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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.

RLN welcomes story ideas, news items, and other input. If you want to be involved in this media ministry, please [email the editor](#).

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Searching for a Thread

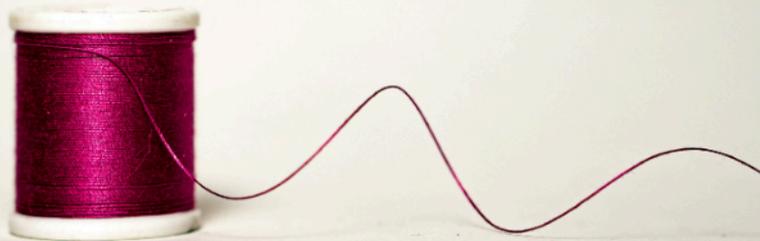


Photo: [Lee Myungseong](#)

It's a bit of a mystery why some people are drawn to the church and others are not. There's no obvious formula, no ideal set of circumstances or perfect upbringing that ensures an attraction to Christianity and the church. Indeed, some people spend their entire childhood immersed in the life of a church, only to find as adults they want nothing to do with their religious upbringing. Conversely, there are those who, like the writer and poet Mary Karr, were raised without any understanding of God and nonetheless seek a religious life. There are also those who fall somewhere in between these polarities, who have moved around within different churches and traditions while quietly remaining committed to a life of faith.

What is it that draws certain people towards the church?

In thinking about this question, I'm struck by an essay written by Mary Karr in 2015 for *Poetry Magazine* about her conversion to Catholicism. In "Facing Altars: Poetry and Prayer" she writes about how she was drawn to prayer through poetry. "Poetry and prayer alike offer such instantaneous connection—one person groping from a dark place to meet another in an instant that strikes fire." This "fire" is, ultimately, what led to Karr's faith conversion. Her seeking was marked by an aesthetic pursuit, as a poet, but also by a desire to find a home for her acute sense of lostness in her own life. Where she might encounter others who were lost and searching as well.

"Having devoted the first half of my life to the dark, I feel obliged to locate any pinpoint of light now...When I hit my knees again during Lent, I [feel] God's sturdy presence, and I [know] right off it [isn't] God who'd checked out in the first place."

Karr's words name a tension that those of us who've chosen a life of faith know well. It's a tension that comes with committing oneself to the search for meaning in the face of uncertainty. The search for Christ in the other. The search for God.

Living into this tension embodied in the life of the church, and *staying* with this tension, is not, perhaps, something that everyone is called to do. But this issue is devoted to those people who have found their lives here—in the staying.

In our first feature, Theo Robinson gives a testimony of his journey towards becoming one of Canada's first transgender priests in the Anglican Church. Then, Lynda Wolf writes about how her first encounters with beauty growing up on the Saskatchewan prairies shaped her awareness of God. As Lynda moved through various churches throughout her life and wrestled with her understanding of Jesus, she eventually found a home in the Anglican Church, attending the parish of St. Peter's in Winnipeg. On page nine, Suzanne Rumsey of PWRDF offers an update on the PWRDF Refugee Network, and the 15 Refugee Coordinators that "move heaven and earth to bring to Canada those who have lost their heaven on earth."

Finally, in *via media*, Kirsten Pinto Gfroerer challenges us to consider the thread in our lives and where it might be leading us. Sometimes we are called to leave, and sometimes we must stay. The thread is a commitment to our own God-given life.



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

Intentional Wilderness Wandering

GEOFFREY WOODCROFT

This time of transition has been difficult for all of us in a variety of ways. We have found ourselves challenged emotionally, spiritually, physically, psychologically, economically, and socially. In terms of our corporate self in the Body of Christ (outside of our individual trials and joys), it has been equally difficult.

In her book *How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're Going*, Susan Beaumont describes transition as "liminal time." (You may have heard me use that phrase in the last two years.) Beaumont's thesis suggests that leadership through liminal time is specialized and will no longer be required once a full transition has been completed. This concept of liminality adds some meat to our understanding of transition. It gives us permission to experiment and understand our roots more fully, and perhaps be more attentive to the ideas, needs, and sensibilities of others going through similar transitions.

Our part of the Church has been moving towards liminal time for several years. Living through the pandemic, however, has allowed us to see this trajectory more clearly. Neil Elliot, a parish priest, and Anglican Church of Canada Statistician, put it to the House of Bishops in

2020 that if the Anglican Church continues its downward trend in membership, we shall be no more by 2040. Elliot confirmed what most of us in the Church have come to recognize as our reality. However, in the two decades leading up to 2020, the Church had tried strategic planning, missional Church development, strength/weakness analysis, and gift awareness searches, all with varying degrees of success. Buy-in for the above list has never been resounding among our disciples; but somehow, we seem to always seem to stay alive for another budget year. Indeed, we have never had that *all-in, let's venture-out of the downward spiral of membership* moment. Yet God continues to call us as the Body of Christ towards the wilderness of true exploration.

Do you recall, in the Exodus story, the difficulties faced by our wilderness wanderers? Remember how they voiced that they should never have left the comfort of slavery in Egypt, making bricks without the necessary materials? It is this story that reminds me of how the Church is often tentative, and perhaps frightened of a forward direction, a plan for success. We often doubt our own desire to reach a new promised land. When the Red Sea filled-in behind the Israelites, they were left with no choice but to wander. Perhaps, we need to recognize that our own Red Sea is filling in and we, too, have permission to wander.

Personally speaking, I have fears and inhibitions as I consider the reality, implications, and uncertainty of transition. But amid this uncertainty I recall the Gospel of Christ, written, proclaimed, and lived by the Church for 2000 years. The promise of "where two or three are gathered, I am in your midst" has led disciples into life-long pilgrimages, proclaiming that "the sovereignty of God is at hand, within, for you!"

Within this sovereignty, you and I are not alone.



Geoffrey Woodcroft,
Bishop of Rupert's Land

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Should I Stay or Should I Go?

THEO ROBINSON

Photo: Sara Krahn

Over the last 13 years I've often been asked, "Why the Anglican church?" It's a question that has arisen as I've made a return to church life, discerned a path to ordination, and, ultimately, been ordained into the priesthood. As I venture through various points in my life, I routinely encounter this question during discussions about being transgender and Christian, with an addendum of "why do you stay?" Every time I'm asked, I admit honestly that I stumbled into the Anglican church completely by accident. But why do I stay? Well, that's an interesting question.

I was baptized and brought up in the Roman Catholic church, at St Bernadette's Parish in Windsor Park. I don't remember when or why I started going, but I went each week knowing that it meant lunch at a restaurant with my grandma after the service (which, for a young kid in the '80s, was pretty darn exciting).

Most of the details are hazy as my memory of these early experiences is not great. I do, however, recall the heaviness of the room, the powerful feelings behind the words (even though I didn't understand what it was all

about), and the hard wooden pews. I also remember shaking hands with the people around me and not knowing why. Everyone just seemed so happy to see each other.

I remember attending catechism classes, both in school and at someone's home, so I am sure that I had all the appropriate church lessons. As I got older, however, my faith and my increasing interest in scientific knowledge began to clash. Socializing became more important than praying, and, for many reasons beyond the scope of this essay, I got lost in life through my teenage years. I succumbed to the peer pressure that going to church was not a cool thing to do.

Despite the confusion of these years, my heart felt pulled towards a belief in Jesus Christ and other aspects of the Christian faith. I was not always consciously aware of this pull, knowing only that prayer came automatically to my lips in times of despair and that I felt the call to attend church services at various points in my life. I didn't tell anyone how I felt inside, letting those around me think that I had given up my belief in such things.

Theo is the incumbent priest at St. Michael's parish in Victoria Beach. He took this photo during Thanksgiving last year.



Photo: Theo Robinson

In my mid-twenties or so, I was at a meeting for a now-defunct charity organization where I met a priest, a female priest, who rode a motorcycle. She was counter to everything I knew about priests (who I believed could only be old, male, and boring!). She mentioned that she was about to become the priest at an Anglican church. Without much arm-twisting, and still in shock that women were allowed to be priests, I decided I would check out this seemingly progressive church.

While I stumbled across this Anglican church by accident, my decision to stay was purposeful. The people were amazingly loving, allowing me to explore my faith the way I needed to, accepting my family as it was, and guiding me back to the Jesus Christ I subconsciously always knew was there. I became an imported Anglican because of the faith, love, and support that I found in those people beside me in the pews.

Not everyone has a great experience in church. The Anglican Church has some rotten history and the present views of a good portion of the Anglican Church worldwide is not always loving to all people, despite God's plea to us to love our neighbours as ourselves. I can certainly see why people leave the church. The deep-rooted systemic issues that exist in the church, including the Anglican Church, are cringeworthy. Homophobia, transphobia,

racism, cis-heteronormative behaviours, and ignorance of climate change are just some of the reasons people give for leaving the Anglican Church. Indeed, there are other church denominations that are more accepting and loving towards their fellow human beings and more caring of God's creation. The more I learn about the Anglican Church's history and present, the more I need to discern why it is I stay, being a transgender male, in a blended multi-racial family, and with liberal religious views.

While I struggle to hear and read stories about events occurring within the worldwide Anglican Church, I can also see the potential that lies just beneath the surface. I've met enough people who are striving for significant structural and systemic change that I feel hopeful for the future of our church, especially the Anglican Church of Canada. I stay to be a part of that change. To be a visible representation of the beauty that exists in our differences and to help lead our church towards a future of truly following in the footsteps of Jesus.



Theo Robinson is the incumbent at St. Michael's Anglican Church in Victoria Beach, a pastor in the Interlake Regional Shared Ministry with the Lutheran Church of the MNO Synod, and a spiritual care practitioner in health care. Follow him on Facebook and Instagram and check out his blog at tjrobinson.blogspot.com.

Choosing to Stay

LYNDA WOLFE

Photo: [Nathan Hanna](#)

I met God on the flat prairie of central Saskatchewan. As a teenager, I would ride my bike from my parent's farm to the top of the nearest "hill" at sunset and view three hundred and sixty unbroken degrees of prairie landscape. My instinctive response was an awareness of God in this beautiful world – God's world.

When I was a teenager, I joined the United Church in our town and sang in the choir. I remained with the United Church until my early thirties, strongly influenced by its emphasis on social justice and the church's place in the world. I would later return to the United Church.

However, during a time when I experienced the combined hardships of divorce, illness, and single parenthood, I turned to the Salvation Army for support. As a soldier of the Army, I was led to Bible study and a more active prayer life. These are practices I continue to this day. I will always be grateful to the Army for these spiritual gifts and for the many ways they supported my children and me. That said, I became aware that I was not in agreement with parts of the Army's theology.

My children and I moved to Winnipeg and, following this move, I returned to the United Church. There, I was blessed with the musical

direction of Lottie Enns Braun, and, through her, introduced to the rich musical community of this city. Worshipping through choral music became a major part of my spiritual life.

Unfortunately, our church closed, resulting in the loss of a worship experience with which I had become familiar and loss of contact with people who had become important friends.

It was because of the decision of two of these friends to worship at St. Peter's Anglican Church that I also began to attend this parish. Attending St. Peter's allowed me to retain my contact with these friends, and once again worship as a choir member.

In retrospect, I see my decision to attend St. Peter's as a life-changing event in my spiritual journey.

I had always struggled with the concept or reality of Jesus. However, my participation in the Anglican tradition of celebrating a weekly Eucharist encouraged me to face this question and wrestle with my own understanding of Jesus as God's son.

There were two significant developments that helped me with this. One was the decision of the rector at that time to conduct a confirmation class for adults. This provided a door to learning about the theology of the

Anglican Church and the way the church understands and worships the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These classes revealed what I would later come to understand as the underpinnings of Anglican theology – scripture, tradition, and intellect. My brain and my heart both had a place in this theology.

The second development was becoming a member of our parish's Worship Planning Team. Under the leadership of our rector, but also with a membership of retired clergy and other lay persons, I came to realize the role and development of liturgy in worship. As we planned for each season of services, I learned how the thoughtful integration of prayer, scripture, and music led to a worship experience that was a "continuous prayer" reflecting the story of God in the scriptures, the fulfillment of God's plan through the coming of Jesus, and the opportunity for us to hear, praise, repent and rejoice in a celebration of God's love.

There are important ways the Anglican Church has allowed me to continue my desire to be a part of the church in the world. Concerns for social issues, such as poverty and injustice that I brought from the United Church, are addressed through the work of our Outreach Ministry Team, especially in its support of St. Matthews-Maryland Community Ministry. Recently, diocesan leadership has required we learn more about our responsibility in reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. This directive has added another dimension to my understanding of the role the church must play in addressing the world beyond our doors. Our parish's desire to support creation care brings me back to my original ties to the land and the natural world of my childhood.

In recent years, our parish explored the idea of spiritual gifts and the discernment of these gifts in ourselves and others. This has resulted in many of us discovering gifts that we were not aware we had. We were then given an opportunity to express these gifts not only through the act of worship but in serving the community beyond our building. This has been an exciting chapter in my spiritual growth and continues to be a source of joy and spiritual

confirmation.

Then came the test. During Holy Week in 2020, our church, like all others, closed its doors due to the COVID 19 pandemic. However, despite the pandemic, the church remained "open." With remarkable leadership, our clergy, musical director, and lay leaders planned a Good Friday service on Zoom. To add to the miracle, most of our congregation learned how to access the live-streamed service. What followed has been a reminder that the church is not a building but the people of God. Not only have we been able to continue a participatory worship experience with clergy, lay leaders and our versatile music director in the following months, but we have chosen as a community to come early to chat and catch up on each other's lives. Through this practice, we have celebrated the birth of grandchildren, supported each other in mourning, and continued praying for each other's needs. The sad part of this story is that not every member of our parish has been able to join us on Zoom. To partially address this issue, members of the Caring Ministry Committee made a commitment that every member of the parish would be contacted at least once a month until we could return to communal worship. We continue to be a strong community supported with an awareness that God's love is with us regardless of the way we come together in God's name.

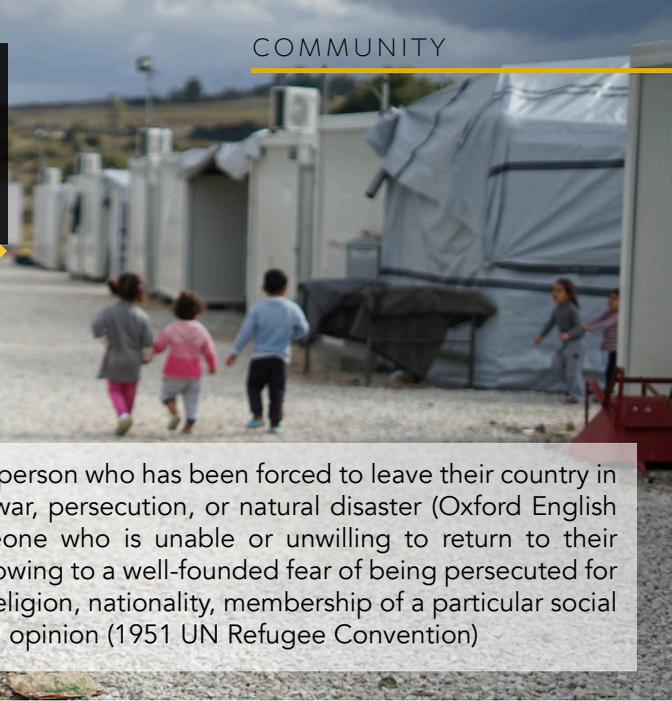
The kid on the bike on the prairies has been led a long way in her growing awareness of and relationship with God. The Anglican Church, as she experiences it in her parish, has played a pivotal role in her journey towards realizing her call to serve God's kingdom on earth. She's going to stay.



Lynda Wolf is a retired occupational therapist. Her clinical and research activities were focused on promoting communication strategies for persons with severe dementia and their caregivers. In recent years, she has been studying Old Testament Scripture with her mentor, Dr. Lissa Wray Beal. One of her COVID projects has been to design and paint greeting cards to share with members of her parish.

PWRDF Refugee Network moves heaven and earth

SUZANNE RUMSEY



refugee (noun) a person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster (Oxford English Dictionary); someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion (1951 UN Refugee Convention)

Photo: Julie Ricard

Afghanistan Evacuation Air Traffic Control, August 16, 2021: “Okay, how many people do you think are on your jet?... 800 people on your jet? Holy f---, holy cow.”

Where and what is your heaven *on earth*? Likely, it would involve a place, a place you call home, a place of family and community, work and leisure, a place made up of the things that define *who* you are. Imagine for a moment that you have become a refugee, defined by loss of place, of home, community and possibly even family. You have been forced to flee and are now faced with the daunting task of moving heaven and earth to find safety, shelter, a new place to call home.

In its [2020 report](#), The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) indicated that “Despite COVID-related movement restrictions and pleas from the international community for a [global] ceasefire that would facilitate the COVID-19 response, displacement continued to occur—and to grow. As a result, above one per cent of the world’s population—or 1 in 95 people—is now forcibly displaced. This compares with 1 in 159 in 2010.”

Despite the growing numbers of those seeking asylum, the UNCHR also reported that “only 34,400 refugees were resettled to third countries in 2020...This compares to 107,800

the year before and marks a dramatic 60 per cent decline – at a time when 1.4 million refugees are estimated to be in need of resettlement.”

In mid-August, 640 Afghans crowded onto a U.S. Air Force CF-18 in a desperate attempt to find safety in another country. It was five times the plane’s passenger capacity. The image flooding news broadcasts and social media feeds was a searing definition of moving heaven and earth.

Here in Canada, there is a small group of Anglicans who, in less dramatic but no less committed ways, go about the work of moving heaven and earth to bring to Canada those who have lost their heaven on earth. They are the Refugee Coordinators for the 15 dioceses that hold Private Sponsorship Agreements with the federal government’s Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada ministry. Some of them are lay people, others ordained, some are paid, others are volunteers. PWRDF provides modest networking and advocacy support to this group known as the [PWRDF Refugee Network](#). Since COVID-19 hit, the group has gathered regularly on Zoom to check-in, offer mutual support and mentoring and to strategize.

In the Diocese of Rupert’s Land, Marlene Smith is the Refugee Coordinator. Since 2015, parishes and families have welcomed 1,619 refugees to Rupert’s Land, although none in 2021.

When representatives of the Refugee Network gathered in July to discuss what key messages they would like to share with Anglicans in Canada, they talked about the enormous global need for refugee sponsorship; a need they are confronted with on a daily basis in the form of appeals for asylum. As Jane Townshend of the Diocese of Huron noted, "During COVID, three or four parishes in my diocese have come forward to say they would like to consider sponsoring a refugee family. I have a waiting list of 300 refugee cases looking for a sponsor."

The refugee coordinators also spoke about the complexity of the needs of those seeking asylum. No two cases are alike. This is compounded by a labyrinthine and painfully slow sponsorship process. "What is discouraging is the three-year wait that can be soul-destroying for family members and individuals overseas," said Tony Davis, Diocese of B.C. Refugee Coordinator.

Yet this moving heaven and earth, of welcoming the stranger, can be transformative for refugees and sponsors alike. "It is an opportunity to encounter 'the other,'" explained the Rev. Scott McLeod, who coordinates refugee sponsorship in the Diocese of Niagara. The professional, cultural, and other gifts that refugees bring to Canada, the group noted, are beyond measure. "Resilience," said

Townshend, "is a key word when it comes to refugees."

At the same time, they are keenly aware that some refugees arrive in Canada deeply traumatized and in need of large measures of compassion and practical support. This can make for some very challenging sponsorships, said McLeod. "But that does not negate the legitimacy of the refugee sponsorship program which is legitimate in and of itself."

Indeed, long before the United Nations defined who is a refugee, Jesus' Judgement of the Nations spelled out clearly what our response needs to be to those who have moved heaven and earth to begin anew in Canada:

"Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me... Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Matthew 25: 34b-36, 40)

To learn more about refugee sponsorship in your diocese, please contact Marlene at refugee@rupertsland.ca.



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Parish News Roundup

St. Thomas Anglican grateful for leadership of PWRDF representative

[St. Thomas Anglican Church](#) in Morden has been blessed with the ministry that Dianne Lambert has offered as our parish representative for Primate's World Relief and Development Fund. Last year, Dianne suggested to the Vestry that we focus on a particular ministry need highlighted by PWRDF and have donations go to that for three months unless otherwise designated. The Vestry agreed and this has been very successful. On October 10, she was very pleased to announce at the beginning of our worship that the parish of St. Thomas had donated \$1100.00 to our latest project, the Solar Suitcases for the Light for Every Birth Project, and the government (Global Canada) would be matching it. Our lay worship leader, Catherine Evenson, then announced, "Coincidentally, our first hymn is "Let There Be Light!"

At our Vestry meeting on Oct. 18, we have chosen another PWRDF project that will run from October through December. Our donations will go towards building a shallow well with a hand pump for the people of Kenya. One well will cost \$1,200 and will provide clean water for rural communities in Kenya to improve health, reduce travel time to fetch water, and keep more girls in school. The drought in Morden this year has reminded us of the importance of water, and we feel this would be a timely project for us to support. Last year, St. Thomas wanted to support Indigenous Ministry in Canada and chose the Indigenous Midwifery Program.

St. Thomas is very grateful for the wise and enthusiastic leadership of Dianne Lambert in her many ministries, but particularly as our PWRDF representative.

- Rev. Diane K. Guilford,
St. Thomas Anglican Church

Say Yes! to Kids proposals total more than \$500,000!

AFC to attempt to close funding gap with quiet campaign

The Anglican Foundation of Canada (AFC) has received an unprecedented wave of applications from across Canada in response to the *Say Yes! to Kids* Request for Proposals (RFP). "In the history of AFC, we have never seen anything like this kind of energy around a grant cycle," says The Rev. Canon Dr. Judy Rois, Executive Director. "We asked people to imagine more for children and youth in a post-pandemic world, and that is exactly what they did!"

At the close of the October 1 deadline, AFC had received more than 80 proposals, representing a total funding request of more than \$500,000. "We are having to recruit additional volunteers to our RFP Committee to review the applications," says Dr. Scott Brubacher, Executive Administrator. "At first glance the vast majority of these proposals are well-articulated and fall within the funding parameters."

In the Diocese of Rupert's Land alone there are 8 applicants seeking close to \$50,000 in funding. "This RFP has the potential to be a game-changer," says Canon Susan Suppes, member, AFC's Board of Directors. "The enthusiastic response right here at home has

Continued on page 13

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



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given us a much stronger understanding of the willingness and capacity of our churches to stretch themselves to meet the needs of young people in communities across the Diocese of Rupert's Land."

Canon Rois says proposals reveal an incredible breadth and diversity, "from podcasts to pilgrimage the vision for new ministry is inspiring." She says demand has been highest for smaller grants and seed funding for new initiatives, with eighty percent of applicants accessing category A grants of up to \$5,000. The majority of these are for pilot projects.

"There are dozens of applications for student enrichment in education, arts, and recreation, many of them designed to reach new Canadians and low-income communities," says Rois. "Some of the most innovative projects, and new models for outreach to non-church youth, have come from rural parishes." Rois says partnerships abound as applicants reveal their plans to work with community agencies and the healthcare sector to either advise on, or help deliver, impactful youth-oriented programs. "We are also seeing a remarkable number of reconciliation-focused projects."

In terms of geographic diversity, Brubacher says 9 out of 10 Canadian provinces, and 2 out of 3 Territories are represented, and 21 of 30 dioceses. "We have never seen this kind of broad, nationwide representation during a grant cycle. This is truly an exceptional situation."

The Very Rev. Peter Wall, AFC's Development Consultant, explains that his team is working hard to address the funding shortfall. "In addition to the \$110,000 raised as a result of the spring campaign, we have received two exceptionally generous gifts that might be used towards this effort." AFC management and board are developing a contingency plan that, once approved, may result in close to \$330,000 in available funding. "Our goal is to bring that funding gap closer to \$150,000."

Wall says that between now and when the Board of Directors meets in November to approve the RFP grants, he and his team will

be having "quiet conversations" with donors who may now wish to support this largest-ever outreach to young people. "Many donors responded very generously to the spring Say Yes! to Kids campaign," says Wall, "and others were unsure about the timing and if it was too soon to begin planning for pandemic recovery. We didn't know how many proposals we could expect to receive. Now we know!"

With this new information in hand, Wall and his team will make sure AFC supporters are aware of the many worthwhile projects that await funding. Canon Suppes says, "There is so much compassion and creativity in these proposals—the least we can do is stretch ourselves to try to fund as many of them as possible. It is my hope that all Rupert's Landers who have the means might make a gift to AFC in support of this important outreach to children and youth."

Those interested in making a gift to support the Say Yes! to Kids RFP are encouraged to reach out to [Peter Wall](#), [Michelle Hauser](#), or email foundation@anglicanfoundation.org.



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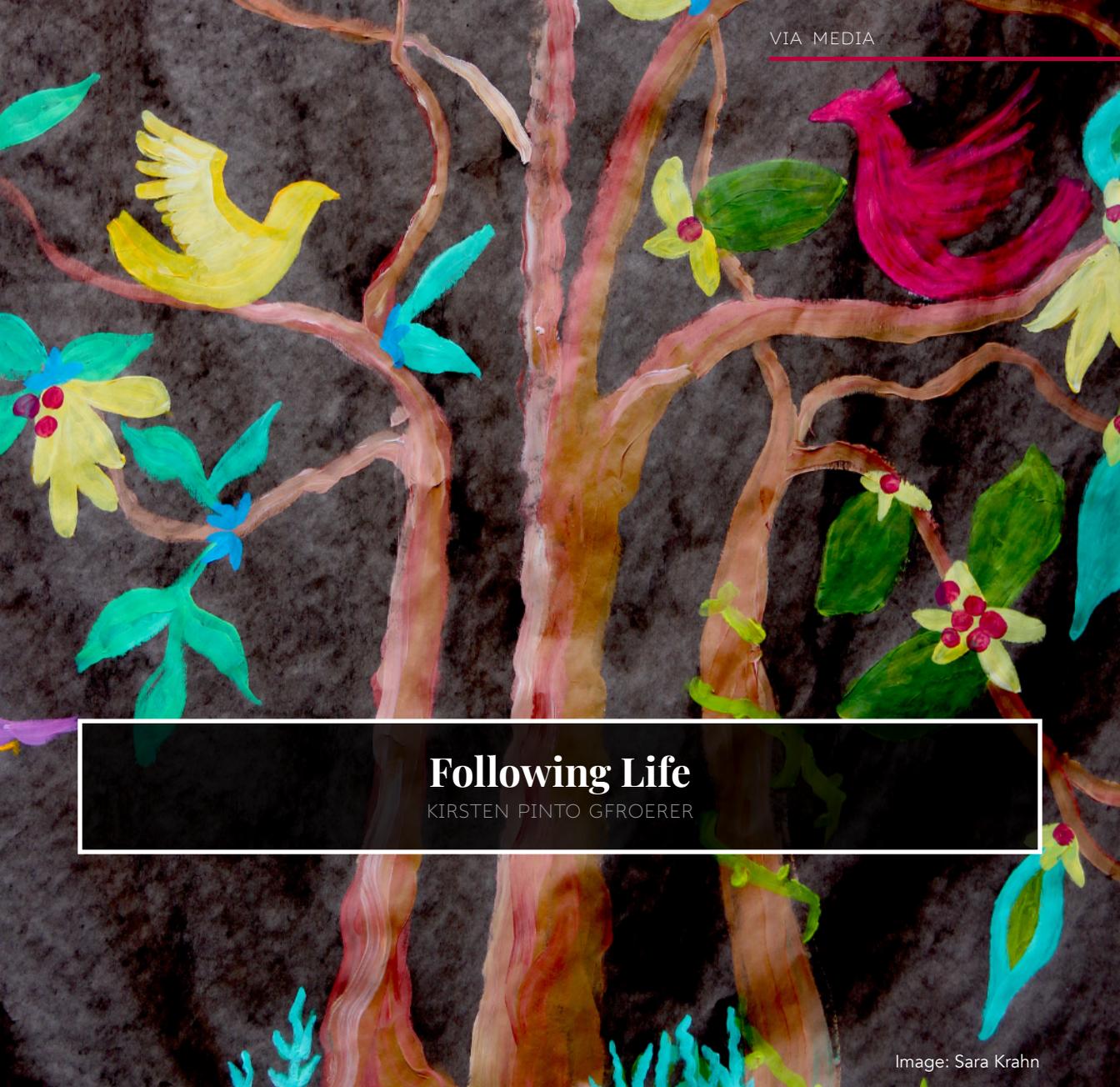
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Following Life

KIRSTEN PINTO GFROERER

Image: Sara Krahn

Several things might drive us to consider our life in the church. We might grow out of childhood and need to find our own way in faith. We might have doubts. We might find ourselves unhappy and disenchanted with the church or its programs. We might feel lonely and out of place. We might feel angry about what the church has done in history and want to distance ourselves from association with it. We might feel ashamed of the current direction of our denomination. We might feel disappointed with God. All these realities may call into question our relationship to a particular parish, the Anglican tradition, or the church in the broadest

sense of the word. How do we walk with integrity at these crossroads in our lives?

In our current culture the primary model of decision making is consumer driven. We are taught to evaluate possibilities like they are products with greater or lesser value to us and for which we need to determine the price we are willing to pay. This consumer decision-making impacts our decision-making regarding church. We are accustomed to finding what feels good and getting what we want. In this culture, the questions that surface when we ponder our relationship to a particular church might be: What does this church have to offer me and my

family? Do I like these people? Do I fit in? Is there a sense of community here? Do I like the music? Am I comfortable in the service? Do I like the preaching? Do I like the worship? Am I happy here? Do I agree with where this church is going? These questions are not wrong—they are human questions—and they provide some information for us. When we seek to find a home in faith these factors impact us. However, the nature of our consumer culture—which feeds the notion that we need to get what we want—can diminish our capacity to see the true, the good, and the beautiful that we are chasing with our hearts.

Even if we are in a season of doubt about the Christian faith, most of us still believe that we are created. With this belief, we then have some relationship and responsibility to the source of our life because we have been called to life by a creator. If we are called to life, we have a calling. If we have a calling, we have a responsibility to discern how to live that calling. This doesn't mean trying to figure out the exact plan which some machinist creator has for our lives. Rather, it means discerning the theme of our life; it means looking for the thread that weaves the fabric of our life into a consistent pattern.

Discerning our calling transforms the way in which we make our decisions. If we are discerning our calling, we are not looking to satisfy a list of wants but are instead looking for the thread of our life. Sometimes this thread shows itself to us even when we are not looking for it.

This happened to me. In my mid-twenties I was desperately trying to leave the church for all of the reasons listed in the first paragraph. I was flailing about and unhappy, looking for a new path. I was reading the Jewish philosopher [Martin Buber](#) and was profoundly enamoured by Judaism. In Buber I came across a passage that said something like this, "Don't leave the house of faith that you have been given, you can stand at the door and let the wind of all other faiths blow upon you but stay at the threshold of the

house you are given." This word was both a chastisement and an invitation. I was trying to run away from my given life by running away from my Christian Faith. but Buber invited me back into my life while giving me a place to breathe. I didn't feel Buber was teaching me a universal truth in these words (though they may have universal value); rather, the words felt like a call to me in that moment.

I realized I needed to stay within my limits and struggle. Buber's words did not speak to the content of my faith, nor did they speak to the goodness or badness of the Christian tradition in history. Instead, they told me that I had to be consistent with my creator-given life by staying with the church for unglamorous reasons; simply because this was the house of faith given to me.

Buber's words fundamentally shaped my life because they freed me of the need to be excessively 'happy' in the Christian Faith. I was no longer constantly faced with a choice regarding my faith; instead, I was living into what was given. True faith for me came later, but this word kept me in the thread of my life.

Finding one's calling is not always about staying. Sometimes, it is about going out into a new and unknown place. The scripture is full of stories about people being called out or forced into the wilderness to find a new place or a new way to be within the old. Abraham was called out of his father's home into a new land. The Israelites were called out into the desert to wander for forty years before they went into the promise land. One of the most beautiful callings in the psalms reads "Hear, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your people and your father's house, and the king will desire your beauty." This is not a call to stay, but a call to come out, to come away. The coming of Christ is the ultimate breaking of all old wineskins into the new. Christ never promises a comfortable home in the Christian tradition; he promises that we will always be unsettled in the following which is the nature of our faith.

The choice to stay or leave is not in itself good. We are called to follow and seek, not for satisfaction or want, but for our life which is hid in Christ in God even when we don't understand it to be. This following can sometimes mean respecting the doubts and questions that make us uncertain of our faith. It can mean accepting the pain that accompanies us as we head into the desert of life, where we must leave the comfort of certain faith behind.

The words of Simone Weil leave us with a strange and wonderful hope:

“One can never wrestle enough with God if one does so out of pure regard for the truth. Christ likes us to prefer truth to him because, before being Christ, he is truth. If one turns aside from him to go toward the truth, one will not go far before falling into his arms.”



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