

**5** Is the Earth  
Cursed?

**8** Dismantling  
Anti-Black Racism

**13** Prison Abolition in the  
Quaker Tradition



Publisher | [Bishop Geoffrey Woodcroft](#)

Editor | [Misha Pensato](#)

Accounting | [Joy Valencerina](#)

Advertising | [Angela Rush](#)

Layout & design | [cityfolkcreative.ca](#)

[Rupert's Land News](#) is published 10 times per year (September - June) by the Diocese of Rupert's Land, in the Anglican Church in Canada. It connects churches and communities from Portage la Prairie, MB, to Atikokan, ON, by offering news, events, opinions, and ideas to 4,000 readers per month. RLN is available in a variety of formats:

[Website](#) • [Facebook](#) • [Twitter](#)

We also deliver timely news and information via a weekly email. [Sign up here](#).

[Advertising](#) - RLN accepts advertising in our monthly magazine and our weekly email.

[View our rate sheet](#). To discuss advertising call (905) 630-0390 or [email us](#).

[Editorial offices:](#)

Anglican Lutheran Centre

935 Nesbitt Bay

Winnipeg Manitoba, R3T 1W6

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](#).

Contents copyright 2023 by *Rupert's Land News*. All rights reserved.

Cover: [Sha Ro](#)

## Fruits of the Spirit

Photo: [Markus Spiske](#)

I am blessed to have received such a warm welcome from the advisory board and from the bishop as I begin my role as editor for *Rupert's Land News*. A lot of thoughtful work has gone into creating the September issue before I joined, which I will take as inspiration through the coming year. I have been shown many examples of kindness, forbearance, and faithfulness by the outgoing editor, Jude Claude, as they trained me for the job. They have introduced me to the workings of the magazine, answered my abounding questions, and demonstrated a deep care for the Anglican community that I am grateful to learn from. I wish Jude the best as they pursue an MA in theology in Toronto.

The Fruits of the Spirit is a rich theme to begin the year. As Bishop Goeff observes in this month's pastoral note, Galatians 5 was written in a context of a community in crisis. Paul is writing to those who are not living up to their values. In this issue, the contributors explore ways we fail to live up to these values in our own lives and in our communities, and how we may embody them more fully.

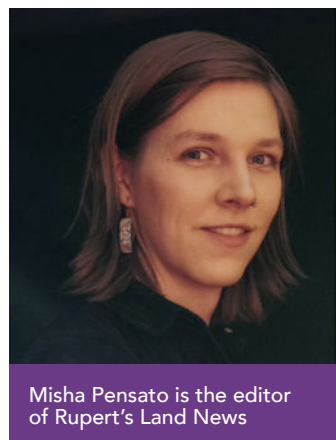
The philosopher Gillian Rose writes in her memoir *Love's Work* that "there is no democracy in any love relation: only mercy." We cannot control how others act towards us: a lover may leave us, a family member may harm us, a community may fail us. Rose is not telling us to accept heartbreak and disappointment. There may be legal recourse to right harm, or contractual expectations between us, but in entering relations with others based on love, we are made incredibly vulnerable.

In this month's Community Catechesis section, drawn from discussions at A Rocha Canada and St Margaret's Anglican Church's *Be Not Afraid/Consider the Lillies* conference, Deanna Zantigh responds to the question "Is the earth cursed?" and considers the interconnectedness of social and ecological disequilibrium, and the fruitfulness to be found in humble, cross-divisional respect and relationship with others.

In an interview with members of Black Anglicans, Diocese of Rupert's Land Chapter, individuals speak about anti-black racism in the Anglican church and the need for real and meaningful representation in governing structures and in church life. The movement for Black Lives in 2020 drew many people's attention to the urgent task of dismantling anti-black racism, but the years since have yielded little systemic change. The demonstrated leadership and determination of Cynthia Manswell, Dr. June James, Rev. Wilson Akinwale, and Rev. Edmund Laldin, and others in the Black Anglicans network feel like a call to take Paul's message seriously.

John Samson Fellows' article considers the call felt by Quakers to the work of prison abolition. Responding to social problems by incarcerating people—often those already most marginalized in our society—is a form of social evil. Samson Fellows reflects on how our relations are only made worse when we isolate and punish those who trouble us. I am heartened to read about those working to question the ways we understand crime and to implement truly just systems.

What would a society based on the fruit of the spirit look like? What kind of vulnerability and courage would it take to let go of our selfishness, fears, and jealousy? I hope readers find the hope and challenge of Paul's letter reflected in each of this article's issues.



Misha Pensato is the editor of *Rupert's Land News*



## Back to the Heart

GEOFFREY WOODCROFT

Photo: 1. Mountain mocking bird, male. 2. 3. Varied thrush, male & female, John James Audubon and Robert Havell, 1837.

*By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness -Galatians 5:22*

In pondering the theme for this issue, I thought it best to wrestle with the biblical context surrounding this verse.

The book of Galatians consists of a letter the Apostle Paul wrote to disciples of Jesus Christ in Galatia. The Galatian church was one he had planted, but which had discarded his teachings. The community of disciples it seems were a mixture of Jewish and Gentile Christians, and these folk, persuaded by external forces, had reverted to religious practices which Jesus had contested during his earthly ministry. The Galatian Church had not only fallen into confusion and dissension, but also into generally hurtful and selfish behaviour. Paul saw that the Galatian disciples were reverting to a life primarily concerned with self-gratification—at the expense of others—and unjust greed and consumption.

Paul clearly teaches disciples to embark upon life-long learning, continually encouraging one another to live life with, and in, their master and friend, Christ. He chooses to make his point by illustrating the choice of faith made by Abraham. In doing so Paul directs Christ's disciples to consider daily whom they are called to be, and what they ought to be doing.

Paul warns that the *works of the flesh* consume a person's gifts, time and talent; they are those things which provide opportunity for a person to hurt others, the earth, and themselves. "By contrast, the *fruit of the Spirit*," Paul concludes has the opposite effect of the former works. This section of Paul's writing, and the theology expressed by it, are powerful for the Body of Christ in every generation, and may be especially impactful today.

*"For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another." -Galatians 5:13-14*

As we ponder the fruit of the spirit in the context of Paul's letter to the church in Galatia, we may be struck by the degree of dysfunction which Paul writes about, and significantly that *disciples* are the vehicles of this hurt and suffering. The apostle, however, gently invites these same disciples back to the heart of life in Christ. In doing so he demonstrates that the fruit of the spirit is not simply *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness*—it is disciples who become these things by their free choice, by God's will, and by continual sound teaching and encouragement.

As we stretch to see our fellow members of the Body, and as we strain to hear the voices and stories of the gathered Christian community, what do we see and hear? We discern Christ's voice in the *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness* we ought to be. If we are struggling to hear Christ's voice, if we are overburdened with infrastructure and fiscal matters, it is time to invite the teachings of Jesus Christ back into our everyday gatherings. If the world is experiencing devastation at catastrophic levels and we feel consumed by our fear and the urge to secure our self-preservation before the preservation of all, we must reclaim our identity – We are members of the One Body of Christ, fruit of the spirit, encouraging one another in Christ's mission in the world.



Geoffrey Woodcroft,  
Bishop of Rupert's Land

# Is The Earth Cursed?

DEANNA ZANTINGH

Photo: Burn Scars in Northwestern Canada,  
MODIS Land Rapid Response Team, NASA GSEC

The text of this article is drawn from a roundtable session of A Rocha Canada and St. Margaret's Anglican Church's Be Not Afraid/Consider the Lilies conference. An audio recording of this session can be found [here](#).

I stumbled on a publication this week that a former professor of mine had retitled for me from a rather bland title to the title: "The Wisdom of Asking Better Questions." Out of that process I realized that sometimes out of these questions we can spin a number of other questions and so that's what I'd like to do for the next five or so minutes.

When I first heard the question, “Is the Earth Cursed?” I thought of this in one of two ways. Was it asking “Can we have hope for the future?” Or was it asking “ontologically is the land cursed, as a state of being?” And to this second question I have to say — absolutely not.

I think the story of the Hebrew Scriptures, the more I sit with it, point us toward the reality that everything has been made good and very good. The arc of that story, to me, presents us with the perennial challenge of being human — the challenge of living in the land in good ways before God and with all beings. I think it is also a story that warns us of all that is at risk of being lost and unleashed when we do not do this.

And all of this leads me to ask new questions too, like:

“Are we in our own time and place living in the land in good ways?”

“Do we even know what that might or could look like upon stolen lands that are being carved open by extractive desires, amidst rearranged and diverted rivers and dwindling animal habitats?”

Is the earth *actively* being cursed? By who?

The answer to this last question I think of course is “yes.” I think the signs of disequilibrium are all around us—in our communities, and families, and in the anxiety that young people feel. And I think this in turn prompts us to ask new questions, like:

“Who is benefiting from this?” And “How do we benefit from it?” “Who is actively cursing the earth?”

And while the present realities of the earth groaning affect us all, they do not affect us all equally. The majority of the world, women, the poor, Black, and Indigenous communities bear an unequal burden for forms of so-called development, while the rich reap most of the benefits. Black and Indigenous communities have faced waves of environmental racism for decades.

Already in the 1970’s, Black theologian, James Cone, wrote an article entitled, “Whose Earth Is It Anyways?” In this article, written over 50 years ago Cone tried to direct the attention

of the human community broadly (and, I might add, white theologians, academics, and communities specifically) to the need to take seriously how the same system of domination is at play in the oppression of people and the oppression of the earth.

Cone goes on to say that “The logic that led to slavery and segregation in the Americas, colonization, and Apartheid in Africa, and the rule of white supremacy throughout the world is the same one that leads to the exploitation of animals and the ravaging of nature.” He continues “... the Fight for justice cannot be segregated but must be integrated with the fight for life in all its forms.”

So if we take this seriously, I think it points us to who some of our teachers might be.

Potawatomi ecologist Kyle Whyte makes a really clear link between climate change and histories of colonization. He says this is merely the newest wave of colonial violence that Indigenous communities have already been enduring for centuries. And when we can look at it that way, and see that this climate change reality is, as Whyte suggests, merely an experience of *déjà vu* for Indigenous communities, that is part of a larger domination system.

The question of how to have hope in the midst of anti-life systems, is not a new phenomenon or reality for all people, there are some who have centuries of experience in fostering life amidst death-wielding forces.... To put this bluntly, as Indigenous feminist Dian Million suggests, “It is not that Indigenous people don’t know what makes for life, health, it is that we know what makes for life beyond any one individual’s wellbeing.”

I think this points us to the colonial roots of this climate crisis and it can help us ask new questions about how climate change is both a social and an ecological crisis. Climate change is never just an ecological reality; its roots and effects are socio-ecological, born of spiritual ways of viewing and being in the world that will require deep conversion.

But I think this awareness also invites us into

more relational ways of finding solutions — “You can’t know something unless you love it.” (Borrowed from Rachel Krause?) We can’t solve the pressing problems that climate change is causing without doing it as a solid human community across lines of divisions. And so ...Is friendship a solution to climate change? I think it certainly has to play a significant role.

We are all interrelated and interdependent. Theologian, Catherine Keller, suggests that every entity in the universe can be described as a process of interconnection with every other being. We are not ontologically cursed — we are ontologically connected — and right now we are not heeding that connectedness.

In his article James Cone also made three suggestions which I think are still really important today:

1. We need a critical assessment of how we got here. We need to do some “extractive” work on our own epistemologies – our own ways of knowing and being.
2. And we need to have a willingness to look outside of where the dominating culture has rooted itself and look for other resources that are ethical, from other cultures that can help all people think about how to care for the earth better.
3. And then the last thing he said, which I think I find most hopeful, is that we need mutual dialogue — and he said that dialogue already assumes that there is respect and knowledge of our neighbours and an honest and humble reality of wanting to be in relationship with others, and that this feeds the earth’s healing.

The survival of the earth, therefore, is a moral issue for everybody. If we do not save the earth from destructive human behaviour, no one will survive. That fact alone ought to be enough to inspire even the privileged among us to join hands in the fight for a just and sustainable planet.

Systematic theologian, Karen Baker Fletcher, [writes](#) that “Our task is to grow large hearts, large minds, reconnecting with earth, Spirit, and one another...” she continues, writing as a Black theologian, that “Black religion must grow ever deeper in the heart.” To which I add, all religion must grow ever deeper in our hearts and in the land. Instead of extracting from the earth, we need a spiritual extraction of the ways of being that are making us sick — ownership, control, fear, greed, Add all of the ways these are tied to many diverse histories of trauma as well.

Is the earth cursed? How can we rebuild connections within and between the human family, our Creator, and the more-than-human world? On stolen lands that are being ravaged for profit, what systems might we need to disconnect from?

I have a lot more to say here, but I will conclude briefly by sharing a [quote](#) from Daniel Heath Justice whose main work is in Indigenous Literatures:

“I don’t see the world as a trash fire. I see the world as relatives who are under incredible strain and who are in a lot of danger. And I think thinking about the world as a trash fire does an injustice to our relatives as well as to ourselves.”



Deanna currently lives in Tkaranto (Toronto) on the traditional lands of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississauga of the New Credit; lands governed by the Dish with One Spoon Treaty. She is a PhD Student in Eco-Theology at the Toronto School of Theology and a Research Manager at the Critical Health and Social Action Research Lab.

# Dismantling Anti-Black Racism in the Diocese of Rupert's Land

JUDE CLAUDE AND MISHA PENSATO

Photo: [Shreyas Kakad](#)

*This is an incomplete segment of an ongoing piece on the Black Anglicans of Rupert's Land, Diocese of Rupertsland chapter and its members. October's issue will continue this article.*

The Anglican church became a global church [in large part through colonial enterprise](#). Throughout its history, [the institution of the Anglican Church has been complicit in manifest anti-black violence and profited from the trans-Atlantic slave trade](#).

The Anglican Church has been transformed and shaped by its encounters with diverse Black communities around the world. The present day Anglican Church has a [prominent Black demographic](#), and is richly shaped by its global community. Though Black communities have been integral to the life of the Anglican church in Canada, long histories of exclusionary and persecutory actions and attitudes continue to marginalise and do harm to Black Anglicans.

Despite this, Black Anglicans across Canada are working to nurture Black life in Canadian churches, and confront anti-black racism and

discrimination. Within our own diocese, there is a long history of Black Anglicans doing this life giving work. In the present day, The Black Anglicans, Diocese of Rupert's Land chapter embodies this ongoing work.

## Formation History: Black Anglicans of Canada, Diocese of Rupert's Land Chapter

In May of 2020, Dr. June James was asked by Bishop Geoffrey Woodcroft to co-chair a committee which would address anti-black racism in the Diocese of Rupert's Land. This happened following a series of police murders of Black individuals, most prominently of George Floyd, and the subsequent swell of support for the Black Lives Matter movement. James has long been involved in diocesan life and has continually worked for anti-racism both within and outside the church. In addition to James and Woodcroft, the "Committee for Dismantling Anti-Black Racism" has also included Cynthia Manswell, Patsy Grant, Rev. Wilson Akinwale, Rev. Diane Guilford, Stirling Walkes, Rev. Deacon Colleen Matthews, Rev. Val From, Rev. Edmund Laldin, and Tanis Webster. Rev. R. Susan Smandych joined later, having previously been part of a similar group in Toronto. The group welcomed a diversity of members, with the understanding that dismantling anti-black racism in the diocese required allyship from non-Black people, as well as the involvement of clergy.

Meetings of the group began online. "Bishop Geoff recommended we do noonday prayers," James says, "and then we would talk about anti-black racism, using a related topic for discussion." Shortly afterwards, due to diocesan responsibilities, Bishop Geoff had to resign as co-chair. As sole chair, James invited more individuals to become members of the committee, and clergy were invited to lead



**Rev. Wilson Akinwale, Cynthia Manswell, Dr. June James**



prayers. The conversation portion of meetings was “cathartic for those of colour,” James says, who were “relating openly, sometimes for the first time, instances of blatant discrimination in the churches they attended.” In addition to sharing personal experiences... the group discussed the historical mistreatment of Black persons in Canada. During this time, James was invited to several parishes to open church services with a message about the committee. James also shared information and numerous resources with the group about anti-black racism in professions such as medicine and the experience of Black Anglicans in England, using readings such as the work of [Glynne Gordon-Carter](#), as tools for discussion.

James and other committee members were in frequent contact with a larger established group based out of Ontario called [“Black Anglicans of Canada.”](#) Amidst the May 2020 protests responding to the murder of George Floyd, members of the Committee for Dismantling Anti-Black Racism attended a series of [online events](#), hosted by the group which featured speakers including Irene Moore Davis (interim chair of Black Anglicans of Canada), Br. Reginald Crenshaw, Rev. Jacqueline Daley, Bishop Peter Fentry, Lance Wilson (ODT), and Rev. Steve Greene.

Indigenous leaders participated in support of initiatives focused on dismantling anti-black racism, alongside both broader anti-racist initiatives and efforts to challenge anti-Indigenous racism specifically. Rev. Vincent Solomon, ministry developer for Urban Indigenous Ministries in the Diocese of Rupert’s Land, organized a national conference titled “Identity, Culture, and Scripture.” Speakers included Adrian Jacobs, Jeremy M. Bergen, Rt. Rev. Chris Harper, Rev. Jamie Howison, Dr. June James, Gung Yan (Joanne) Lam, and James Thunder. These speakers were invited to reflect on their identities in the church under the headings “White and Christian,” “Black and Christian,” and “Native and Christian.”

In May 2021 the Committee for Dismantling Anti-Black Racism presented a commissioned

report, drafted by James, and adopted and passed by the committee, titled “Walking Together for Racial Justice and Equality: Dismantling Anti-Black Racism in the Diocese of Rupert’s Land.” James stepped down as chair of the committee soon after the presentation of the report due to other commitments, though she continued to be involved with the group. Akinwale became the new chair.

James says that a highlight for her was in August 2021 when the Federal government passed a bill declaring Emancipation Day on August 1 as a public holiday. The Diocese of Rupert’s Land sent out a statement to churches celebrating the official creation of the holiday. Additionally, in 2022 Prime Minister Justin Trudeau gave an address related to Black History month, in which James... was named for her professional work and community involvement, related to dismantling anti-black racism.

Smandyich joined the committee in December 2021, and offered input from her previous collaboration with the Black Anglicans network.

The Committee for the Dismantling of Anti-Black Racism worked to draft motions related to furthering anti-racism efforts in the diocese. National networks of Black Anglicans had discussed the possibility of establishing chapters of the Black Anglicans of Canada group across dioceses. The committee in Rupert’s Land contacted those involved in the Toronto group to begin the process of establishing themselves as a chapter of the Black Anglicans network.

In October 2022, the committee's motions were passed at the 118th Synod. In March 2023, the group hosted the event [“Ours to Tell: Celebrating Black History”](#). This marked the official inauguration of the Black Anglicans of Canada chapter for the Diocese of Rupert’s Land, and hosted several esteemed guests.

### Goals

The Black Anglicans network has the [stated goals](#) of supporting Black belongingness, empowerment, participation, and representation.

The Diocese of Rupert's Land chapter works to forward these goals in its local context.

Akinwale states that one of his own goals is to ensure that the legacy of Black Anglicans does not die. "Some people have to carry it on," he says. He hopes that the national networks of Black Anglicans that have strengthened since 2020 can continue to connect with Black laypersons and clergy across the nation and work towards common goals. "There has to be partnership amongst all of us. We need to know what is going on across regions," Akinwale says.

### Recommendations and Resolutions

In May 2021, the Committee for the Dismantling of Anti-Black Racism presented six recommendations to the diocese for consideration. Among these recommendations were acknowledgment of anti-black racism in our diocese, and increased anti-racist training and education for clergy and laity. The group envisioned training that would go beyond raising awareness about racism and create self-sustaining anti-racist structures. According to the text of the report, this could happen through "intentionally support(ing) the discernment of Black Anglicans as to where their ministries lie within the Church," and through "foster(ing) a spirit of openness and transparency to speak up if racist behaviour or attitudes are observed." Another recommendation was to create mechanisms to address incidents of racism within the diocese with the input of the committee.

The motions presented at the 118th Synod in 2022 aimed at creating an official framework for carrying out future anti-racism work were particularly significant to the group. These motions, which were ultimately [passed as resolutions](#) were:

**C2:** that Diocesan Council undertake a critical examination of the diversity of representation, participation,

and leadership of Diocesan-level governance and decision-making bodies

**C3:** that this examination considers demographic diversity within the constituency of the Diocese of Rupert's Land and compares the diversity of representation, participation, and leadership of Diocesan-level governance and decision-making bodies, with demographic diversity, to assess whether the existing diversity in the Diocesan structures reflects diversity within society at large

**C4:** that the result of this examination of diversity be shared during Faith Horizons in the Fall of 2023

**C5:** that the diocesan council, with input from and in collaboration with the Diocese's Dismantling Anti-black Racism Committee, dedicate time and effort to develop a new policy and associated procedure regarding representation of marginalised persons, (other than Indigenous persons - recognizing that Indigenous persons in this Diocese have their own structures and governance, including the B-15 Committee), on Diocesan-level governance and decision-making bodies, and that the status of this policy/procedure be reported on at Synod 2024.

Akinwale says that, by passing these resolutions, the Black Anglicans, Diocese of Rupert's Land chapter has "set the pace" for other chapters. The group hopes to maintain this energy by supporting the resolutions, and ensuring follow-through on their enactment.

### Experiences of Anti-Blackness in the Anglican Church

The urgency of the group's work arises from an acute awareness of the presence of anti-blackness in the church both historically, and in the present, on national, as well as local, levels.

James notes that the "history of slavery, started by the Europeans, including the British, is instilled in the Anglican church." This history [shaped the Canadian context](#) in significant ways, as Canada was a part of the transatlantic slave trade and has a long history of anti-black racism both in official policy and social practice.



**Rev. Edmund Laldin**

James explains that during the American Revolutionary War, a significant number of enslaved Black persons travelled North to fight on behalf of the British against the Americans. When the war was over, those Black persons who fought for Canada were not treated with the respect their white counterparts received. Instead, James says, “white soldiers in Canada got the best land and Black people got scrubs.” While many of the Black Loyalists, as well as the later Black refugees of the 1812 war were Anglicans, they found themselves subordinated in Canadian Anglican churches. “Initially they had to sit in the back of the churches,” James says, “and then later they were sent to the rafters.” As a result of this discrimination, and at times due to explicit pressure from white clergy, many Black persons left the Anglican church to join other denominations.

Anti-blackness in the Anglican Church of Canada is not a thing of the past but continues to exist in the present day. Laldin points out that there is meagre representation of Black persons or Persons of Colour amongst national staff, and there is a similar lack of representation amongst the Anglican Foundation’s board of directors. Concerns expressed by Black Anglicans about the lack of Black representation have at times been met with defensiveness, and deflection by members of ACC staff.

A common way institutional representatives will deflect from questions about racial equality in hiring is to say that positions are open to all, and that marginalised groups are invited to apply, but often don’t come forward. Laldin remarks that individuals regularly do not feel comfortable coming forward for good reason. He notes that there is a sense of apathy and resignation from many BIPOC persons he has spoken to, resulting from negative experiences with the institutional church. Past encounters with racist hiring practices, and being rejected despite clear qualifications have made many reluctant to apply to positions. He also asks why the Anglican Church of Canada does not have mandates for representation in place, noting that it is within

the Primate’s control to create and enforce these mandates.

James notes other instances of this pattern, such as during the Covid pandemic lockdown when the Christmas services of various churches across Canada were featured by the national church. There was a marked absence of Black church representation, and when James reached out to national church staff to question this, she was met with the deflecting response: “We might have asked churches who didn’t respond.”

Also on the national level, Manswell notes an instance of discrimination in an Anglican Journal article, where white persons related to the text were spoken of at length while the single Black person referred to was given only three lines of description.

Anti-blackness is also present in the history of our local diocese.

Akinwale notes stories of Black candidates for ordination who have been rejected without explanation. He shares a personally devastating experience in which he was refused entry to a service he was supposed to be participating in at a neighbour parish. Despite those involved in the service, including a former clergy member, being aware that he would be at the service and participating, he was intentionally kept locked outside in the rain, and his knocking was ignored.

He also remarks that the Committee for the Dismantling of Anti-black Racism’s recent proposals to Synod were met with resistance from some individuals.

There are many stories too of anti-black racism within the context of local parishes. Laldin recounts how during his time as priest at All Saints, he noticed the hesitancy of many non-Black members to get to know Black congregants. There were also automatic assumptions made about Black parishioners. He recalls how he had to make a point of informing non-Black congregants of the careers, contributions, and achievements of Black members. He remarks that there is often not a welcoming space for marginalised persons to come forward and share in.

James expands on this, saying that she sees



Photo: [Anca Gabriela Zosin](#)

Black community members who have been disempowered so often they feel resigned to everyday racism: “So many times people have spoken out and nothing happens.”

James recounts how members of a local Anglican parish were surprised when a Black parishioner, who had been a resident of Canada for just over a year, showed up to church with a nice family-sized vehicle: “They assumed that when you come to church as a Black person—when you come from Africa—you must be from the dumps. They were wondering ‘How is this lady able to buy a car?’” James challenged these assumptions, addressing one parishioner who had come from Iceland, noting that she too was an immigrant who had been able to buy a car for her children.

Manswell also shares instances of racism experienced within local church communities. When she came as a student to All Saints, she says there were no other Black people in the congregation. She recalls how she sat at the back of the church during services and was not greeted by church members, with the exception of Rev. Ronald Shepherd. She recognized that there were many Caribbean immigrants in the city who were Anglican, but they were not represented in the pews of Canadian Anglican churches.

Manswell notes that at times she felt as though she was expected to come to church but keep quiet. She also spoke about white congregants who confused Black members for each other.

At one point Manswell told her church community that in Trinidad, Anglican churches make a point of explicitly welcoming

newcomers and asking them questions about their lives. She suggested this might be a way to make the parish more welcoming to new people, especially Black immigrants. Manswell’s suggestion was abruptly and rudely shot down by another parishioner, and went disregarded.

When Laldin became priest at All Saints he instituted Manswell’s suggestion, having also gone to Trinidad and experienced this welcome firsthand. As a result of this, he recalls a time a Black newcomer shared information about his life’s work with the congregation about having made monumental achievements in biology by isolating an enzyme for treating diabetes in mice. Laldin notes that without this formal welcome, the rest of the congregation likely would not have reached out and gotten to know the visitor, and the man may not have felt comfortable coming forward to share about himself.

Beyond explicit instances of anti-black racism, members of the Black Anglicans group note a lack of acknowledgment of the integral role Black communities have played in the Anglican Church of Canada, and the rich histories and gifts these communities have to offer the church here. James notes how integral Caribbean Anglicans are to the local Anglican community. “In nearly every church in this diocese there are Black people from the Caribbean.” And, she adds, Caribbean people “saved the Anglican church in Toronto.”

### Instances of support and solidarity

Maxwell also makes a point of acknowledging that there are many white Anglicans in the diocese who are supportive of Black communities. She specifically notes that at her home church of All Saints, “there were and still are a lot of very warm, welcoming, and supportive people.”

Akinwale too speaks to instances of solidarity, including expressed support for the work of the Committee for the Dismantling of Anti-black Racism, and shared commitment to their goals.

*to be continued in October’s issue*

An earlier version of this article was originally published in [Quaker Concern](#) by Canadian Friends Service Committee. It has been updated and republished here with permission.

The question “What do you believe?” is a challenge for an unprogrammed Quaker like me to answer, but I’ve found that the minutes of previous Quaker business meetings contain collective wisdom, innovation, Spirit, and Light that might provide some answers. Reading [minute 93 of the 1981 Canadian Yearly Meeting](#), also known as “the minute on prison abolition” over a decade ago helped lead me to membership in the Religious Society of Friends. I think it may also function as a source of insight for other faith communities.

The fact that Canadian Quakers could approve such a far-reaching, self-aware, radical, and deeply loving statement made me want to know more about Friends’ ways. This remarkable piece of collaborative writing made the Canadian Yearly Meeting “the first religious body to call for the abolishment of prison,” and lies at the heart of the Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC)’s criminal justice work.

The minute begins by situating us within the history of Quaker responses to crime:

*“Friends, partly through their own experiences in the prisons of the seventeenth century, became concerned about the treatment of the accused or convicted. Friends witnessed to their concern for the Divine Spirit in humans by seeing prisons as an alternative to corporal or capital punishment. Subsequently, they worked for reform of these prisons.”*

This gives us a long view of the development of the Quaker understanding of criminal justice, the enormous influence it has had on the world, and the unforeseen problems it contained. Quakers were among the first to promote the idea that incarceration was preferable to physical torture or death and believed that punishment and penance for crime could be accomplished via contemplation.

## What Do You Believe?: Prison Abolition in the Quaker Tradition

JOHN SAMSON FELLOWS

Photo: [Markus Spiske](#)

Many early penitentiaries enforced both isolation and silence, setting up the disastrous and inhumane conditions of the modern prison. Many Friends recognized that their original theories of incarceration were being used as new methods of torture, and attempted to reform the prisons they had helped create. This work brought us to the late 20th century and the moment Canadian Friends began to realize that their efforts at prison reform were no longer feasible: *“Today, Friends are becoming aware that prisons are a destructive and expensive failure as a response to crime. We are, therefore, turning our efforts to reform prisons to efforts to replace them with non-punitive, life-affirming, and reconciling responses.”*

For the 1981 Canadian Yearly Meeting in session, prison abolition was the logical next step in the long progression of Quaker thought. They not only recognized the need to physically dismantle an evil system, but also saw that they would have to rewire their own responses to crime, removing the impulse to punish and replacing it with ways to reconcile.

*“The prison system is both a cause and a result of violence and social injustice. Throughout history, the majority of prisoners have been the powerless and the oppressed. We are increasingly clear that the imprisonment of human beings, like their enslavement, is inherently immoral and is as destructive to the cagers as the caged.”*

[Statistics continue to bear this out](#)—it is no coincidence that most prisoners currently in jail in Canada are “the powerless and the oppressed.”

This paragraph also makes an evocative allusion to Quaker history—Quakers of the 18th century were led to look clearly at their sins and begin to work for the abolition of slavery. The concern for the spiritual well-being of those who run prisons echoes the work of past Friends like Benjamin Lay and John Woolman, who warned their fellow Quakers of the evil and soul-destroying nature of slaveholding. Friends here remind us that once we understand that something is wrong, we need to do something about it.

*“The challenge before us is to use alternatives based on economic and social justice and on the fulfillment of human needs. Some alternatives to prisons have already been developed and more are needed to bring about reconciliation and healing within the community. Friends need to seek out, develop, and support such programs. At the same time, we need to foster awareness in ourselves and others of the roots of crime and violence in society to ensure that our lives do not unintentionally reinforce these evils.”*

Here Friends make the case that prison abolition is a world building project connected to other great social and economic justice struggles of our time. We are encouraged to both generate our own alternatives to prisons, to make abolition a reality, and to support others engaged in this work. We are also reminded that the root of what we understand to be crime is injustice, and that injustice may be perpetuated in our own lives and ways of being.

*“Prison abolition is both a process and a long-term goal. In the interim, there is a great need for Friends to reach out to and to support all those affected: guards, prisoners, victims, and families.”*

Abolition is not just a theory, it also consists of concrete actions we must take every day. I hear echoes in this of George Fox’s assertion that Christianity is “not a notion but a way.” Abolition is more than a political movement, it is a process of community healing and personal reconciliation.

*“We recognize a need for restraint of those few who are exhibiting dangerous behaviour.*

*The kind of restraint used and the help offered during this time must reflect our concern for that of God in every person.”*

What seems like an afterthought or concession—that we will still need to use restraint on some people—turns out to be the most radical statement of the minute.

Our concern for that of God in everyone means absolutely everyone, even those who Friend [Ruth Morris](#) called “the dangerous few”, who she guessed made up 1 or 2 percent of prison populations. As she later put it, “persons who have committed a series of dangerous, violent acts need to be protected from their own impulses as much as we need to be protected from them. Such a separation must be in an environment completely different from our prisons, which are incubators of violence.”

Building this environment will depend on the structures of support and care we create in our communities and the accountability we build into our relationships with one another.

There is so much more wisdom and inspiration to be found in our Prison Abolition

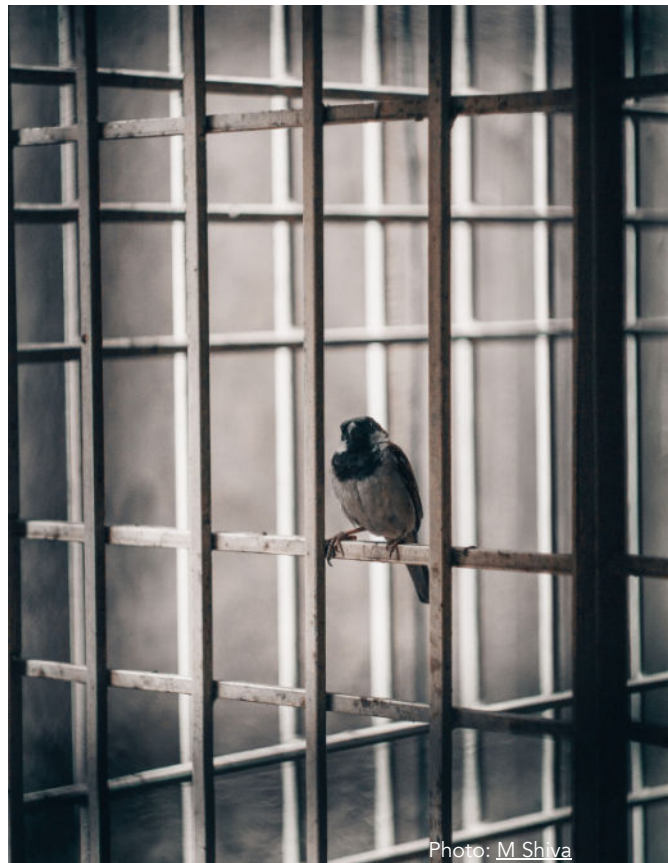


Photo: [M Shiva](#)

minute than I have space for here. I encourage readers to spend some time with the [text](#) ) and to be open to what it may have to say to faith communities today.

If the minute shows us a progression from building prisons to reforming them and then working for their abolition, what might be next?

I personally find direction in the work of many social movements for racial and economic justice, including Justice 4 Black Lives Winnipeg. This group has [sought to get the significant funding that currently goes to policing in the city shifted to investments in communities](#), seeing the abolition of police as the best path to the abolition of prisons and the establishment of true reconciliation and peace. Finding and supporting these expressions of abolition may connect you to those communities most affected by the criminal justice system.

I'm grateful that 40 years after it was approved, CYM minute 1981.08.93 abides in the work of the Canadian Friends Service Committee, and continues to provide me with one answer to the query, "What do you believe?"



Photo: [Caleb Gregory](#)



Photo: [Caleb Gregory](#)

#### Related Reading and Resources:

[Penal Abolition and Restorative Justice](#), Canadian Friends Service Committee

[God's total identification with the incarcerated](#)

[A Christian Case for Prison Abolition](#), Covenant

[Christians for the Abolition of Prisons](#)



John Samson Fellows is a cultural worker, activist, educator and abolitionist from Winnipeg, Treaty One Territory. He currently teaches creative writing at Stony Mountain Institution through the University of Winnipeg's Walls to Bridges program.

  
THE COURTYARDS  
AT LINDEN POINTE

# A TALE OF TWO WINTERS



Stop enduring the Winnipeg winters and start experiencing the Linden Pointe life. It is time to set aside the snow shovel and step into what retirement living should be.



The Courtyards at Linden Pointe presents a vibrant living experience for independent seniors. A community designed with premier amenities and light care assistance to promote an active lifestyle.

We call it Brightwater Tailored Living™.

YOU ARE INVITED FOR A PRIVATE TOUR

TO BOOK YOUR TOUR TIME • (431) 778-6105 OR [LISA.BRIGHT@BWLIVING.COM](mailto:LISA.BRIGHT@BWLIVING.COM)

# LINDEN POINTE

A BRIGHTWATER COMMUNITY

75 Falcon Ridge Drive • Winnipeg, MB R3Y 2C2