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# ORA ET LABORA

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

Cover: [C D-X](#)

# Ora et Labora

When we take the time to pray, we take the time to develop our relationship with God. Speaking for myself, sometimes prayer is contemplative, emotional, nourishing, and exciting. Sometimes, though a part of me doesn't like to admit it, prayer can be tough. I may feel unable to focus, too busy, or, even though there are an uncountable number of needs in the world, unsure of what to pray for. But God is always there. He is watching, listening, sharing, laughing, crying, and walking with us; He gives His all for us 100% of the time. And He rejoices when we can take a moment, even just a small moment, to be with Him. What a gift.

Despite the busyness of our lives, we can find these moments everywhere — if we make the conscious effort to seek them. So much of our time is spent on our work. We work for our livelihood, we work for causes we care about, we work to build relationships, and the list goes on. Our work, in all its many facets, is central to our lives and who we are as people. But *what* we do in our work and *how* we approach it makes all the difference. When we allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit, we bring glory to God. And so, when we approach our work virtuously and practice integrity, patience, and kindness towards ourselves and one another, we honour God.

In this issue, Dr. Obren Amiesimaka begins by looking at *The Rule of St. Benedict* and explains further what work and prayer are. Ultimately, he says, it is a balance of the two that leads to a healthy spiritual life.

Following this, Sr. Mary Coswin writes on how our desires and longings will lead us to the Lord. When we pray, we make the decision to actively seek the One who has sought us all along. She quotes St. Augustine's *Confessions*, "You have made us for Yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You."

As [Ian Simkins](#) aptly puts it, "in the garden, Adam and Eve's first full day was not a day of work. It was a day of



Photo: [Simon Morley](#)

rest. That order is significant. That means that we work from rest, not rest from work. Rest is not a reward. It's a gift." We can only work — and truly work well — when we have rested. We think about our work all the time, but we must pay more attention to our rest as well. This is what Ryan Turnbull and Zoe Matties call attention to.

Inspired by the Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han, Ryan Turnbull presents the idea that we structure our lives based on what we *can* and *should* be doing. But that sometimes, and perhaps more often than we may think, doing things that may seem "useless" is what we need to take a deep breath and delight in the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Then, Zoe Matties invites us to practice the Sabbath in ways we may not have initially thought of. On the seventh day of creation, God delighted in what He had made. As such, we are also called to slow down, re-orient ourselves, and delight in what God has made.

Finally, I am delighted that I got a chance to meet with our new diocesan PWRDF representative, the Rev. Deacon Gabriel Kwenga (who goes by Kwenga). A man with infectious joy and perseverance who is dedicated to serving God and God's people every day in his work and prayer.

Peace be with you; I hope you enjoy.



CINNA BARAN

Editor of Rupert's Land News

# Thanksgiving



It is Thanksgiving... I give thanks.

To whom? About what?

I boldly give thanks to God so all may hear, as though the entirety of creation must digest it and swallow it to the maker of heaven and earth. I give thanks out loud for that which I did not make nor own, yet I have utilized for my own sustenance, or that of those near to me. I give thanks because that is what I ought to do.

Stewarding disciples within God's only Son are thankful that their lives are within the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Ours were the sufferings He bore, and it remains that the sufferings of the world continue to be born-out in thanksgiving. We are thankful because Jesus, whose Body we inhabit, is thanksgiving. In fact, He is the Great Thanksgiving, broken for the world, poured-out so that all may have fullness of God's gift of life for all.

God gives us the opportunity to think, reflect, and engage the world in a manner of great trust and friendship, making stewarding disciples active in Jesus' loving work throughout creation. In that work, disciples walk alongside God's children wherever we chance to meet them. Encounters will lead to conversations that Christ desires to initiate — they may be difficult and strange, or

inviting and fun. Regardless of the nature of the conversation, it is always an opportunity for the illumination of God in Christ to and for the world.

Christ, the Great Thanksgiving, remains at the heart of each conversation, even the most difficult thereof; and it is here in the midst of relationships that Jesus is sacred. It is here in the midst of relationship and conversation that the opportunity for forgiveness, healing, freedom, and love are constantly available. Here in the midst of relationships we can behold God doing something new in every moment. In great thanksgiving transformation and growth just happen... that is, when we are open to God's heaven close at hand.

Of course, not all conversations move along at the same pace, intensity, or investment. In fact, no conversation in a relationship will be the same as any other. Those conversations born out of deep hurt, broken trust, and estrangement require profound investments of courage, energy, and care that go far beyond what people may normally think to invest. Some conversations have become robotic, emotionless, one-way instructional moments which do not seek anything beyond itself — as if no investment in the other party is remotely necessary. Yet through the other, Christ may deliberately scream back.

All encounters are an opportunity for great thanksgiving — a sacredness born from Christ's trust in His disciples, those whom he called friends. Like the many conversations Jesus had through the gospels, we too ought to engage — not by telling others how to believe, but allowing their faith in God to heal and set them free. This is all the more powerful a message as disciples discover that God continues to do the very same for them through the many with whom we walk.

Thank you.



GEOFFREY WOODCROFT

Bishop of Rupert's Land



Photo: Federico Respini

# Balancing Prayer and Work

OBREN AMIESIMAKA

*Ora et Labora*, prayer and work, is the cornerstone phrase and encapsulating spirit of *The Rule of St. Benedict*. St. Benedict of Nursia (480 – 547 AD) was the founder of a dozen monastic communities in present-day Italy for whom he penned his Rule. Comprising 73 chapters, it has become the seminal guideline for monks and monastic living.

It is thus no surprise that St. Benedict is patron saint of monks and people in religious orders. His influence has also made him the patron saint of a variety of occupations (e.g. civil engineers, farmers), diseases (e.g. inflammatory diseases, fever) and places (e.g. Europe), amongst others (e.g. students, temptations, the dying, against curses).

Central to *Ora et Labora* is maintaining a balance between prayer and work as St. Benedict believed that neither prayer nor work need overwhelm the other in a monk's life. Its application does not stop at the monastery door, however, as it is instructive for spirituality in daily life.

A former boss of mine in academia always advised that one begin writing with defining the terms one wishes to speak about.

So, what is *ora* (prayer)?

“Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the

requesting of good things from God.” ([St. John Damascene](#))

St. Therese of Lisieux [said](#), “for me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.”

The Church of England [says](#), “to pray is to make our hearts ready to experience the love of God in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.... Prayer opens us more deeply to the transforming grace of God. We enter into God's presence, allowing the Holy Spirit to pray in us.”

Likewise, the Catechism of the Catholic Church ([CCC 2558](#)) describes prayer as “a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God”. The CCC further describes prayer as God's gift, as “a covenant relationship between God and man in Christ”, and as communion.

In brief, prayer is relationship and communication with God; be it for thanksgiving, praise, repentance/forgiveness, salvation, protection, request, lamentation, direction or more — as we see in the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:2-4).

Personally, prayer is a manifestation of my faith; and faith is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). When I pray, I do so in the firm belief that God listens to me and will answer me. I pray as often as I feel the need — anytime, anywhere, and employing any means – song, chant, word; out loud or internally.

Turning to *labora*, what is work?

In lay terms, work is “any activity performed by persons of any sex and age to produce goods or to provide services for use by others or for our own use” ([International Labour Organization](#)). This definition encompasses the variety of human endeavours from employment for income to knitting oneself a hat. However, it limits work to physical activity. Indeed, the Bible does recognise this kind of

‘physical’ work.

God charges humans to work: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (Gen 2:15). In fact, the Lord recognises work as integral to human living: “Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work” (Deuteronomy 5:13); even our Lord Jesus Christ did have his handiwork: “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary...?” (Mark 6:3a).

However, besides divine work of God as in Genesis 1 and 2, the Bible does also speak of work that is manifestation or fruit — there are the works of the flesh and works which are fruit of the Spirit. In Galatians 5:19-21, St. Paul lists many things which are works of the flesh (including adultery, hatred, strife, heresies, murders, etc.). Conversely, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance...” (Galatians 5:22-23a). Here, St. Paul juxtaposes works which are vice and those which are virtue, neither of which need necessarily be physically enacted.

*Ora et Labora*: Pray and Work

“Pray as though everything depended on God. Work as though everything depended on you.” These words are attributed variously to St. Augustine or St. Ignatius of Loyola.

To my mind, *Ora et Labora* highlights the importance of *balance* between prayer and work. The success of any work we do depends on God who we commune with in prayer. Our physical work — everything from animal husbandry to piloting aeroplanes, teaching to tending the sick, almsgiving to visiting the imprisoned — is underpinned by works which are manifestations of the fruit of the Spirit or works of the flesh; as are all our thoughts, words and deeds.

We pray to maintain our relationship, communion and connection with God, and for spiritual growth. By so doing, we are strengthened by God, through whose grace our physical work may be guided by the fruit of the Spirit. For instance, a lawyer could pursue justice and serve the poor pro bono or could act without integrity and defraud their clients. Prayer helps keep us tethered to God and on the path of righteousness.

Indeed, the need for balance is exemplified by 1 Thessalonians saying: “pray without ceasing” (5:17), whilst also saying: “make it your goal to live a quiet life, minding

your own business and working with your hands...” (4:11).

Our Lord Jesus Christ shows us that we should both pray and work.

The Gospels report our Lord praying at several times: Matthew 11:25, John 17, Luke 22:39-44, Mark 15:34, and others. Through this, Christ shows us that prayer nourishes our faith, strengthens us to run the Christian race, and keeps us actively connected with God.

Nonetheless, everywhere He went, our Lord was doing good works such as teaching as seen in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5); challenging exclusionary practices/institutions, such as eating with ‘sinners’ (Matthew 9:10-12); saving situations, like calming the storm on the sea of Galilee (Luke 8:22-25); casting out unclean spirits (Mark 1:23-28); healing the sick, including the woman with the issue of blood (Luke 8:43-48); and raising the dead, as He did with Lazarus (John 11:38-44). But His greatest act was ultimately dying on the cross.

Christ did these works recognizing the frailty of humans, as with St. Thomas who needed evidence of His physical works — i.e. touching the stigmata — to believe in His resurrection (John 20:24-29). Importantly, our Lord addressed the real and present needs of the people. The significance of this is emphasised in James 2:14-26 which teaches that “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus, also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

*Ora et Labora* are important for Christian life both within and without monasteries. Not least because most people need to earn a living, but also because prayer is crucial to our relationship with God and guides *how* we do our earthly work.



**OBREN AMIESIMAKA**

Dr. Amiesimaka declares that he is no theologian, but a lowly follower of Christ, striving to see Him more clearly, love Him more dearly, and follow Him more nearly, day by day. Obren lives trusting in God’s mercies and salvation bearing in mind Romans 3:23 “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”.



Photo: Cinna Baran

## Seeking God

MARY COSWIN

One of the most popular books in spirituality at the end of the late 1990s was *Holy Longing* by Ron Rolheiser, OMI. In it he admits, “It is no easy task to walk this earth and find peace; we are forever restless, dissatisfied, frustrated and aching. Desire is always stronger than satisfaction. This desire lies at the centre of our soul.”

Desire or longing is misunderstood in our society. Or rather, it is not understood except in a romantic context.

We tend to desire instant satisfaction: “Thirty minutes or free!” says one commercial. No lines, no waiting, no dissatisfaction—no longing! As if!

For those familiar with the Enneagram, I identify with the 4 energy and longing is no stranger to me. Keenly aware of *what’s missing* in most situations, I inherently experience longing. Funnily, this makes me a very good editor and, in a way, interior decorator. But it robs me of some of the joy of being in the present moment. It is an art and grace to live with the desire for what deeply counts and can never be filled in this life and, at the same time, be present to the present.

We would rather bury and ignore our longings if they can’t be met instantly or soon. C.S. Lewis says in *The Weight of Glory* that “our lifelong nostalgia, our longing to be reunited

with something in the universe from which we feel cut off.. is no neurotic fantasy but the truest index of our situation.”

I am reminded of St. Augustine’s famous line in his *Confessions*: “you have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” Even scientists are suspecting that we are hard-wired for God, that is, we are created with a desire for the Transcendent.

We are seekers, all of us. This quality is required of a person who knocks on a monastery door to join. Benedict cautions the monastic leaders to consider “does she truly seek God?” I was led to the monastery partly as a result of a nighttime dream in which, in the midst of a group of friends, dancing, I was approached by Jesus’ mother who brought me to an altar. Frightened but trusting, I said “yes.” I said “yes,” knowing and not knowing at the same time that a relationship with God in Jesus Christ is an answer to all longing.

Of course, this seeking of God and the fullness of life Jesus promised is a life-long adventure. It didn’t end for me at the monastery entrance. We are meant to seek God mostly in “ordinary time” — daily family life, work, health concerns, caring for family members, and meeting with friends. God is found in great moments, too, but most of the time he is found in ordinary ones, if we’re open. For me, seeking God takes many forms. It is sitting in silence at the beginning of the day, watching his creation in nature. It is seeing Christ in the person asking for change or some food. It is in my own feelings and experience. These are the simple and accessible places for seeking God daily.

Jessica Powers, a Carmelite poet of the 20th century in her poem *The Kingdom of God*, states:

“not toward the stars,  
not on the hills of the moon,  
not under the lighted leaves,  
not on a pillow of breast....

Here is the sacred guest.  
There is a Tenant here.  
Come home, roamer of earth, to this room  
and find a timeless Heart under your own heart beating.”

It is not in our effort alone that we seek and find God. God is seeking us; our own longing and seeking is a response to God’s. As St. John of the Cross says, “God seeks us more than

we seek God.” We witness this time and time again in Sacred Scripture: “come to me, all you who labour... how I have longed to gather you... behold I stand at the door and knock.”

God’s nature is love and in love God seeks us out; we are the lost coin, sheep, son or daughter. God is the joyful woman who finds her coin and calls for a celebration, the good shepherd who finds the lost one and carries the sheep on his shoulders, and the loving parent who welcomes us home with open arms.



Photo: Cinna Baran



MARY COSWIN, OSB

Mary Coswin, OSB grew up in Winnipeg, and has been a Benedictine Sister and member of St. Benedict’s Monastery in Winnipeg since 1965. She has enjoyed her time teaching, counseling adolescents, offering youth retreats and spiritual direction to adults as well as training new spiritual directors. In her spare time, Mary reads, takes photos, dabbles in card-making, and keeps up with friends over a walk, a drink, or a meal.



# Busy? Have a Feast!

RYAN TURNBULL



Photo: Brad Switzer

“Hey, how’ve you been?” I ask.

\*Sigh\* “BUSY!” they grin back.

“Ah yeah, it’s that time of year, isn’t it?”

I don’t know if you’ve had this conversation lately, but I find it has become somewhat of cultural script in my circles. We used to all lie and say we were doing “good” or “well” if you have good grammar. Now, “busy” has become the new “good.” This doesn’t necessarily mean we are suddenly more “busy” rather than “good,” but I think it points to the way we are expected to perform in order to feel like we belong. Busyness and productivity, in our late-capitalist society, have become the most important signifiers of being good members of society. Whether or not we actually have good work to do, we must constantly perform busyness lest anybody suspect that we are not being all that we can be.

But this constant performance of busyness, is not suddenly making us better, more productive citizens. Instead, it is leading to widespread burnout, anxiety, and a fragmentation of our attentions. The Korean philosopher, Byung-Chul Han, has given a remarkable analysis of our present condition in his book [\*The Burnout Society\*](#). According to Han, we used to live in a

[\*disciplinary society\*](#) that was structured around telling us what we *should* do. Institutions like the church, the school, and the prison, formed a disciplinary structure that reinforced right behaviour as a metric of belonging. That paradigm still operates in some ways but increasingly, Han argues, we live in an ‘achievement society.’ The achievement society is structured not around what we *should* do, but around what we *can* do. Taboos and “thou shalt nots” are being stripped away and now every option is available. Of course, the human psyche cannot actually handle unfettered access to unlimited options, and the pressure to be or become anything we desire is overwhelming.

Under the conditions of the achievement society, subjects must be constantly producing, constantly improving, constantly saying yes to new possibilities and opportunities. At first, this condition might seem liberatory. No more taboos! No more “shoulds” or “should nots”. You *can* be anything and become anything. But this flood of possibility is, in the end, debilitating. When everything is before us, Han argues, we struggle to commit our attention to any one thing. Attending in this way would be to close off a possible achievement, to establish a new disciplinary structure or rule for ourselves, and thus

risk not becoming all that we *can* be. What this looks like in my life is a pathological need to keep producing, to write on my days off, to apply for more grants, more opportunities, all while three different screens beckon for my attention while little alerts shake my [phone](#) offering their fleeting hits of dopamine. We cannot attend to this for long. Our attentions become so fragmented that we cannot finish any given task before rushing off to another. Or as so often happens, we burnout.

While the disciplinary society caused deep harms of repression and depression, the achievement society, upheld by therapeutic institutions like counselors, chaplains, and again the Church, is encouraging us to turn ourselves into sites of never-ceasing production which is fueling mass anxiety and burnout as we fail in the Sisyphean effort to be all that we *can* be. We manically grin at each other while bragging about our busyness – at least for the few seconds we can manage to focus on the exchange.

So, what's to be done?

Han's suggestion is that we should draw from the *vita contemplativa*, the contemplative life, across various traditions to rediscover rhythms of rest and attention that allow us to exist in a way that is not structured entirely by either the imperatives of *should* or *can*. It would be tempting to follow Han's suggestion here with a turn to the contemplative and spiritual practices of the Church – perhaps offering up the Daily Office as a therapy for our fragmented attentions and burnt-out psyches. But this would be a mistake, I think. For the practices of Christianity are not, first and foremost, therapeutic, though they may have therapeutic effects. The practices of prayer, fasting, study, and Sabbath that mark the Christian life can make us more attentive. They can create space and rest as a harbour against the all-consuming speed and busyness of our late-capitalist society. But if that is all they are, we have yet to understand why the Church, in her wisdom, has so often called us back to these practices as the bedrock of the Christian life.

Yet, I am an Anglican, so I will tell you to say your prayers and to go to Church and to take time for Sabbath, and I think doing this really is the best way to resist the burnout of the achievement society. But the resistance is not because these practices themselves will

suddenly make you less busy, or more mindful, or less attention deficit, but because they are practices by which we discover the utter gratuity of God's grace. "Taste and see that the Lord is Good!" declares the psalmist. And this is what the life of prayer is about. That actually we do not need the Church to discipline us to behave, nor therapize us into achieving more, but rather it is in the Church that we discover a place where we do things that are fantastically [useless](#). We take time to sing. Sometimes well. Sometimes in multi-part harmonies! We sit and listen to the wonderous stories of what God has done for people far away and long ago and what God is doing in our midst right here and now. We share our hard-earned money even with people and institutions that we don't always like or agree with. Sometimes we even come face to face with God. And it is good.

Every week, on the first day of the week, the Church throws a Feast. Feasting is extravagant and gratuitous. It doesn't achieve anything. It definitely doesn't make us behave better. But that's not the point. Jesus is risen and He is in our midst. He is in the Word that we break open and declare for all to hear. He is in the Bread that we break open and share with all who come. He is in the faces of all the broken people who gather, week in and week out because they once met a Man who said, "Come have breakfast with me" (John 21:12).

The Westminster Catechism teaches that humanity's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. From our vantage within the busyness of our burnout society, that sounds like a lot of work. But if this is truly our chief end, then there's absolutely nothing to lose – and maybe even everything to be gained – from taking the time to begin enjoying God in extravagant, even reckless ways. Who knows? We might even accidentally discover we're able to focus on something again.



**RYAN TURNBULL**

Ryan is a farm-kid turned theologian, living in Winnipeg, MB. He is currently serving as the Discipleship Developer for the Diocese of Rupert's Land and is a Fellow at St John's College. When not obsessing over theological minutiae you can find him biking around town looking for a coffee or a little treat.



# Practicing Sabbath Delight

ZOE MATTIES

Photo: [Thomas Kelley](#)

I once looked a humpback whale in the eye. As I sat in the small inflatable dinghy in the Southern Antarctic Ocean, I watched as she gracefully swam towards the boat, her fins flashing white beneath the surface. I held my breath as she swam beneath the zodiac, my heart beating like a caged bird inside my chest. With one flip of her tail, she could overturn us, but as she came up nose first on the other side of the boat, I caught her eye. In that moment I began to wonder who was watching whom. She stayed with us for over 20 minutes, dancing and spinning in the water, spraying us with her breath. It was a holy moment.

I have had many of these “holy moments” in my life. Moments where, as the poet [Gerard Manley Hopkins](#) writes, “the world is charged with the grandeur of God.”

These moments of delight and awe draw me into contemplation of the One who created it all. When we interact and connect with creation, we can experience one of the ways God calls out to us and invites us into relationship. This should not surprise us. The psalmist writes, “The heavens declare the glory of God and the skies proclaim the work of His hands.”

The creation narrative in Genesis 1 speaks of how God also delights in what God has made. God proclaims “it is good!” upon surveying the created world. In Genesis 2 we read that on the seventh day God finished creation by resting. The Hebrew word for rest is *menuha*, but it is better translated as “joyous repose,” “tranquility,” or “delight.” On the seventh day God didn’t simply cease activity, but

God celebrated and delighted in all that had been created. In return, all creation was free to simply be what God had created it to be.

I propose that Sabbath-keeping has less to do with a checklist of things one may or may not do on a given day, and more about a re-orientation towards God's life-giving

rhythms. Not only is this Sabbath orientation for humans, but it is an invitation for *all* creation. The command to keep Sabbath is a command to practice *menuha*, and to let all creation also practice *menuha*. As Psalm 96 declares, “let the heavens be glad, and the let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it.”

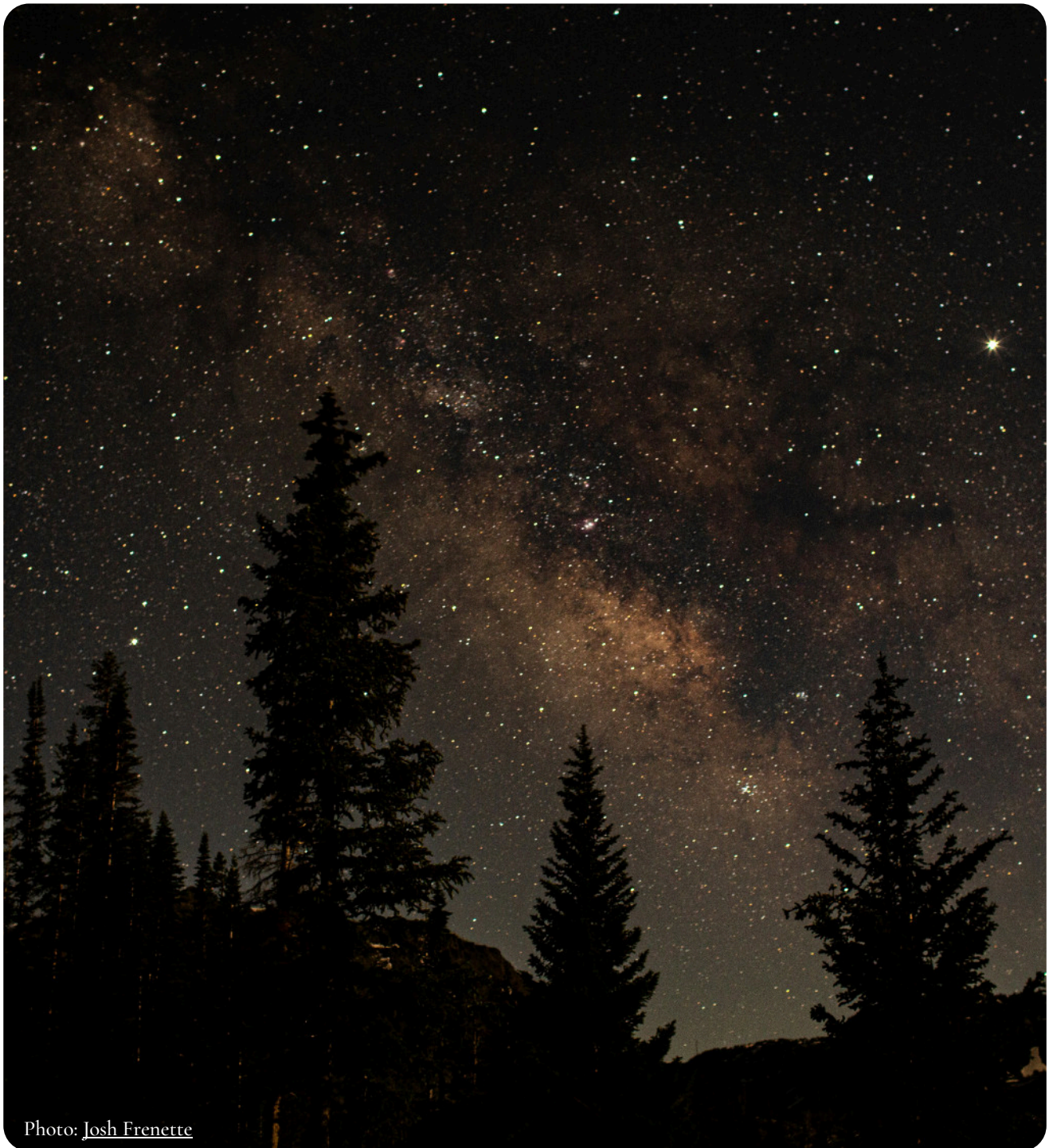


Photo: [Josh Frenette](#)

Sabbath was meant primarily as a communal practice that gave shape to the life of the people of God. It was meant as a day to be intentional about being present to God, to others, and to creation. It took the people who first received the Sabbath commandment a long time to re-orient their lives from the the structures of Egypt, where doing Pharoah's work was the only priority. In the wilderness, they had to rely on a different master, one who fed them daily and taught them how to work and play with each other. Even there, God provided a way for them to work six days and rest on the seventh.

This retraining in the wilderness was God's way of exchanging Pharoah's yoke of slavery for God's yoke of freedom. Jesus carried that vision further by saying, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." In the gospel story that follows this saying, Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath, which shows us how both work and rest fit into the context of God's rhythms.

The biggest barrier to practicing sabbath delight is distraction. We live in a fast world. Fast food, fast cars, fast forward. It's hard to learn to stop, to remember that our welfare is not all up to us, that our efforts are not what make the world go round. We surround ourselves with human made structures, we pave over the soft earth with hard surfaces, we drive ourselves past healthy time limits because we forget that we are not the authors of our own lives. Something in us resists dependence on others and on God. So we hoard jars of manna every day, conveniently ignoring the stink of rotting food that builds up in our storehouses.

The ideology of colonialism gave us the notion that the earth is a storehouse to be plundered for our benefit. So the western world became an imperial power, and the two-thirds world became its mine. In the 21st century we are beginning to learn the high cost of earth's plundering, with a creation that is suffering all kinds of ailments and creatures who are dying at a rate we cannot sustain. Where is sabbath in such a world?

God has created a world and a pattern for living that brings abundance. We can hardly be present to this rhythm, however, if we are constantly on the go. The world is full of beauty and opportunities for delight, but we will miss these gifts, or worse, destroy them, if we do not slow down. More than that, we will miss knowing our place within a creation over which it is God who reigns, not us. Sabbath is a reminder, as biblical scholar Ched Myers writes in his book *Sabbath Economics*, of gifts and limits: "the grace of receiving that

which the creator gives, and the responsibility not to take too much, nor to mistake the gift for a possession."

In the introduction to Rabbi Abraham Heschel's famous book *The Sabbath*, his daughter, Susannah Heschel, wrote that "sabbath is a metaphor for paradise." Heschel said that the practice of Sabbath prepares us for the experience of the Messiah's coming — the ultimate Sabbath. As Christians, we also anticipate a new age. In fact, the heart of scripture points towards a brilliant hope for a renewed and restored creation. As Jesus let go of his life for us, he gave birth to a new creation, right here in the midst of the old. Resurrection is a restoration of *menuha*, the delight in things as they ought to be. And by embracing Sabbath, God's rest, we are reoriented to a good world, renewed by Christ, in which we already participate, right here alongside a suffering world still sick with the effects of sin. Sabbath-keeping is the practice of resurrection in a world that suffers; it is the tending to each other and to creation in both hope and celebration.

When we pull out invasive plants, when we clean up litter on the path, when we ride our bike to work, we practice Sabbath.

In our daily lives, when we bring each other meals, when we make space in our lives for co-workers, friends, and our spouses, roommates, or other neighbours, we practise Sabbath.

When we grow a vegetable garden or a good crop in the field, when we feed the birds in winter, we practice Sabbath.

When we look in awe at the starry night sky, and when we take a walk in the woods and celebrate what we have not made, we practise Sabbath.

May God give us rest, and renew us with delight.



#### ZOE MATTIES

Zoe Matties lives within the watersheds of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. She enjoys eating veggies from her garden, exploring the woods with her dog, and watching birds. She works for A Rocha Canada helping people of all ages learn to love and care for the places they call home.

# Do Justice, Love Kindness, Walk Humbly:

## An Interview with The Rev. Deacon Gabriel Kwenga

I had the pleasure of sitting down and chatting with the Rev. Deacon Gabriel Kwenga (who goes by Kwenga). He is a permanent deacon, an honorary assistant at St. John's Cathedral, the new diocesan representative for the PWRDF, and an avid football (soccer) fan. He is a man who embodies the relationship between work and prayer in his dedicated service to God's people.

**RLN:** Tell me a little bit about yourself.

**Kwenga:** Well, I was born in Cameroon, and I lived there for thirty years. Then I moved to Belgium. Four days after I arrived, something very drastic happened to me. I drank caustic soda (a chemical used to make soap) by mistake. It was in a lemonade bottle, so I thought it was lemonade. After I drank it, I was in intensive care for six months and I spent two years in and out of the hospital. I had an operation which was quite new at the time, and it worked well. After the operation, during a quiet moment in the hospital, I decided it's time to really commit my life to God. Because if there is one reason why I am alive today it's because He has a purpose for me. So, I was baptized thereafter.

When I came out of the hospital, I went to a nice little town known as Knokke close to the North Sea. In Belgium they speak Dutch in the north and French in the south. I was in the Dutch area and my Dutch was not so good. So, this is how I got to the Anglican Church, because that was the only church where English was spoken. In that church I met David and Susan Mole — the most kind and friendly people you can ever think of. They were the priests of that



church. And for more than five years I spent time with them every Tuesday.

I lived in Belgium for fifteen years and then I came here. I have had several neuropathic attacks, and I am still recovering from the last one. But I'm doing very well, so I'm not complaining. I'm grateful; it can be worse! I'm married to Bridget, and we have three kids. My first, Fidelis, lives in Montreal, and the other two are here with us. Dwain is sixteen and Brielle is thirteen.



**REV. KWENGA**

**RLN:** Did you have a religious upbringing in Cameroon?

**Kwenga:** In Cameroon I used to go to the Church of Christ (in the Pentecostal spectrum) and my family was devout. My mother was actually a deacon there, so I had to go to



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church every Sunday. In fact, I went to a mission secondary school from ages 12-17. It was an all-boys school, and we went to church twice a day. There was morning devotion and evening devotion, and on Sunday, we went twice. So, I had been exposed to Christianity from my infancy.

**RLN:** That's church fourteen times a week! And you didn't get sick of it?

**Kwenga:** No, I did not. We are brought up very obedient in Africa. But the thing is, you cannot actually force people to be Christian. You have to decide to be a Christian. And so, I'm sure all of that was preparing me for my later years. From age one on I was going to church, but I was baptized at age 30. So, I needed a lot of preparation. When I came out of the hospital in Belgium, I said "no, you know what, Father? I am still living. This means that God has a bigger plan for me." That was the final push to be baptized.

**RLN:** How did you like your experience with the Anglican Church in Belgium?

**Kwenga:** I found myself very comfortable in the Anglican setup, especially their music — that's what pulled me into the Church. I love classical music and Gregorian chanting. Johann Sebastian Bach is my most favourite composer. He composed a song, "Jesu, the Joy of Man's Desiring", that I think is one of the most beautiful pieces of music ever written. And I love singing. There is a saying that when you sing, you pray twice.

After the operation, I could not speak for almost six months, and I had to do speech therapy. Also, my breath is worse — I cannot hold a note for long. As I grow older, I cannot really sing the way I used to sing before. I used to sing so low in choirs. One of my biggest achievements was when I was singing in a choir in Belgium, and we went to the UK, and I sang "Day-O" by Harry Belafonte. There were more than 1500 people in the auditorium, and that was the zenith of my singing career. But now I don't have the breath anymore so I can't do it.

**RLN:** Tell me about what your prayer life looks like.

**Kwenga:** Prayer is an ongoing process. I pray every moment of every day. My prayer life is very informal. I pray when I get out of bed in the morning, and I've been reading a Daily Bread now for about 20 years. Or, if I see someone in need, I pray for that person. So, I pray ceaselessly. And when I pray, I always pray for alignment between what I ask for and God's purpose. Because God knows better.

**RLN:** Do you have any fun hobbies?

**Kwenga:** I love football — you call it soccer here. When I was young and strong, I used to play the games. But I watch it as much as I can. I love it a lot. And my favourite football club is the Arsenal Football Club in London. I have been their supporter for more than 20 years. And also, I am trying to fall in love with hockey. I see the artistry of that sport; my only worry is the physicality. Why do they have to fight? But in terms of the beauty of the game, I love it.

**RLN:** You are the new PWRDF diocesan representative. How is that going? Are you excited?

**Kwenga:** It's frightening! Haha. You see, the bishop and I had coffee one day where he asked me if I wanted to be the new PWRDF rep. I said, "let me think about it," but at that moment I knew I would say "yes." Because, when I was baptized, I took this pledge between myself and God that I would serve Him at all levels. When an opportunity arises, I will never back off and I will give it my best shot. So, I told my wife, I prayed on it, and I sent the bishop an email the next day. I like the challenge.

You know, one of my favourite verses is Micah 6:8 where he says, “...and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” And this is one of the reasons that I am excited for this job. Because the mission statement of the PWRDF is “working towards a truly just, healthy and peaceful world.” That’s our calling as Christians — to seek justice.

**RLN:** Are there any causes you’re particularly interested in helping with?

**Kwenga:** I got into this position without much knowledge of the operations and initiatives of the PWRDF. At this point, my focus is to understand what it’s all about and support the initiatives. I’m there as a servant leader. I was really impressed when I had my first meeting with the committee members. So, my first focus is to help them do what they are doing better. My first challenge is that I want to make sure that every parish which is capable of having a rep, should have a rep.

Next year, there will be a mission in Kenya because it has been hit very hard by climate change and it has been affecting food production and cultivation. So, I would really like to go and see how my brothers in Africa are mitigating the effects of climate change.

I also think the “Grow Hope” project is the most important project carried out by the PWRDF because it’s the easiest way to make money. What happens is there are some parishes that buy seeds and give them to participating farmers. The farmers will then plant the seeds, and once they are harvested and sold, the proceeds come back to the parishes which they send to those in need and the Canadian Foodgrains Bank matches those four times.

**RLN:** Tell me more about what it’s like to be a deacon.

**Kwenga:** I started my ministry mission in that church in Knokke. David Mole once said, “Gabriel, do you know that you can further commit yourself to being a Christian by serving God at a different level?” and that’s how the seed to serve beyond the pew was sown in me. And that’s how I think about being a deacon.

**RLN:** What’s your favourite part about ordained ministry?

**Kwenga:** Serving people. I enjoy the role of deacon as a bridge between the Church and the secular world. And at



Photo: [Thays Orrico](#)

this time, I’m sure that role is much more needed by the Church. Because the Church seems to be disconnected from society. Deacons are supposed to remind the Church what society needs, and then tell society what the Church is all about. Deacons are needed now a *lot*.

**RLN:** What does the Eucharist mean to you?

**Kwenga:** That’s a big question. It is spiritual food. That’s what sets you apart as a child of God. Because that was the ultimate sacrifice Christ offered to make us become fully incorporated into His body. And so, to me, it is spiritual food just like what physical food does to you as a human being. I cannot live without the Eucharist. I cannot. I was telling my wife the other day, “forget about the sermon during the Sunday service — the high point of worship is the Eucharist.” What is very somber, what is very profound is the Eucharist.