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RUPERT'S LAND NEWS

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CONNECTING CHURCH & COMMUNITY

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Editorial offices:

Anglican Lutheran Centre
935 Nesbitt Bay
Winnipeg Manitoba
R3T 1W6

Subscription queries:

Administrative Assistant for the Diocese
(204) 992-4200 | general@rupertslan.ca

RLN welcomes story ideas, news items and other input. If you want to be involved in this media ministry, please be in touch with the editor.

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Cover: Kathleen Brown tends some seedlings in hope of spring.

Correction: Oops! Jamie Wilson is the Commissioner for the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba (TRCM), not the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).




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In Memorium

TIMES OF TRANSITION *Allison Chubb*

As we move closer to the summer and the discontinuation of the print version of the magazine, we are developing a plan to ensure everyone continues to have access to RLN. If

you have an email address, please sign up for the online magazine and RLN Weekly by entering your email at rupertslandnews.ca. The sign-up box can be found on the righthand side, near the bottom of the page. If you have any trouble signing up, please don't hesitate to call or send me an email: rlnews@rupertsland.ca. If you do not have email access or someone who will print the paper for you each

month, please let your parish priest know. It is imperative that clergy are aware of who you are so we can work with them to ensure you receive a printed version of the electronic magazine. Please note that the Anglican Journal will continue to come in the mail for all of 2015; more information about this will be available in the May magazine. As always, your letters are welcome. 

BOOK REVIEW: **THE WHYs BOOK: PEW PONDERINGS & PERPLEXITIES, BY KENN GARRITY**

This book is built on real questions asked by real people. The greatest strength of the book, however, is that it brings everything to an understandable level. For example, in dealing with the Transfiguration, Garrity develops the relationship of Moses, Elijah, and Jesus and its implications for our relationships. Garrity owns the ideas in the book as his own, which are not always the official interpretation. Well worth the price and a good read.

Rev. Colin MacIver, Priest Associate at St. Thomas', Weston & St. Andrew's, St. Andrew's

I like the format of this book because it allows me to choose what I wish to read. Some of the responses to the questions

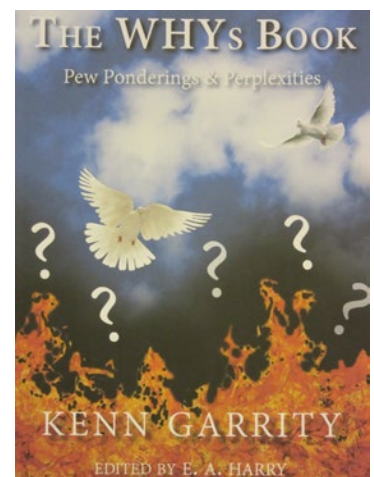
definitely make one think. I especially enjoyed reading the response to the question, "Why do you not consider Anglicans to be Protestant?" His understanding of this question made complete sense to me, and at the same time, I received a history lesson. The questions I have read, I have enjoyed very much.

Rev. Ted Nimik, Honorary Assistant at St. Saviour's, Winnipeg

Garrity has captured the 101 questions in The WHYs Book with his usual "flair," attending not only to the sometimes confusing biblical passages many of us struggle with, but also tackling such topics as: "Will our pets enter those pearly gates? Why is church

attendance shrinking?" and, "Should we forgive bullies?" Garrity answers the 101 questions that have been asked of him in great detail. The WHYs Book is an experience many of us could benefit from.

Rev. Deacon Marline Wruck, St. John's, Lac Du Bonnet



FREE UP \$50 WITH THE ANGLICAN FOUNDATION

Diana Swift, The Anglican Journal

Let's face it. Nowadays, \$50 doesn't buy a body very much — certainly not an annual membership in most national organizations. But for a parish, just five purple Sir John A's will buy it an annual membership in the Anglican Foundation of Canada (AFC), the Church's national charitable organization that funds a wide variety of projects in support of Canadian Anglicanism. In the past few years, the AFC has awarded half a million dollars in grants for ministries across the Anglican Church of Canada.

Under the executive directorship of Toronto-based Judy Rois, the AFC is currently running its "Free Up \$50" campaign. The goal is to get each one of the country's roughly 1,650 Anglican parishes on board with a \$50 donation. "Since the campaign began this past November, 65 new parishes have become AFC members," says Rois. "Added to the 400 existing members,


that leaves just 1,185 to go!"

Rois is optimistic about expanding AFC membership. "I believe most Anglicans are ready and willing to give to their Foundation so that it can be there for them when they need it," she says. "For various reasons, I think the entry fee of \$50 a year per parish may have simply fallen off people's radar." The AFC has been working hard to raise its profile and make people aware of its significant capacity to support Anglican ministries from infrastructure improvements to youth ministry and lots more in between.

Aware that supporting the AFC ultimately benefits their parishes, diocesan bishops are among the AFC's strongest proponents. "What goes around comes around," says Archbishop Percy Coffin, when asked why every parish in his Diocese of Western Newfoundland is an AFC member. The other two dioceses in Newfound-

land & Labrador (Central and Eastern) have also signed on. As Bishop David Torraville of the Diocese of Central Newfoundland puts it, "The Anglican Foundation is a way of saying that we are in this together."

Looking to the Far North, both the Diocese of Yukon and the Diocese of the Arctic purchased AFC memberships for all their parishes before Christmas 2014. "The Anglican Foundation has always been a fantastic partner with the Diocese of the Arctic," says diocesan Bishop David Parsons. "Investing in the AFC is really investing in our own family, and who wouldn't do that?"

Rois is hopeful that other Anglican jurisdictions across Canada will be inspired by the examples of these sparsely populated dioceses in Canada's most easterly and northerly regions. "They have really stepped up to the plate with all their parishes becoming annual donating members," she says. 



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THE WEEK THAT CHANGED THE WORLD *Donald Phillips*

Just as we explain all the details when we share a profound experience, the Gospel writers spend several chapters narrating the final week of Jesus' earthly life, giving us great detail about his trial, the journey to the site of the crucifixion, and even his last words uttered from the cross.

Why are we given such detail? It is for the same reason that the entire Gospels are written: to help you and me realize that this Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God, and that through him all of humanity and the whole of creation has been forever changed. When the narratives of the final week of Jesus' life are read as literature, we can't help but realize that we are reading about the life of someone like us, not living in 21st century Canada, but like persons living under oppressive regimes today.

The Jesus in these stories is just as powerless and vulnerable as we are. We are left with the deep realization that this is the account of one of us becoming a victim of the very forces that witness to humanity's utter inability to live in peace and justice with one other and this world. And ultimately, Jesus dies — just as we do.


Then we read of Jesus' rising from the dead. The Gospel writers do their best to describe an event which

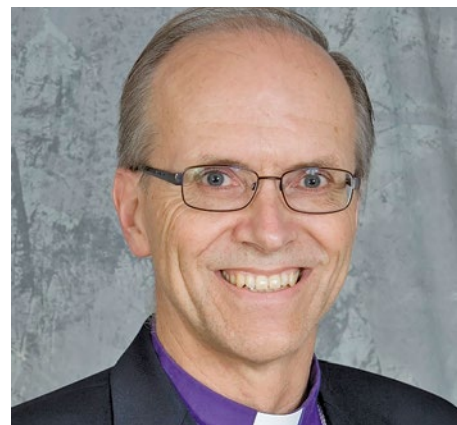
neither they, nor anyone else before them, had ever experienced. In our rationalistic age, we often focus on trying to make the possibility of bodily resurrection believable. But this is not the primary concern of the Gospel writers. They are focused on helping their readers to know that this risen Christ, who is clearly a manifestation of God, is the same person as the one who was crucified.



And guided by God's Spirit, the remainder of the New Testament provides us with accounts of how the disciples of Jesus continued to expand their realization of the cosmic significance of what had taken place. This act of God in saving humanity was not just for the occupied nation of Israel, nor only for the Greek-speaking world of the first century. It was nothing less than God's kingdom, the merciful and just reign of God, beginning anew in this world.

This may be true, but how are we to know it all happened, and with this world-changing effect? We

are to re-experience it. We gather as disciples, not just to hear the Gospel stories but to re-live them; the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday, the trial and crucifixion on Good Friday, the emptiness and grief of Holy Saturday, the discovery of the empty tomb early on Sunday morning, and the experience of the Risen Christ present in the midst of his disciples gathered. Every disciple experiences Jesus' death and resurrection through their baptism, and experiences the ongoing gift of his life through the sacrament of the Eucharist. This world-changing event will never be more real than it is in the Christian community gathered from Maundy Thursday to Easter Day — the Triduum — the Great Three Days. It is here, more than anywhere else, that we know Christ is risen; risen for you, for me, for the world. 



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

VIEW FROM **THE EMPTY TOMB***Shelagh Balfour*

In John's account of the resurrection, Simon Peter and "the other disciple" race to the tomb after being told that Jesus' body is gone. The other disciple hesitates at the entrance, but Peter goes in to see for himself. The Empty Tomb, a painting by Presbyterian minister and artist John Stuart, offers an image of what Peter might have seen as he stood puzzling at this strange thing that had occurred. The picture is from inside the tomb, looking out past the stone shelf and the draped linens toward the warm light of new day. The predominant colours of the picture are grey and black - light does not penetrate far into the cavern - but the tomb is empty, the stone

has been rolled away, and colour and light stream in through the entrance. We are drawn out of the darkness of the tomb into the light of the resurrection.

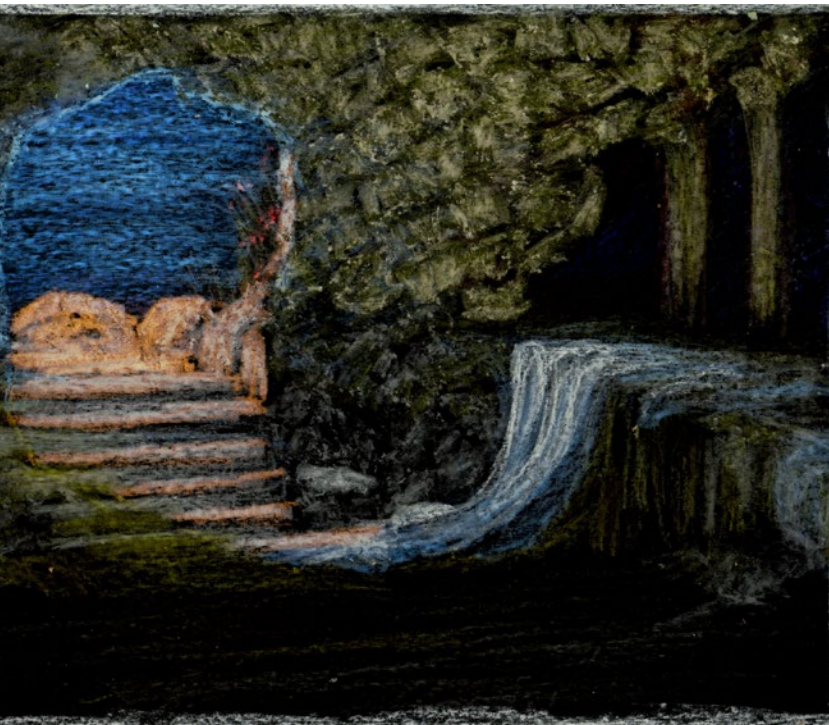
A few years ago, I entered a period in my life that felt very much like the darkness of the tomb. I experienced a series of health crises in a short period of time, which took me to the edge of my ability to cope. Ironically, as I progressed in my physical recovery, I found myself increasingly debilitated by depression. The world literally felt and looked endlessly dark and heavy, an oppressive place in which I could find no joy and no hope for any kind of future. My dreams were of death

and destruction. I entered an extended period in which life was simply "killing time" until death came, and I was convinced, despite all evidence to the contrary, that death would come sooner rather than later.

And yet, as I reached the depth of darkness, I found that God was there with me. When I was unable to hope for myself, I knew beyond doubt that God was hoping for me. However far I fell, however alienated from the world I felt, I was never truly alone.

Easter does not happen without the cross, without the extreme suffering that our Lord experienced for our sake. Nor, I would say, does it happen without the tomb. Our familiarity with the Easter story and its triumphal ending can lead us to slide quickly over the time between Jesus's death on the cross and his resurrection. Holy Saturday is the day we celebrate the Easter vigil, and we move quickly to the new fire and the alleluia's.

But imagine it from the



◀ *Photo: John Stuart*



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perspective of Jesus' followers on that first terrible day. Imagine the oppressiveness of grief, the darkness of lost hope. Imagine them reliving the horror they had seen, and the fear that, with their teacher so brutally killed, death could not be far away for them. Their lives, their hopes, their futures, had all gone down to the grave with their Lord.

Now, with that in mind, think of Peter running to the tomb on Sunday morning, entering it and finding it empty just as he'd been told. Certainly, neither he nor the rest of the disciples would have understood all that had happened in a moment or in a day. But what joy and amazement they would have experienced as the reports of Jesus, alive and well, began to trickle in.

One could spend a lifetime meditating on Jesus' resurrection and, in the end, still be left with mystery and wonder. It speaks to us with a different voice in the various ages and stages of our life and has something particular to say to us in times of suffering. Our Lord was a man, a human being who suffered. He knows what it means to suffer, to have death looming close, and what it means to die. When we experience our own times of deep sorrow and suffering, he is a sure companion and a faithful guide. He has been there before us and will not leave us alone, even when we despair.


Yet because of the resurrection, Jesus is also more than this. He is our sure and certain hope that, whatever the outcome in our

lives, death will never have the last word. He will be our companion and guide in the dark, oppressive times in the tomb, but, ultimately, he will lead us into the warm light of his new day. At times, this may seem remote and far off, and yet the promise remains. I have lived in the darkness, and the journey out has been a long one. For some, I know, it is a journey of an entire lifetime. But Jesus has gone before us. He has provided us with the way through and victory at the end. Thanks be to God. 


Shelagh Balfour is the Administrative Assistant and an active member of St. Peter's, Winnipeg

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HOLY SMOKE!

Kevin Frankland

The choir was practising as I entered and I heard the very Tudor Anthems which had so captivated me in my listening lesson assignments. But this was no recording. "This is surely what heaven must sound like," I thought. But what was that incredible smell?

I came to Anglicanism as a university student, disillusioned, questioning, searching. Growing up in an evangelical free-church tradition, the notion of a fixed and prescribed form of worship was very strange — indeed, it was just wrong! Yet even in my early teens I had been fascinated by my grandmother's Prayer Book and committed the Creeds to memory. I even learned to make the sign of the cross, and used it in my private prayers. I vividly remember the first time I entered an Anglican Church. What I did not know at the time was that this was not just any Anglican church. This was "that church." Intimidating from the outside, vitrified brick with turrets and battlements, the inside, by contrast, was bright and warm with gleaming brass, flickering multi-coloured votive candles, icons, and statues. But what was that indescribable scent in the air?

As a music student, I had been studying Grout's History of Western Music. The Church Modes and Gregorian

Chant were a purely academic exercise, with no real practical application. We were nevertheless required

to memorize the five parts of the Ordinary and listen to a recording of a complete plainsong Latin mass. It was strange, other-worldly, unlike anything we had ever heard before. Although I would never admit it to my classmates, I actually liked that recording, and furtively listened to it again and again. But while it did have excellent programme

notes, this was no substitute for a first-hand experience.

We had by now moved well beyond Gregorian Chant and into Renaissance polyphony, including the English composers Tallis and Byrd. I was mesmerized by the sheer beauty and simplicity. It transported me to another realm. A friend had told me about this unusual church where he had gone for a Christmas carol service, so I decided to check it out one weekday evening. The quiet 'said' mass was held in

the small Lady Chapel. The people were actually kneeling for prayer, genuflecting, and crossing themselves.



Photo: Flickr

They physically went up to the altar and knelt for communion. Wow! It was all so... reverent. I had grown up with the King James Bible (and to this day, nothing else really sounds like the Bible), and in high school I discovered Shakespeare, but here was an entire service in that same beautiful language.


Choir practice was to follow mass, and I asked if I might sit in. To my delight, I was invited not only to join them in the rehearsal, but to come back and sing with

them on Sunday — to sing the very music which had so captivated me in those listening assignments. It was not just academic, theoretical and historical, after all. It was a living tradition. The next Sunday, I experienced it all in action, in its proper setting — an actual solemn mass. And I finally discovered what that divine fragrance was. I then understood why frankincense was one of the gifts of the Magi, was used in the Jewish Temple rites, and in the ultimate worship of God in the Revelation. Sights, sounds, smells, tastes, gestures — all came together in one glorious experience of worship. It all seemed to fit. This truly expressed what I believed about God. Yes, this was where I belonged.

So, what is this An-

glo-Catholic thing all about? Well, it is much more than “smells and bells.” Indeed, the “spikes” and “nose-bleeds” have no place in true Anglo-Catholicism. One can have all the incense and lace, all the goldwork and silk brocade imaginable, and totally miss the point of it all. The early Tractarians were not primarily ritualists. The Oxford Fathers Keble and Pusey kept to a very simple ceremonial. Their goal was to remind Anglicans that Henry VIII did not start a new church, the Church of England; that the English reformers merely sought to strip the existing apostolic Ecclesia Anglicana of those layers of mediaeval accretions which had devolved into abuse and superstition.

Thus, Anglo-Catholicism is a theological position,

emphasizing our continuity with the undivided Church of antiquity, the apostolic succession of Holy Orders, and the importance of the sacraments, particularly holy communion, as a means of God’s grace and salvation. But, first and foremost, Anglo-Catholicism acknowledges the utter transcendence of God. Everything we do, in church and beyond, stems from this. 



Kevin Frankland is the new priest at St. Michael and All Angels', Winnipeg.  He recently joined us from Nova Scotia.

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PARISH NEWS **ROUND UP**

▷ St. Aiden's Christian School

The School is holding its annual fundraising dinner on Thursday, April 16, at Calvary Temple. Money raised will go toward education for students in the inner-city who attend the two St. Aiden's campuses. Tickets are \$30 each. For more information on the program and how to buy tickets, visit rupertslandnews.ca/staidens-school-dinner or call them directly at (204) 488-5051.

▷ St. Peter's, Winnipeg

St. Peter's is hosting their annual emerging artists show and sale, Friday, April 24, to Sunday, April 26. All are welcome to browse or buy the work of local artists. For full details, or to download the poster, visit rupertslandnews.ca/event/emerging-artists.

▷ University of Winnipeg

Did you miss hearing Cornel West at the Trinity Conference in January? Come hear him lecture on Social Justice and the Public Good on Friday, May 8, 7:00 p.m. in Riddell Hall at the University of Winnipeg.

▷ Canadian Council of Churches

The Canadian Forum on Inter-Church Dialogue will take place June 22-25 in Saskatoon. Alyson Barnett-Cowan, a Canadian who has recently finished her term as the Anglican Communion's Director of Unity, Faith and Order, will be a keynote speaker. For more information, please contact Bruce Myers at bmyers@national.anglican.ca.

▷ Holy Saturday

Did you know there will be a partial lunar eclipse between Good Friday and Holy Saturday this year? If you're keeping watch in the early morning, the moon will be reddest at 7:00 a.m. as it disappears over the western horizon.

Do you have an event of interest to the wider diocese? Send us the details at least six weeks in advance of the next paper (for example, a notice to be published in the June paper is due April 16).

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NAVIGATING THE JOYS AND CHALLENGES OF RURAL MINISTRY

John Dolloff



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Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves. Psalm 126:6

It was a week before Valentine's day and the cemetery was cold! The wind blew right through my coat and suit as if they were made of paper. Within thirty seconds, my ears were frozen and I was on the verge of shivering uncontrollably. This all contributed to the general unpleasantness of having to say our final farewell to the deceased.

Yet through the blowing snow, across the field we could see the farm where this gentleman had been born ninety-one years ago, a reminder of where his life

had begun and where it had returned. In the meantime, he had enjoyed a successful career as a pilot in the air force and life as a husband and father. His life had touched many others for the better. In the midst of the cold and sorrow, there was the legacy of a life well-lived.

My time in the cemetery serves as a powerful metaphor for the practice of ministry in general, and in rural Manitoba in particular. Just like the wind in the cemetery, there are powerful forces at work, forces which can make one uncomfortable and lead to anxiety. However, just like at the graveside, there are powerful signs of God's presence at work in the midst of sorrow to bring

new life in rural ministry.

Are there challenges? Of course there are. However, some of the challenges can also be strengths. For instance, many rural churches have a small membership, which is seen as less than ideal. While I don't want to minimize the challenges this presents, a smaller membership can also be a strength.

The late Mike Yaconelli in an article entitled, "A Better Idea Than Youth Ministry," describes church in the following terms:

"Yes, that's right. Church. The place where people who don't know each other get to know each other; where people who normally don't associate with each other, associate; where

people who are different learn how to be one. Mostly, church is the place where we can grow old together... Growing old together is where we teach (and learn from) each other what discipleship means in the everyday world."


I would contend that most rural churches are ideally placed to live out this reality. Some might think that this automatically happens in communities where everyone knows one another, but I believe that learning about discipleship from one another requires communities to be intentional about providing opportunities for nurturing relationships between members.

One place where this has happened at St. Mary's la Prairie is at our men's group. On the first Saturday of each month, a group of men gathers at 9:30 a.m. for breakfast. Following the

meal, one of the men shares with the group whatever he wishes about his life. In many cases, these are men who have known each other for years, so you might think they already know one another. Yet their comments reveal that you might not know the person you sit next to in church as well as you think. Rural churches have the opportunity to facilitate relationships that lead to a rich harvest in faith building relationships.

Rural churches also have the opportunity to foster communities of diverse membership where people who are very different learn to be one. Within our men's group we have accountants, social workers, dentists, and realtors, to name a few. We have a number of men who served in Canada's armed forces, and we've also heard from a Mennonite whose ancestors were impris-

oned for their pacifism. Yet all were able to accept and celebrate the life experience of the other.

One of the things I quickly noticed when I served in a community with more than one Anglican Church was how many of the people I served had spent time at one of the other parishes. For Anglicans in rural communities, that is just not an option. This means that rural churches by their very nature have to learn to embrace diversity. As I reflect back on my experience of rural ministry, it is with a profound sense of gratitude for the privilege of being welcomed into the lives of so many individuals. As we journey together I know that we not only grow older together but that we grow into Christ. 

John Dolloff is the priest at St. Mary's la Prairie, Portage la Prairie.

LEARNING EASTERTIDE FROM THE MONKS

Jamie Howison

From my very first visit to Collegeville, Minnesota, I've been smitten by the place. It was the summer of 2008, and I'd been given the opportunity to attend a Collegeville Institute writing workshop. Since that first visit, I've returned four more times, including a month-long sabbatical stay in 2011.

But the Institute is only one

of many things that draws people to Collegeville. The place isn't a town or a village, at least not in any conventional sense. At its heart lies St. John's Abbey, which is the largest community of Benedictine monks on the continent. That Benedictine heart is at work in everything else that is part of Collegeville,

including St John's University, St. John's Preparatory School, The Liturgical Press, and The Hill Manuscript Museum. It is all set on some 2000 acres of property set aside as a wildlife reserve, which the monastic community protects and treasures with great care.

That diversity is an expression of a Benedictine ethos of balance, learning, gen-

erosity, and hospitality, an ethos learned in the school of life that is the monastic rhythm of daily prayer through all the seasons of the year. It was during a 2009 Eastertide writing retreat that I unexpectedly learned something from that Benedictine school of life, namely, that Eastertide is a fifty day festal season.

Don't get me wrong. I was aware that the Easter season runs from Easter Day through to Pentecost, and I was accustomed to setting adult baptisms and confirmations within those fifty days. I'd often made the point in my preaching that after the forty days of Lent it was right and good to observe fifty days bathed in the resurrection light. But quite honestly, aside from the addition of all of those alleluias, I think I treated the fifty days as being little more than "Ordinary Time plus." The monks of St John's turned me around on that count.


We were coming up on the fifth Sunday in Easter when the Institute residents were invited to join the monastic community for lunch following Sunday mass. As the liturgy came to its close, Fr. Kilian McDonnell escorted us into the monastery. We stopped in a small reception room, where Kilian — a monk of the Abbey since the late 1940's — served us appetizers and modest little glasses of wine. He raised his glass and wished us all a

happy Easter season, and I thought to myself, "Now isn't that a gracious Benedictine touch, to offer guests a bit of Easter wine before lunch is served." After a few minutes of conversation, Kilian had us follow him into the dining room.

I'm not sure if my jaw literally dropped when I saw the feast that lay before us, but that was certainly what it felt like. The long serving tables were set up in a "T" shape, at which members of the monastic community were happily filling their plates. To my left, I saw steam trays filled with all of the breakfast staples: eggs, sausages, bacon, hash browns, pancakes, Belgian waffles. To my right were all manner of cold options: salads and pickles, olives and cold cuts, as well as steamed vegetables and roasted potatoes. The table down the centre held roast turkey, roast ham, and roast beef, each ready to be carved. Just across from the very base of the "T," another table was set with bottles of wine, cold beer, and an array of juices and soft drink options.

Having filled my plate and poured a more generous glass of wine, I settled in at the guest table, where I was soon joined by Father Kilian. He smiled and said, "We don't always eat like this, you know. But it is Easter, and Sundays in Easter are always real feast days in the Abbey."

That's the moment I saw it; the moment I realized that Eastertide really is meant to be a fifty day festal season, not just a set of Sundays with a lot of alleluias added to the communion rite. There in the Abbey dining room I saw it — and tasted it — for the first time.

Sundays in Easter are always real feast days, Kilian had told me, but that is partly because his community knows something about the fasting and restraint of Lent and of the work-a-day ordinariness of Ordinary Time. In that is the gift of the liturgical year, a gift we do well to receive. 

Alleluia!

*Christ our Passover is
sacrificed for us;*

*Therefore let us
keep the feast.*

Alleluia!



△ Jamie Howison is the priest at St. Benedict's Table, Winnipeg

Ron McCullough

Priest, Mentor, Friend

On the cold afternoon of January 29, a man lingered at the back of the church following the funeral for Ron McCullough, unable to bring himself to leave. It was clear that after experiencing Ron's friendship, Terry Weaymouth's life would never be the same. For him, Ron wasn't just another minister; he was a friend, a mentor, even a father figure.

Terry's eyes filled with tears as he recalled the man he had known for nearly ten years. Not just anyone could fill the role of "mentor" for Terry, but Ron was the kind of man he could trust. He was "very genuine," with deep concern for the needs of those around him. When Terry struggled to believe in himself, Ron would see his full potential, encouraging him to dream and make goals. Few people in the world have had

such faith in Terry.


Ron particularly encouraged him to embrace his unique heritage. As an Ojibwa man adopted by an Anglo-Saxon family, Terry had often felt like an outsider to both his birth community and his adoptive community. Ron, however, saw this heritage as a gift, something to be embraced and better understood. Ron believed it was important for people to be unashamed of who they are, because each person is a gift which reflects God's glory.

Terry had been particularly struck by the sacrifices Ron made for the life of ministry, dedicating his entire life to caring for his family, the Church. Ron was accustomed to long drives, prison visits, and sleepless nights in order to serve those God had placed in his care. Unsatisfied with "just good

enough," Ron was unafraid to ask difficult questions. This created in him the vocation of a true Deacon: a man who stood with one foot in the world and one in the Church, continually attempting to translate the needs of one for the other. He spent many years as a chaplain in multiple prisons and was accustomed to

serving in multi-point parishes. Those who remember him fondly also include many of Winnipeg's poor, whom he loved deeply.

Ron's relationship with local Indigenous communities went further than the words he spoke to Terry. When 19-year-old Matthew Dumas was shot dead by a Winnipeg police officer in 2005, Ron offered to take his funeral. And for decades, he travelled between Winnipeg and Fairford to be the priest at St. Helen's, on the Pinaymootang First Nation. Among the full church that day sat a large number of friends from the Church and the Reserve, anxious to say goodbye to the man who treated them as brothers and sisters.

Chief Garnet Woodhouse had known Ron since the late '70's, shortly after he arrived at St. Helen's. Chief Woodhouse knew few non-Indigenous people as "supportive of the community" as Ron was. A man of prayer, Ron's spirit of generosity seemed to leave a mark wherever he went. In fact, he identified so closely with the Chief's Soto Nation that it was sometimes joked, "Father Ron, the only thing you're missing now is your Status number!" When asked what made Ron different, Chief Woodhouse responded, "He believed we are all equal in the sight of God." 



LIVES OF THE DESERT FATHERS

John Wortley

By “Desert Fathers” we mean the earliest Christian monks: Egyptian men (and some women) who chose to exchange life as it was lived in towns and villages for an austere existence in the desert, largely inspired by the example of Abba Antony of Egypt, ca 250-356. Shortly after Anthony died, Athanasius the Great wrote a Life of Antony, one of our main sources of information about those early monks. But by the end of the fourth century, a corpus of aural lore was being developed in the monastic retreats of Lower Egypt. This oral corpus continued to grow and was still growing when around AD 500, it was committed to writing (in Greek). This was the work of some monks who had taken refuge in Palestine from the attacks of barbarians in the area.

Once they were safe in Palestine, the monks sought to preserve in writing the aural tradition they had brought with them. They called their work, *Apophthegmata Patrum*, “Sayings of the [Desert] Fathers”. The title is inadequate, for, in addition to many sayings of various fathers, there are also

tales. These included both anecdotes from “lives of the Fathers” (as the tales were sometimes rather grandly known) and anonymous tales of a more general nature. But regardless of genre, every tale has a moral - much like the narratives in the



Photo: Flickr, Father Photios Cooper

Gospel According to Luke.

The reason such tales were retained and recorded together with the Fathers’ sayings was that they were considered to be spiritually beneficial. This gives a clue to what the whole corpus was about: apart from the Scriptures, it was all they possessed by way of guidance in how to live the life of a monk. On closer examination, it can be seen that

the sayings and the tales indicate, respectively, the theory and the practice of Christian monastic life as it was first conceived. Over the following millennium, monasticism would achieve massive importance and leave a profound imprint on the evolution of the Church, one which we ignore at our own peril.

If the statistics from the tales and sayings can be trusted (one can never be sure), so many folk withdrew from “the world” — which more or less meant the valley and estuary of the Nile — that Athanasius could say, “The desert became a city”. Apart from those who entered the large and well-organised institutions in the Thebaid associated with Pachomius, most would-be monks started out as apprentices to some experienced Father in a small community. Some would stay there all their lives, and a few would become Fathers of their own communities, while a very few would withdraw into the fastnesses of the desert to live (and maybe to die) as hermits.

Wherever they were living, all monks sought, above all, to obey the Pauline

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John Wortley is a retired priest and Desert Fathers scholar.

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injunction to “pray without ceasing.” (1 Th 5:17) To this end, they would learn the Psalms and large portions of the Scriptures by heart. These, they would constantly repeated aloud, both when they assembled for worship and while they worked with their hands: this they called meditation. They constructed baskets, ropes, mats — anything that could be made from the rushes and palm-leaves that were readily at hand. We get a glimpse of it here:

Once when the holy Abba Antony was residing in the desert, overcome by accidie and a great darkening of logismoi he was saying to God: “Lord, I want to be saved, and my logismoi donot leave me alone. What am I to do in my affliction? How am I to be saved?” Going outside [his cell] a little way, Antony saw somebody like himself, sitting working

— then standing up from his work and praying; sitting down again, working at rope-braiding, then standing to pray once more. It was an angel of the Lord sent to correct Antony and to assure him. And he heard the angel saying: “Act like this and you shall be saved.” He experienced much joy and courage on hearing this and, acting in that way, he went on being saved. [Antony 1, APSys 7.1]

Monks worked, not only to support themselves, but to have something with which to relieve the poor and to entertain visitors who came their way. This they did in the belief that in serving the poor and the stranger they were ministering to Christ himself. But for themselves, they had little mercy. Fasting, which was held to be a most salutary practice, was carried to inordinate lengths. Of sleep they often had too little, and

there were many other ways in which they tortured themselves to beat down “the old man.” It was only gradually that wiser fathers began to realise that there had to be moderation in all things. The word discretion or discernment [diakrisis] became increasingly common — to the point that this was eventually regarded as one of the most important monastic virtues, without which no good thing could be accomplished.

“Abba Anthony said: ‘There are those who wore their bodies away with spiritual discipline [askesis], but became far from God, because they did not have discretion.’” [Anthony 8, APSys 10.1] When an unnamed elder was asked: “What is the monk’s task?” he replied, “Discretion.” [N.93 APSys 21.9] There were many other tasks to be sure: obedience, indifference to physical conditions, purity; there were about twenty ideals for which the monk was to strive, but the one that is most often mentioned and which appears to have been considered the key to all the others is humility. Abba Antony said: “I have seen all the snares of the devil spread out on earth, and I said with a sigh: ‘Who can pass these by?’ and I heard a voice saying to me: “Humility.” [Antony 7, APSys 15.3] 

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