in church, worship and ministry, with Donna. She is always engaged in deep thinking about theology, and particularly, how it affects the parish. She is always in tune with where the church is going and where it needs to be in the future, and I have learned a lot from her."

Donna attributes much of her theological insight to teachers who inspired her along the way, such as the Very Reverend Ralph Baxter, Dr.



Dawne McCance, and Rabbi Neal Rose. McCance in particular played a central role in Donna's formation as she displayed the authority and wisdom of a strong female scholar and mentor. Such authority and wisdom was passed on to Donna, who, in turn, passes it on to other women with great generosity and grace. Says her daughter, Stephanie: "My mother paved the way for me to survive and thrive in a male-dominated world. Her values are steadfast and she has a strong theological base to them. She taught me never to shy away from being who you are and always to follow your heart's calling."

Donna is also not the sort of priest to shy away from prodding the church to be what it is called to be. According to Bishop Don Phillips, Donna has "charted her own path," one which always took a "wider view of the church," and one which included not only its contemporary struggles, but also its ancient faith and its potential future. When reflecting on the church Donna is, characteristically, prophetic about the need always to consider the church's future, even when tradition seems to bind it in specific ways. Donna calls us to be open to the Spirit's enlivening grace:

**While I understand that we (the church) have an obligation to minister to and with an older generation (of which I include myself), we also have a huge obligation to young adults who are seeking – searching – for something beyond an individualistic and consumer-driven culture in which we live. If we are open to discovering (within a Christological framework) what feeds the spiritual needs of that demographic, we also need to invite them into having some authority in terms of shaping the church of the future. They are not interested in maintaining the status quo. I suspect that they are interested in helping to build a church of the future, and if we are open to this, we need also to be open to the possibility (probability) that this church of the future may look (be) very different than the church we have known.**

Donna admits that this is a hard sell, but she believes that sound theology, together with dynamic leadership by those “who help keep the church accountable for what they are saying about God,” will move us into a future far greater than what we have asked for or imagined.

Betty Currie says of Donna after her ten years of ministry at St. Peter’s that she has “the mind of an academic and the heart of a pastor. She is curious—she researches everything, and needs to be convinced of the theological rightness of a position.” But most of all, as Currie puts it, “she encourages others to grow.” I know something of this, as Donna was my supervisor in my field placement at St. Bartholomew over a decade ago. So many of us in the Diocese have grown as a result of Donna Joy’s wisdom and encouragement. The church has been blessed by her care and rigour and by the willingness to bend but also to remain firm in the faith. She remains, and long may she remain, “a breath of fresh air.”

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Jane Barter is a priest in the Diocese of Rupert’s Land, who is currently serving St. Peter, Dynevor (Selkirk), St. Philip (Hodgson), and St. Matthew (Peguis). She is also Professor of Religion and Culture at The University of Winnipeg.





## A Child of Creator: The Value of Knowing & Being

SUSIE MCPHERSON DERENDY

Photo: [Aleyna Rentz](#)

It is timely that I am writing about children and knowing, while also finishing up the final preparations for the upcoming Children's Programming Learning Circle at the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre.

Lately, I've been thinking about Indigenous children and young people. My life and work are invested in my own healing, but also the healing of children and young people. In 2012, I left child welfare where I was employed for several years as a foster care worker. The homes I was involved with had children who had been in their homes from birth or a very young age, and many were committed to the children and were doing the best they could in the given situation. I was sad when I left; I thought of the spirit of the children. Though there is now more connection to ceremony, family and community, and culture, this is what was on my heart when I left.

During a course I took at the Vancouver School of Theology, the professor said he visits elders wherever he goes, and he spoke of an elder who said Indigenous children are born with everything they need within them and that they are awakened to who they are by stories, songs, prayers, dance, gatherings, and ceremonies throughout their lives; all of these traditions and practices, among others, connect them to the sacred and holy.

This was and is deeply encouraging. For my own personal reconciliation process it was and is important to understand the effects of colonization, what happened and what can and needs to be done. When I wake in the morning and sit for a few minutes on the bed, I look out the window and see the site of what used to be the Indian Residential School off in the distance on the North Hill in Brandon, Manitoba where I



live. I walk along the river most days when I am home, and I say prayers and sing songs, and commit once again to doing what I can to be a part of living out the two apologies made by the United Church of Canada—the banning of spiritual practices and residential schools.

From my own story, I am assured that my identity and personhood are a gift given to me as a Cree woman. I was raised, with my sisters, along the banks of the Churchill River by my parents, James John and Celia. My family and relatives were relocated in January 1957 from York Factory to Churchill. They attended the Anglican Church there, but my dad's brother was involved in a Cree fellowship at the Alliance Church and so we went there. My dad's prayers always ended with "God is love, amen" and that teaching has been most helpful over time. The Cree Fellowship is a positive memory, and I still long for those times. We often sang songs in Cree when I was a student at the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre with students from northern communities. I learned much from them and believe that we all have something to teach others, and we all have something to learn...and so it is with children.

In the mid 1990s I went through a process of prayer and counseling and was asked to share the painful and traumatic experiences I had from as far back as I could remember. And I shared each one, about what happened and how I felt way back and at the time. In the book we read prior to the individual session, the first chapter begins with the question, "Who are you?" The question is asked repeatedly with the answers ranging from being a mother or father, what people do for work, and others. The question focussed on the belief of many that they are sinners, and believe that is who they are; but in this teaching, I learned that I am a Child of God *and* one that falls short or overdoes it (sins); but sin is something that we do or don't do, it is not who we are. This was a revelation for me as I saw myself then, in a deeply conditioned way, as a failure, as not enough, as one who has made mistakes—both my own and those of my parents, my people,

and especially in light of how much of society has seen Indigenous people in a negative way; we have all heard them.

For a long time, this has deeply affected the image I've had of myself. It is not a wonder then that I, along with many others, am challenged to love myself.

**Should children in foster care see themselves as unloved by parents and families? No, this is only what happened to them—it is not who they are. They, and we, are “no less than the trees and stars.” My prayer has been, “help me to see myself as you see me, and worthy of what it takes to better my own life and that of others.”**

As I sought for my own reconciliation as Cree and a follower of Jesus, I came across a quote by Thomas Aquinas who said, "Creation was the first bible (divine revelation) and the word—the bible, also known as divine revelation, came later." This reminds me that each one of us is a part of creation, and that the sacred divine is within me too. I've also come to understand that Creation is what my ancestors lived by for guidance and wisdom. I imagine the difference this can make with all of Creator God's children and how we see ourselves, and others.



Susie McPherson Derendy is the Keeper of the Learning Circle at Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre.

# The Walls Are Still Breathing

ALY VIDAL



*A Montessori School run out of St. Margaret's Anglican Church has been authorized by the Diocese to run out of the basement at St. Margaret's, and operates according to provincial guidelines regarding daycare operation during COVID-19.*

We've kept our lights on at the church throughout this pandemic so that anyone who wanders by or makes their way down Westminster Avenue on their way home from work might see a sign of a living church. Maybe the soft yellow light that shines out of those old windows into the dark may speak to them of the light of Christ in the world. Or maybe the beauty of the warm glow may simply stop them in their tracks, calling their attention, their presence in the moment. We can all drive by and experience this beauty (and if you haven't, I encourage you to do so!). But there is something else breathing life into our church walls these days. And we do not all get the opportunity to experience or even observe this life and beauty in our church. That is, St. Margaret's Montessori School.

The school opened on January 6 of this year (actually, the exact day that Maria Montessori opened the doors to her first school in Rome 113 years ago). When Liz Currie first brought her proposal to the vestry of St. Margaret's to open a school in the church, we discussed all the fine details. We weighed the costs, the benefits and the inconveniences to our daily operations as a church. Little did we know that this school would be one of the *only* operations in the church that we would be permitted to run due to the restrictions that accompany this pandemic. The school is operating five days a week from the early morning hours until the sun is setting. Every weekday, four staff (three of whom are parishioners) commit to the duty of their vocations and prepare, plan, and care for the preschool children in their charge. Every

weekday, the children's little feet pitter patter down our wooden steps to the basement. They hang their coats in our coatroom. They enter our recently renovated space with light-filled classrooms, now carefully prepared with beautiful Montessori materials. They begin their self-guided work in maths, language, sensorial, or practical life skills. Every weekday, there is life in this building. There is excitement in a new discovery. There is laughter in a joyful moment. Every day, the love of Christ surrounds these children. And in return, these children keep breathing life into the church.

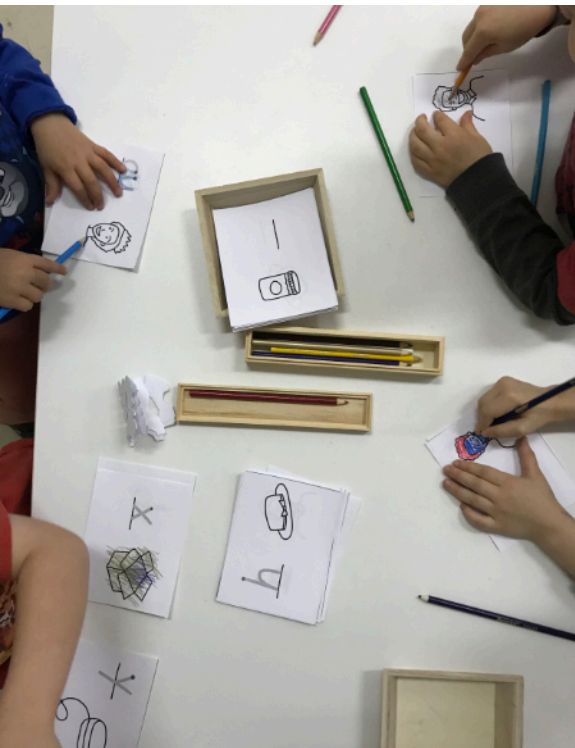
I keep recalling a description that the school board came up with when we first sat down to hash out our identity, purpose, and vision. It is comically simple, but it is a constant reminder to me of who we are and where we find our purpose. *We are a school inside a church.* That's it! We hoped that this statement would communicate that although we primarily aim to provide a Montessori education, we are also intimately connected to the building that we are in, and inherently, to what that building stands for.

Maria Montessori did not create her pedagogy for the purpose of religious education, but after many years, she paralleled her methods to the "work the child needed to do to be a part of life in the church." She wrote of the child's experience in the Atrium (a term for the child's environment in the church), "It will rather be a life complete in itself, something that will affect the children at all points. It will be like a surrounding and pervading atmosphere in which they will live and move and have their being." (*The Child in the Church*, 1965).

Aly Vidal, long time member of St. Margaret's, is a mother of three children, who after working as the parish administrator over the past few years has now returned to teaching high school math. Aly serves on many committees at St. Margaret's, but has a great fondness for the work she does on the Montessori School board.



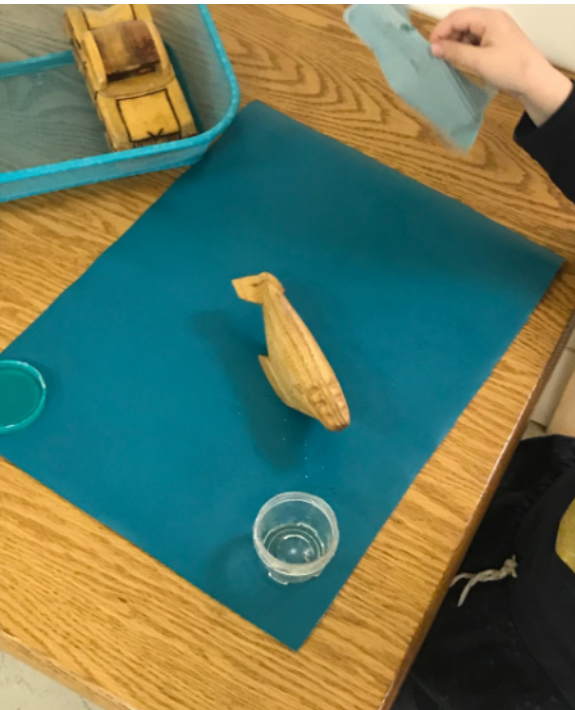
So, here's a peek inside the school inside the church's walls; the walls that are still breathing.



Language Arts



Mathematics



Sensorial



Practical Life

Photos: Liz Currie

# Parish News Roundup

## Bishop's Letter to Annual General Meeting Delegations

Greetings in the Name of the One who loves and calls us.

For all who embark upon the journey and work of an Annual General Meeting this year, you have done so with generosity, adaptability, and resilience. On behalf of your neighbouring parishes and deaneries, and the national Church, I pour out thanksgiving to God for you.

We experience our call to mission and ministry anew each day, and perhaps the extraordinary events of the past year have made us yearn to hear God's voice and direction more than we have yearned in the past. The discipline of engaging an AGM is not simply to fulfill civil and canon law, which they do, it is also a significant moment to be the Body of Christ huddled in an upper room listening to the resurrected master prepare us for a life of mission and ministry.

Read the [full letter here](#).

## From the Narthex: New Podcast from St. Thomas Weston

Have you ever questioned your faith or had pressing questions about the church? Well, this might be the podcast for you! "From The Narthex" offers a space to think through your faith, your forgotten faith, or faith you'd like to try out again, and learn a few things you might wonder about the Anglican Church.

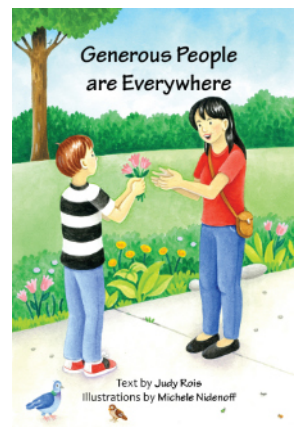
Follow [@fromthenarthex](#) on Twitter, and check out [Spotify for new episodes](#) every Wednesday.



## Anglican Foundation Seeks Children and Youth for Podcast on Generosity

"Nurturing generous-hearted living may be one of the greatest things we can do for young people," says Judy Rois, Executive Director, Anglican Foundation of Canada. After launching AFC's Generosity podcast in 2020, Canon Rois is deepening this theme in 2021, with her latest children's book, [Generous People are Everywhere](#).

"This book asks simple but pointed questions such as: What is generosity? What does generosity look like? Are generous people happier?" says Rois. "These questions are really meant to be a starting point for a broader discussion.



We want young people to think about generosity as a way of life: how the spirit of giving flows in them and through them to the wider world."

To get the conversation started, Rois is inviting children, families, and youth ministry leaders to consider the book as a small group or home-based study.

Rois says the illustrations and text, geared to ages 8–14, make this an excellent choice for Lent.

In addition to encouraging children and youth to read the book, AFC wants to include their voices in recorded interviews to be featured in [Foundation Forward](#), a podcast inviting Canadians to talk about generosity. AFC is offering a free copy of the book to the first 20 young people who are willing to make their voices heard. Recorded submissions are required by April 12, 2021.

[Read more.](#)



## Anglican Foundation of Canada Receives Overwhelming Response to 2020 Appeal

The spirit of generosity remains high among Canadian Anglicans as the [Anglican Foundation of Canada thanks donors](#) from coast to coast to coast for an overwhelming response to its annual fundraising effort, expected to total more than \$165,000, representing a 9% increase over last year.

"From the beginning of the pandemic we knew we must continue to do everything in our power to financially support parishes and faith communities across the country," says Judy Rois, Executive Director, Anglican Foundation of Canada. "We acknowledged the difficulties people might be facing and asked those of our donors who were able to give to continue to do so. We asked those who were in a position to give a little bit more to give as they felt called."

The result was an unprecedented outpouring of support. "I am overwhelmed by how our donor community came together," says Rois, "and in spite of the challenges we will continue to face in 2021, it gives me courage and hope that with the strength of our supporters, AFC will be able to fund ministry that matters throughout this global health crisis and beyond."

While AFC's 2020 grant disbursements were lower than in previous years, due to a conservative approach taken during a volatile and uncertain financial environment, Rois says AFC's ability to fund for impact notwithstanding the economic disruption is owing to "more than six decades of generosity: past and present."

"In 2020, more than any other year, I have seen the power of legacy in action," says Rois, "In addition to those who gave generously this year, people who are no longer with us were still with us in spirit, helping AFC to carry out its mission, investing over \$550,000 across the Canadian church through grants to more than 130 applicants."

Canon Rois, who served in parish ministry before being appointed as Executive Director of AFC in 2010, has a message of hope for

churches who find themselves struggling financially in the wake of COVID-19. "Many churches will be tempted to turn to survival mode in the months ahead," she says. "Some may even put community-focused ministry and mission on hold." Rois says AFC wants to continue to do its part to prevent this from happening.



**The Common Garden, Flemington Park, Toronto, ON. This "garden of remembrance" was one of the highlights of the projects funded during the May and November granting cycles.**

"Every gift we have received this year has reminded me of the richness of God's economy," says Rois, "and every gift, of every size, has reminded me that with a spirit of generosity and continued creativity, Canadian Anglicans, working through this Foundation, can still mobilize to meet many of the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of people in our communities."

## Upcoming Courses and Workshops

### Pastoral Care with the Bereaved

*Saturday, February 13, 9:00 a.m. to noon*

A workshop for lay disciples involved in pastoral visiting, this workshop will give participants an opportunity to explore how to care for those who have lost a loved one. Prayer resources, healthy grieving, and sitting with hard emotions will be discussed.

### Pastoral Care with the Dying (and their loved ones)

*Saturday, March 13, 9:00 a.m. to noon*

In this workshop for lay disciples involved in pastoral visiting, participants will discuss what the Church teaches about death and dying, prayer resources, and bringing the Christian hope to those who are grieving.

Both workshops will be online and will be led by Helen Holbrook and Colleen Matthews. Helen is a priest and experienced chaplain, currently serving at St. John’s College but with years of experience in long term care settings. Colleen is an ordinand for the diaconate who ministers at St. Matthew’s Maryland Community Ministry and Jocelyn House Hospice in Winnipeg.

To register, please:

- 1) Email [mindev@rupertsland.ca](mailto:mindev@rupertsland.ca) to indicate which workshop(s) you would like to attend, AND
- 2) Send the \$10 registration fee for each workshop. This can be sent via e-transfer to [finance@rupertsland.ca](mailto:finance@rupertsland.ca), or cheques may be mailed to Judy McIvor at the Diocese of Rupert’s Land, 935 Nesbitt Bay, Winnipeg MB R3T 1W6.

### Anglican Origins: Uncover the Roots of Our Tradition

*Tuesday evenings; February 23 to March 23, 2021; 7:00 - 8:30 p.m. (Montreal time).*

**Instructor: The Rev. Dr. Hilary Bogert-Winkler** is Director of Pastoral Studies at Montreal Diocesan Theological College.

What is Anglicanism and where does it come from? Many people might answer this question by pointing to the English Reformation, Henry VIII, and the Church of England. But Anglicanism’s roots are deeper and broader than this history suggests. This latest offering in Dio’s popular series of non-credit courses explores the origins and development of the Anglican tradition, beginning with the arrival of Christianity in Britain and culminating in a worldwide Anglican Communion.

Course and registration details [available here](#).

## Call for Submissions: Mitchell Prize for Faith and Poetry

Image Journal is now accepting submissions for its biennially-awarded Mitchell Prize. The prize seeks to recognize Canadian poets (writers living in Canada or Canadians living abroad) whose work wrestles with the beauty and complexity of religious faith.

[Read more.](#)

## Donate to Rupert’s Land News

If you would like to support the work of Rupert’s Land News, please consider making a donation (be sure to indicate RLN). Donations of \$20 or more will receive a tax-deductible receipt. We appreciate your continued support and encouragement of this ministry.

### Your donations would go towards:

- putting together the Monthly magazine
- putting together the Weekly newsletter
- maintaining the website and social media
- attending and covering diocesan events
- and covering the costs of layout and design by Cityfolk Creative

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# Lockdown Learning: A Paradigm Shift?

MICHAEL MINOR

Photo: [Chris Montgomery](#)

Like most churches, most post-secondary institutions (like the university I teach at) suddenly shifted to online formats when we entered the pandemic. Nearly a year later, it seems that online teaching and preaching will not be changing soon. We are all coming to grips with the real possibility that the way we meet to communicate, to learn, or to worship, may never return to “normal.”

Like academia, the Church seems to be particularly anxious about changes to form that disrupt tradition. After all, the Church has frequently split over who should read and interpret sacred texts, as well as what form those texts should take. Form—from oral stories, to carving on stone, to scrolls of papyrus, to books of vellum and paper, to digital media—has also figured prominently in the controversies of both religious and academic institutions.

So, we should take it for granted that there is considerable anxiety about this rapid shift in form and what it will mean for higher education. Nevertheless, much of this worry seems misplaced. At Manitoba’s largest university (U of Manitoba), enrollment is up and more students than ever are able to balance work and school from home. For myself, working from home has meant more efficiency and, ironically, more

opportunity to engage with students. I’m a Millennial who has spent my entire adult life in universities as both a student and instructor. Most of my long student life was lived out of a laptop bag, so working a foot away from where I sleep feels like slipping on a well-worn pair of Blundstones.

I realize that I sound like a typical entitled Millennial, romanticizing the gig economy as it permits me to work in trendy workspaces instead of boring offices. I also realize that this transition has been anything but comfortable for many who teach. I am grateful for the self-sacrificing educators who have the added demands of maintaining physical distance in their classrooms. And of course, instantly moving embodied courses to online learning has been a Herculean task, especially for those who have justifiably resisted “blended learning,” which combines online and in-person teaching formats.

**But for myself, as with most colleagues I’ve talked to who were born after 1980, teaching from home seems like the long awaited fulfillment of the prophesied digital revolution. Not only does it seem inevitable, but it seems to validate our experiences of living so much of our lives online.**

Many students also seemed unphased by the transition. I had one student last year who had been late to every class, until we moved online. The shift in form inspired a complete turnaround; she was the first to login. When we finished class in record time (thanks to the pre-recorded lecture), the response was something along the lines of: “wait, we’re done? And I’ve been dragging myself out of bed on a Saturday for a 9 a.m. class all year?”

While many young people are as comfortable learning online as they are in-person, some have grown to prefer it. These, often introverted, people are able to overcome social anxiety when they have control over who sees them and how they choose to participate. Basically, students can text instead of speaking. They can easily share videos and images with their class-mates. They can respond to questions and topics of conversation even when the “synchronous” class-time has ended. From my perspective, this has been a major move toward equity for many who had previously been labelled shy or anyone who might face bias—unconscious or otherwise—based on appearance.

In other good news, there are a number of benefits to teaching writing online. It’s easier to demonstrate library research or highlight specific elements of a text when sharing a screen instead of a classroom. Most helpfully, online forums and chat features allow us to move our oral discussions about how to become better writers into written discussions. Without really noticing, the students I teach are doing more writing than ever, and they are benefitting from this additional practice.

Still, moving online has been as challenging for some as it has been beneficial to others. Procrastination is easier than ever when we lose the anchoring effect of more rigid class schedules. Extroverts, who have enjoyed privileged positions in our society for some time, have to quickly adapt to a format that predominantly privileges introverts. Most importantly, there are few easy remedies when technical glitches interrupt classes. And while it is true that this shift can allow for more

interpersonal equity, equity is under attack when some students have intermittent internet connections or are trying to participate on their phones instead of a computer.

Change is not easy and it is important to approach it with healthy skepticism. Plato famously refused to write because of concerns about writing’s ill effects on memory. Countless academics and religious leaders worried about their positions once the printing press brought literacy to the masses. In 1988, writer Wendell Berry justified his refusal to buy a computer because it would jeopardize his writing process.

**It is good to consider the complex implications that this sudden digital shift is having on how we learn. But we’ve safely traveled this uncertain path many times before.**

What is perhaps more worrying for young people in post-secondary programs or trying to find a place in the working world, is that school and many forms of work are no longer places. These have become more seamlessly integrated into our daily lives, and as feminists point out, domestic labour is shamefully undervalued. As we come to terms with the benefits and challenges to our daily lives that online work and school have produced, a new, greater challenge comes into focus. If education and work are becoming ever more efficient and entangled with our daily lives, will society learn to value these more domestic, entangled forms of labour? How will the many institutions that have been so securely tied to being a place adapt when the urgency of the pandemic subsides?



Michael Minor teaches writing skills as part of the Inner City Social Work Program. His first book of poetry, *Learning to Love a River*, is published by Signature Editions. He, his partner Steph, and their two children are grateful to live in Treaty 1 territory.