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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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**A LONG STANDING TRADITION**

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# “Let Me Have Silence, and I Will Speak”

*Let me have silence, and I will speak,  
and let come on me what may.  
I will take my flesh in my teeth  
and put my life in my hand.  
See, he will kill me; I have no hope  
but I will defend my ways to his face.  
This will be my salvation,  
that the godless shall not come before him.  
Listen carefully to my words,  
and let my declaration be in your ears.  
I have indeed prepared my case;  
I know that I shall be vindicated.  
Who is there who will contend with me?  
For then I would be silent and die.*

In this passage, taken from the 13th chapter of Job, Job addresses his company of friends who have been attempting alternately to comfort, counsel, and reform Job amidst his suffering. As his companions attempt to offer explanations and solutions for his agony, Job doggedly insists on the injustice of his situation, and demands a response from God. Job prior to and following this passage speaks words offensive to his companions, and, in the interest of his own wellbeing, they attempt to quieten Job, and to convince him that his pain arises in part from his personal obstinacy.

But Job does not act from an ideological position but instead from the immediacy and necessity of his suffering (many struggles for justice and peace arise from this). And in this passage he asks for those trying to make sense of his situation to be silent, and to allow him to speak what he may. Job is set to speak justice, to uphold it even before God, and is prepared to be cut down for it. Job himself is in no way silent. But his laments, unlike the systematizing discourse of his companions, signal things incommunicable. Job sits in his pain, unable to speak a solution, and in refusal of a flattening of his experience.

Amongst his companions, it is Job whom God will converse with. And while Job is

repudiated, what is revealed in the repudiation is consistent with Job's protests. God's response to Job contains the most expansive, beautiful descriptions of creation found in the Hebrew Bible. The vision humbles and perhaps *satisfies* Job, but it is also consistent with his suffering and complaint; Job's testament to irreducible creaturely suffering shares in God's overwhelming vision of the creaturely order as limited before God, uncomprehending, and dependent. It is Job who has expressed a core feature of this creatureliness—the experience of pain without access to sense or solution. Job's friends have truly been unjust in attempting to systematize and explain what is excessive and unspeakable in the suffering of creation. They would have done well to “have silence,”—to be in solidarity with Job and allow his cries. Ultimately, Job's companions must seek forgiveness through Job, who has alone found communion with God.

This month, contributors to the magazine converse with silence. In our Community Catechesis section, Phil Barnett writes about the Christian contemplative tradition and introduces readers to spiritual practices of silence. Kirsten Pinto-Gfroerer meditates on silence amid suffering—on “trusting silence” which may sit with pain. Allison Abra and Matthew Bowman are interviewed about St John's College's efforts to house Ukrainian refugees and the gift of enlivenment that the college's guests have brought amidst the quiet isolation of the pandemic. Finally, Theo Robinson challenges readers to consider “silent voices,” those persons whose voices are suppressed through means subtle and direct, and consider how we might speak up for all.



Jude Claude is the editor of Rupert's Land News.

# Silence

GEOFFREY WOODCROFT

Photo: [Sean Sinclair](#)

Silence is a varied thing. Sometimes, when I am silent, I hear things better, because I listen better. There are times immediately following personal and corporate prayer that I find a voice, not my own, speaking into my soul's ear; it is not always clear and not always saying something I like. There are other times that I use silence as a weapon of privilege and power, or as a second-rate way of confessing I do not know something. In many cases, silence is potent, uncomfortable, and distracting. Yet, it is always a gift, and it requires discipline and practice.

Elijah, in 1 Kings 19 heard the voice of the Lord in the sound of sheer silence. This chapter often confuses me because it appears between stories of Elijah being surrounded by violence. Putting my confusion aside, the sound of sheer silence attracts me. Whether in nature, sleep, or with noise-cancelling headphones, I cannot recall hearing it. However, God must still use that space, the sound of sheer silence, to communicate with us. Indeed, much inspiration, imagination, and creativity has flourished in us for the last 3 years, while war, tempest and pandemic have been screaming at us. 3 years—the wars increase, the illness appears chronic, and the tempests increase their harsh behavior, but I know that God has spoken through and around it all.

In late 2019 Neil Elliott released his analytical prophecy of the death of the Anglican Church of Canada by 2040 *if* nothing changes in the ACC's trajectory. I interpret this to mean that should we do nothing to stop the trend—that is, if we remain silent—the prophecy will fulfill itself. I agree with this. However, I do not think that God is calling us to silence at this time. Rather, like Elijah, we have been wholly equipped in deafening, sheer silence to raise the story of Jesus Christ, and to more fully

understand the authority and power entrusted to the Church for our time.

As Jesus came out of the water of baptism at the baptizer's side, John heard the voice of God clearly *This is my child, with whom I am well pleased*, and John saw the spirit descend like a dove and remain on Jesus. Again, in the transfiguration event, God speaks out of dazzling, stunning brightness to three disciples *This is my child with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him!* Through both events I think Jesus, the silent One, is actually the loudest, at least for our collective ear. God's words, and Jesus' actions teach disciples to continue learning, and to behave as Christ behaves. Disciples are to seek Christ and serve Christ in all people, loving one's neighbour as oneself.

Through our Anglican community we make disciples in the waters of baptism; supposedly, we promise to do all in our power to support disciples in their life in Christ. To do all in our power implies lifelong learning, lifelong relationship, lifelong mentoring/mentorship, and a commitment to hear the words *This is my child with whom I am well pleased*. To choose to do all in our power for other disciples is to teach Christ's ministry and mission, authority, and power which are alive in His Body today. We come out of our silence to say to some *Go your faith has made you well*, and to others, *Follow me, I have news for you*. To do all in our power for disciples will reverse the erosion happening before us as we focus our attention not on ourselves, but on God's call.



Geoffrey Woodcroft,  
Bishop of Rupert's Land

# Silence and the Tradition of Christian Meditation

PHIL BARNETT

Photo: [eberhard grossgasteiger](#)

*Then the word of the Lord came to (Ezekiel), saying "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. -1 Kings 19:9b, 11b-13*

Ezekiel experienced the presence of God in the silence. Contemplative prayer enables us to enter into silence and experience the presence of God.

In the Christian community there are two commonly used methods for contemplative prayer. They are Christian Meditation and Centering Prayer. Each uses a prayer word to enable us to let go of our thoughts so that we can be quiet in our hearts and minds and enter into silence. The practice is simple. In Christian Meditation it involves saying a prayer word or a short phrase and repeating it, silently, interiorly, throughout the meditation period. In Centering Prayer, the prayer word is used to let go of thoughts and is said again when the thoughts return.

It is simple, but not easy, because our minds are continuously busy. The thoughts will be there, but saying the prayer word helps us not to pay attention to them, so we can enter into silence.

Jesus' teaching about prayer is instructive. In Matthew 6:6-7 we read "But whenever you pray, go into your room, and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words."

In meditation, we keep the prayer simple – a word or a phrase. We go into our inner room and enter into a quietness of heart and mind, leaving space for God to be present to us and within us.

Meditative prayer has a long history in the Christian tradition. It was almost unknown for many centuries and was re-introduced to the western Church in the 1970's and 80's. Fr. John Main reintroduced the practice of Christian Meditation and Fr. Thomas Keating founded the practice of Centering Prayer.

We can trace the practice of repeating a word or phrase back to the fourth century where we find it recommended by the Desert Fathers and Mothers. John Cassian, in particular, wrote about this way of prayer in his IXth and Xth Conferences.

Cassian wrote that he and his friend Germanus had travelled to the desert of Egypt where they met Abba Isaac, a respected teacher, who talked to them about ceaseless prayer. He told them to pray by repeating a single verse. The one he recommended was, "God come to my assistance."

Cassian noted that by praying in this way, repeating a prayer word or phrase, *"The mind thus casts out and represses the rich and ample matter of all thoughts and restricts itself to the poverty of a single verse."*

In meditation, then, we try to let go of all thoughts, so that we can focus on simply being in the presence of God. When we have an inner silence, it gives us the chance to listen to God in a very intentional way. Our minds are usually so cluttered with thoughts about our busy lives that we don't leave much room for the Spirit to communicate with us. It is in the stillness and the silence of meditation that we become centred in the presence of God and become more open to the work of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

Approximately 10 centuries after John Cassian, we find an anonymous English mystic of the 14th century who wrote a book titled *The Cloud of Unknowing*. The author writes: "So take a little word of just one syllable to help you focus your attention. The shorter the word the better, because it is more like this particular activity of the Holy Spirit. Choose a word like 'God' or 'love' or any other word of one syllable that appeals to you and impress it indelibly on your heart so that it is always there, whatever happens... Fix this word fast to your heart so that it is always there come what may. With this word you will suppress all thoughts."

Another example of prayer by repeating a word or a phrase is the Jesus Prayer. The most common form of the prayer is: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." It, too, goes all the way back to the Desert Fathers and Mothers. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition it has been maintained throughout the centuries and is still very much a part of their practice of prayer. When I was at an international conference some years ago a young man from Poland said that meditation was nothing new to him because he had been saying this prayer since he was a child.

We have seen, then, that meditation is deeply rooted in our Christian tradition. When we engage in this way of prayer we are

connected to numerous spiritual teachers from different parts of the world and from different centuries. And most importantly, we know that we are walking in the footsteps of Jesus himself.

This quote from John Main's writing summarizes key aspects of this way of prayer:

*"Meditation is not the time for words, however beautifully and sincerely phrased. All our words are wholly ineffective when we come to enter into this deep and mysterious communion with God."*

In order to come into this holy and mysterious communion with the word of God indwelling within us, we must first have the courage to become more and more silent. In a deep, creative silence, we meet God in a way which transcends all our powers of intellect and language.

We have to listen, to concentrate, to attend rather than to think. As John Main says:

*Silence is absolutely necessary for the human spirit if it really is to thrive, and not only just to thrive, but to be creative, to have a creative response to life, to our environment, to our friends. Because the silence gives our spirit room to breathe, room to be. In silence, you don't have to be justifying yourself, apologising for yourself, trying to impress anyone. You just have to be, and it's a most marvellous experience when you come to it. And the wonder of it is in that experience, you are completely free. You are not trying to play any role, you are not trying to fulfil anyone's expectation."*

For more information visit [The Canadian Christian Meditation Community](#) and [The World Community for Christian Meditation](#) (Christian Meditation) [Contemplative Outreach](#) (Centering Prayer)



Phil Barnett has been a meditator for 30 years, active in the Canadian Christian Meditation Community as a Regional and National Coordinator. He has led retreats and workshops across Canada and in the Caribbean.



# Silent Presence in the Face of Suffering

KIRSTEN PINTO-GFROERER



Image: [Odilon Redon, Le Silence, Wikimedia Commons](#)

Part of the work of the church in the world is to care for those who suffer. Thus, it is asked of the Body of Christ to grow our capacity to do so with wisdom. However, in the face of suffering we are often undone; we don't know what to say or do, we feel our own brokenness, and we feel afraid. But what if it isn't our capacity to do or say the right thing which is the crucial offering of the church in our time? What if silence *can* actually speak louder than words?

When I was training to be a counsellor I had a counsellor professor who was well practiced in Buddhist meditation. When I went to her office I would knock and she would greet me very briefly and then sit and wait in silence. All of her body language told me she was fully present and ready, but she was immovable, waiting within silence for me to emerge. And she was

very content to do so for as long as necessary. It was extremely disconcerting, and the first few times I was flustered and jumpy and started talking a mile-a-minute, but she didn't change her way of being, and slowly her confidence and peace did something; I slowed and felt the centre of me. Over time I learned to come in, sit, and take a moment to let the silent room and this silent woman give me a gift which in turn helped me to receive the teaching or the balm of healing that I needed in the moment. I remember nothing of what was said in those meetings, but I can still touch that silence.

Why was that silence powerful, and how was it healing and facilitative of my coming-to-be? Why is that kind of silence so hard to sustain (I have never been able to hold her depths of silence, yet)? This is a question that has stayed

with me as I have lived a life within the life of the church, whose task it is to be near to those who suffer. It struck me more deeply when studying Julian of Norwich; she was an anchorite, enclosed in a room attached to a parish church, and she paid attention to and wrote about one vision of the suffering of Christ on the cross for almost fifty years. This time spent—the seclusion of this task, and the focus only on the face of Christ crucified and nothing else—is a form of silence which laces the pages of her writing. 650 years later they speak powerfully “All shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.” Wherein lies this power?

The power lies in trust. My wise professor, and Julian, had a practiced confident trust which filled the room and the pages of the text that speaks through the ages. I cannot define the trusting silence that my professor practiced but it touched and resonated with the trust which Julian’s writing exudes. This kind of silence opens to more. It relinquishes control. It waits with, rather than takes over. It works within the still, rather than with the rush of fear; it dispels panic. The one willing to sit with a sufferer in this kind of potent, practiced silence trusts in the particularity of the person who is in front of them, and is willing to hold room for the inner life of the other, alone before God. Julian when she asked God about how “all would be well” for a particular friend of hers, learned that this was not a question that she could ask. It wasn’t hers to know; it was hers to hold in trust. A practitioner of this kind of silence learns to live in this trust. They do so because they come to know that the infinite has more possibility than our vision can perceive. They do so because they have come to know that the one who is seeking, and suffering, is held as precious within a good love, even when all appearances show it to be otherwise. This silent trust speaks without words that hope exists within every person and every situation.

Rowan Williams, one whom I believe is also adept at this kind of silence, once said: “Hope says that whether it turns out right or not, there’s never going to be a last word of pain, or loss, or failure so long as God remains God...Not that

God is going to bring about a happy ending in this world, but that God’s work with, and God’s faithfulness to, people in the most acute, unreconciled kinds of suffering or loss is not under discussion.” This kind of hope can only be held within silence because it only exists in the *more* that we cannot ask or imagine.

So, how do we expand our capacity for trusting silence so that we the body of Christ can give this silence as gift within this world so thick with suffering? It is a hard-wrought, lifelong learning which is endangered by a world full of noise. I don’t think it is any wonder that my professor practiced meditation, nor that Julian was enclosed in an anchorhold. To trust silence, you must become deeply acquainted with it. Some are acquainted with it because of their own experience of suffering, and the presence they have met within it; they bring it with them within their healing wounds. Time with nature can also teach this gift, as the psalmist says:

*The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork...  
There is no speech, nor are there words;  
their voice is not heard;  
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,  
and their words to the end of the world.*

In the end, as Christians we are given the cross of Christ as the most potent teacher of trusting silence, we can lean into it in this time of Lent and pray that it will bear us and slowly teach us what we long to know.



Kirsten Pinto Gfroerer is a counsellor, writer and lay theologian who lives near a small forest on the edge of Lake Winnipeg. Her book *Anchorhold: Corresponding with Revelations of Divine Love* contemplatively explores the theological writings of Julian of Norwich. To learn more about her work visit [her website](#).



# Refuge and Relationships:

An Interview with Allison Abra  
and Matthew Bowman about  
Hosting Ukrainian Refugees at St  
John's College

JUDE CLAUDE

Photo: [Jon Tyson](#)

## Can you speak briefly about what St John's is and the work that the college does?

**Allison:** St John's is the educational institution for the Diocese of Rupert's Land. We were founded in 1866 and then became a constituent founding college of the University of Manitoba in 1877. Our relationship with both U of M and the diocese has evolved over time, but we maintain close ties with both institutions. Our current student and faculty base are generally all U of M students from a range of different disciplines across the university, but we retain control of our Theology program. We also maintain independent food service and catering operations and a student residence.

## Over the last year, St John's has been involved in housing numerous Ukrainian refugees; can you say a bit about how this came to be?

**Allison:** St John's hosts a lot of events both for U of M and for the community, and we held one at the college in June. A friend of mine happened to be present and I was chatting with her about the fact that someone she knew had

been put in charge of finding housing for newly arrived Ukrainians and the challenge it had been because so many hotels were booked. We happened to be standing in the part of the college that has a big glass wall that looks out onto our quad towards our residence, and I pointed to it and suggested it as an option. Since U of M was mostly remote from March of 2020 until the summer of 2022, there weren't a lot of students on campus, and our residence was not full. Within a few days, I got a call from the province, and we started conversations with them. We signed a contract in mid-July and by late July/early August we had our first folks moving in.

## How does the program work?

**Matthew:** Canada set up the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel, which essentially allows refugees to live for up to 3 years in Canada on a visitor's visa, with the ability to work. People stayed with us soon after arriving in the country while they looked for permanent housing. We have hosted around 200 people in total, for varying lengths of time. Some were with us for several months.

## Are there any moments that stand out in your memory from the last year of involvement in this program?

**Allison:** I have three that speak to the ways that the Ukrainians really became part of our community, but also to how meaningful this was for some of them and for us as well.

At the start of the academic year our student council hosts an event called Jumpstart . It usually involves a BBQ meal and has the goal of engaging the student community at the college, including students in residence. The Ukrainians were invited to this, and we all ate together in our Cross Common Room. The student council had planned games for afterwards and several Ukrainians stayed for them. I have a memory of sitting at tables with students and a few of our Ukrainian newcomers playing bingo. It was just really cool to see. It was the first real big interaction I had seen between the students and the Ukrainians..

Then, in December the college hosted a Christmas jazz concert that was a fundraiser for chaplaincy and for the Emmanuel Mission Learning Centre downtown at Holy Trinity Anglican Church. We knew that we hadn't oversold the chapel, so Matthew sent all the Ukrainians an email inviting them to come to the Christmas concert if they wanted, for free. When the concert started, I went to the front of the Chapel to welcome people to the college, and there was one Ukrainian that was in the audience, which was great. But then after the concert was over, I turned around to see that two full pews of Ukrainians had shown up after intermission. It just made me happy, because it's this festive, lovely event and I was glad that they had chosen to experience it. And some of them told Matthew how much they had enjoyed it.

But probably the most special memory was back in October. We have banquets for our residents that are planned by the Residence Council that tend to be tied to some holiday or season. We were sitting at the Halloween banquet and one of the Ukrainians, Denys

Gerashchenko came up to say that he was leaving the College the next day, but he wanted to thank us for the opportunity to stay with us. He then told us he is an artist, but that since the war began, he hadn't been able to produce any art. He was just feeling so down about everything that it stifled his creativity. But since coming to St John's, he had felt that creativity return. And he made a piece of art for us. It was really moving, because I think, like everyone, all of us here have been so horrified at what's been happening in Ukraine. To feel like we can do something to support people that have been displaced, it's just been really gratifying.



**Artwork by Denys Gerashchenko,  
gifted to St John's.**

**Matthew:** You had Ivan Safarov at Jumpstart as well, right?

**Allison:** Yes, that's right. One of our very first folks to stay in the residence, Ivan Safarov, ended up getting hired to join our food service staff. We have two Ukrainians now working for the college, one of whom lived here briefly with us and one of whom did not. Ivan is also a musician who appeared on X-Factor in Ukraine, so the student council hired him to do some numbers at Jumpstart, which was great.



**Ivan Safarov and Kateryna “Kate” Kharkivska employed with St John’s College as food service staff**

**Matthew:** For myself, I had the same experiences as Allison at banquets, et cetera. In general, though, my interactions were largely administrative. I’ve had people come in with their phone and press the button to get Siri or Google to listen and translate and then they just hold the phone in my face, like “Now it's your turn to talk back.” Other times I've sort of turned my computer monitor and typed while they've typed on their phone—all to sort of make it work.

## **What have the benefits been for St. John’s of having Ukrainian refugees stay with you?**

**Allison:** I think that all of us just felt grateful that we could as individuals, but also as the college, contribute to supporting people that are suffering as a result of this terrible war. I think it's also been a good educational experience for our students, the ones in residence especially, living side-by-side with folks as they passed through. When I started at the college in July of 2021, we were down to about 25% occupancy in the residence. Those students were really wonderful to have here because it reminded us every day why we do what we do. But I think having the Ukrainians come in and suddenly have the residence be almost full for the first time since Matthew and I had worked here was a good reminder to everyone about what the college is. It helped us as an institution revive and renew after a long, hard period of the pandemic.

**Matthew:** Also, I think this made the social life of the residents livelier. Having 30 people at a banquet versus 60 or 70—it would have been sort of sad.

I understand that the contract with the provincial government for this program will be ending soon. Are there ways in which you think this work will live on?

**Allison:** It's not on this scale, but the college does have a history of supporting refugees. There was a program amidst the war in Syria where the college housed several Syrian students in the residence. We also have had a long relationship with a student from South Sudan who came here as an international student. Our former chaplain and current chaplain worked closely with him to help him apply for refugee status and ultimately permanent residency in Canada, which has been achieved in the last few months. So, it's always been part of our mission, but I think that the experience with the Ukrainians has opened our eyes to the possibilities.

We have a faculty fellow who is affiliated with the college; she's a sociologist named Lori



Wilkinson who's also a Canada Research Chair in Migration Futures. We've been talking with her about potential roles that the college could take on in this way in the future to continue supporting refugees, but also in ways that would carry out our educational mission. We're exploring potentially providing housing to refugees that are also pursuing studies at U of M.

**Matthew:** We've also made partnership relationships with MANSO, which is the Manitoba Newcomer Settlement Organization and New Journey Housing, both of which help new Canadians find permanent housing. There's the need for housing in Winnipeg, in Manitoba, in Canada for refugees. We have made clear to MANSO and New Journey Housing that our doors are still open. As long as we have rooms available, we're happy to have people move in..

**Do you have any thoughts on how other Anglican churches or institutions might make use of their resources to support refugees?**

**Matthew:** I've written down "Don't be afraid to take risks and to think outside the box," but also to "not reinvent the wheel." Parishes don't exist on their own in

isolation. Neighborhoods are up to interesting things. Anglicans are great at striking committees and considering things and having meetings and discussions, but we're not so good at saying: Maybe there's already people with expertise in this, in the neighborhood, or down the street, or in the city. And maybe we should be asking where we can help as opposed to starting to try something from scratch all on our own.

It's also about trying to focus not on future possible scarcity, but on our existing blessings.

**Allison:** I would say we were trying to just think creatively coming out of a tough period. The pandemic has had a significant financial impact on the college, as it did for a lot of parishes. Our in-person community had really struggled to find ways to come together because of the pandemic and the closure of campus. We had this more-than-half-empty residence and had been looking for solutions. We were more open to it because we had been trying to think creatively about the resources that we had and what they could be used for in non-traditional times. And I think now that we've learned a lot of great things from the challenges of the past few years about who we want to be moving forward.



**The last group of St John's' Ukrainian guests arriving in December**

Chamber Orchestra Musaïc announces:

## Shall We Gather: Orchestral Music by composers of African descent

**Sunday, February 26, 2022**

Bethel Mennonite Church  
465 Stafford Street (parking off Harrow Street)

**Chamber Orchestra MUSAIC, under the auspices of Chamber Orchestra Without Borders Inc.,** is a non-profit organization promoting the cultural mosaic of Winnipeg through orchestral music. The organization has been in operation for 15 years and is led by artistic director, Larry Strachan. Larry holds a Master’s degree in Orchestral Conducting from Shenandoah University in Virginia and is a graduate from the University of Manitoba School of Music. Previous shows from Chamber Orchestra Musaïc include ‘Beyond 150’ (2018), ‘Crossroads’ (2014), ‘Awakening’ (2010), ‘Steal Away’ (2009), and ‘Journey from Africa’ (2008).

The next concert, **‘Shall We Gather: Orchestral Music by composers of African descent’,** will be held on Sunday, February 26, 2023 at 3pm. It will take place at Bethel Mennonite Church, 465 Stafford Street (parking off of Harrow Street).

The concert will include works by Fred Onovwerosuke (Ghana), TJ Anderson (USA), Jenny Peña Campo (Cuba), Shirley Thompson (Jamaica/UK), and Adolphus Hailstork (USA). Featured soloists include Charlotte Siegel (soprano) and Zilla Jones (mezzosoprano).

Canadian Heritage and The Manitoba Arts Council have provided support for this project.

Tickets are \$30 for adults and \$25 for youth/ seniors and \$15 for those under the age of 15. To reserve your ticket, call (204) 487-0302, via email at [chamorchwb@gmail.com](mailto:chamorchwb@gmail.com) or purchase at the door.

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# Speaking Up for Silenced Voices

THEO ROBINSON

Photo: [Amin Moshrefi](#)



Silence is a double-edged sword. It can be equally beautiful and comforting as dangerous and scary.

There are moments in life where being silent or sitting in quiet can be important. In church liturgy there are various periods of silence strategically placed throughout a worship service so that a person has time to reflect on what has been said, to meditate and to pray, and to open their heart to God.

Sitting in a silent vigil next to a dying friend's bed can be quite powerful for both people. While it may take time to acclimate yourself to simply sitting in silence with another person (plenty of people find silent pauses

uncomfortable), allowing for that quiet to permeate the room can bring moments of reflection, meditation, and prayer similar to those found in a worship service.

Jonathan Bartels, a registered nurse in the US, created the [medical "Pause."](#) This event is a moment of silence taken by medical staff and friends and family of the patient immediately after death. This sacred moment of silence "allows individuals to personalise their practice while not imposing onto others," and is a "means of honouring a person's last rite of passage."

These silent moments are precious, beautiful, and comforting. They break up our busy lives, give us time to hear our own

thoughts, and they can reconnect us to God. These golden moments can be tranquil and healing and are sometimes so rare that when they do happen, one needs to take hold of them and cherish them.

However, silence has a dark side to it, as well. While there are times in our lives when silence is required, an imposed silence has a very different feeling. When a silence is imposed, it means there is a voice that has been silenced. Perhaps someone is making decisions for another person without consulting with them. Perhaps a voice is silenced by passive aggressive comments. More than likely, this imposed silence means that not all voices are being heard. Who is it that we are listening to and who is it that we are silencing?

Being unable to tell your story could mean life or death. A person being abused, especially a woman being sexually abused, is often silenced by dismissing comments or outright declarations of denial by others. The abusee's voice gets lost in the noise generated to protect the abuser.

A transgender person living stealth will be in constant fear that their secret will be discovered. It only takes one slip of the tongue or one tiny rumour to destroy a person's life and possibly cause death, whether by their own hand or another's.

These are only two examples of people being silenced in one way or another.

The only thing worse than voices being silenced are the bystanders who remain silent.

This quote has been attributed to Desmond Tutu: "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor." By silencing your own voice in situations of abuse or intolerance, you are encouraging harassment, bullying, dismissal, and humiliation. So, whose voice is being labelled as more important? And who is it that is being silenced?

We as bystanders need to break the silence and change the course of history. Breaking the silence can change laws and as a result change a person's life—maybe even save a life.

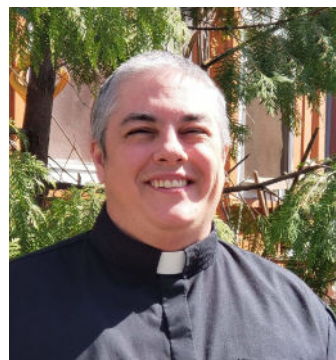
This all brings to mind Simon and Garfunkel's song "Sound of Silence", particularly this verse:

*And in the naked light, I saw  
Ten thousand people, maybe more  
People talking without speaking  
People hearing without listening  
People writing songs that voices never shared  
And no one dared  
Disturb the sound of silence*

We have become accustomed to the evil around us, desensitised to the point that we no longer raise our voices against cruelty and injustice. No longer do we dare "disturb the sound of silence." Instead, it has become easier to turn the other cheek and allow the voices around us to be silenced. If we ignore a problem, it will simply go away, right?

Clinical Pastoral Care students are taught that a silent listener is important for voices to be heard. That is what we need to be today – silent listeners. Space needs to be given to all the voices who have been silenced over the years. To do this, we need to shed our indifference and stand beside those who have been silenced, historically and presently.

We can no longer be bystanders while victims of harassment, abuse, and violence are placated with half-promises and told to keep silent about events that have unfolded. We can no longer be indifferent as death tolls rise from murder and suicide. It is long past the time for silent voices to be given the space they need in order to speak up against cruelty and injustice. It is time for those of us who have a voice, to speak up for those who have been silenced. It could mean the difference between life and death.



The Reverend Theo Robinson is an Anglican priest serving as a Pastor in the Interlake Regional Shared Ministry with the Lutheran Church of the MNO Synod. You can follow his blog at [tjrobinson.blogspot.com](http://tjrobinson.blogspot.com)