

WHY GO TO CHURCH?



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CONNECTING CHURCH &
COMMUNITY

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WHY GO TO CHURCH?

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](#)

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RLN exists to explore issues at the intersections of faith and life. In doing so we solicit and publish a range of opinions, not all of which reflect the official positions of the Diocese.

We acknowledge that we meet and work in Treaty 1, 2, and 3 Land, the traditional land of the Anishinaabe, Cree, and Dakota people and the homeland of the Metis Nation. We are grateful for their stewardship of this land and their hospitality which allows us to live, work, and serve God the Creator here.

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

Cover: [Mario Amé](#)

Faith Matters: Why go to church?

CINNA BARAN

Dear readers,

Welcome to another season of Rupert's Land News. As you will soon notice, the magazine looks a little different than it has in the past. Over the next three months, instead of having authors write on a theme, they will be answering questions which are pertinent to the minds of all Christians today in a series we are calling "Faith Matters." This month, the question is "why go to church?"

No matter how long one has been a Christian for, this is a question that is important for all churchgoers to consider, reconsider, and sit with in prayer. Church is so much more than attending a service in a building once a week, yet this is often the narrow way it is perceived. Attendance in Canadian churches has been dropping for a while, and of course, the COVID-19 pandemic did not help this. It is reasonably speculated by some that people realized that they did not *need* to go to church (however they defined that "need"), and thus, they stopped going.

Yet, many people do still go to church, including many of you who take the time to read this magazine. Why? I encourage you to ask yourself this question. Make no mistake, this is not a question which points to any doubt in our faith or a lapse in commitment; it shows a desire to find meaning behind this crucial aspect of our lives. And perhaps, as you sit with it, you may come to a greater understanding of the Church (as a whole), your faith, and your community.

The responses which our four authors have given to this question shows an aspect of their own unique perspectives and thoughts. It is important to note that none of them will be providing a "be-all and end-all" answer (nor should they be, as there isn't one), and none of them are speaking on behalf of the Anglican Church or the Diocese of Rupert's Land. They speak for their own experiences, thoughts, and hopes.

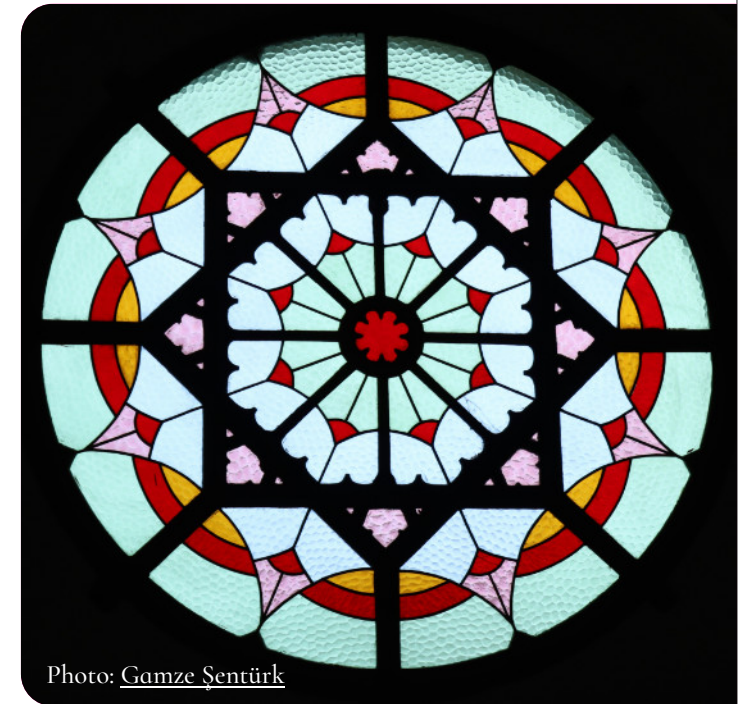
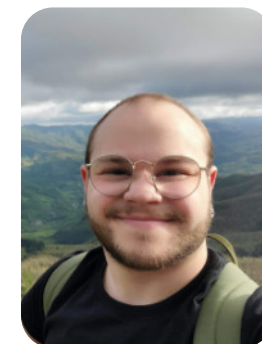


Photo: [Gamze Şentürk](#)

What we find in their writings is what church means to them — past, present, and future — and what it could mean to us. Some authors share personal stories of how church has been a part of their lives, and some look to the history of Christianity and the broader picture in which it is contained. In their writings, we can see how their different answers are all unified by their membership as part of the Body of Christ, and ultimately, by their love of God.

And so, dear readers, once you have read and digested what these authors have to say, I encourage you to take some time in thought and prayer with this question: why do *you* go to church?



CINNA BARAN

Editor of Rupert's Land News



Amanda McKenzie

A warm hello to all the RLN readers. I'm Amanda McKenzie, and I am one of the Elders to the Bishop of Rupert's Land (since February 2021). I have been a devout Anglican all my life, baptized and confirmed in a small Anglican-United Church in Lynn Lake, Manitoba. I follow a bloodline of the Cree people, am a member of the Peter Ballantyne Band, treaty #6, and my reserve is in Pelican Narrows, Saskatchewan. I was born in Winnipeg, but raised in Lynn Lake, Manitoba. I am swampy Cree. My traditional teachings and understanding of our "way of life" come from my granny, father, and mother. I am a knowledge keeper and harvest our traditional medicines.

My hobbies and interests are painting and drawing Indigenous art, crocheting, fishing, traditional medicine picking, and teaching others about our Indigenous culture such as harvesting medicines, 7 Sacred Teachings, medicine wheel, dream catcher making, etc.

My passion is spreading the word of God's love and grace, and to bring understanding of the Holy and undivided Trinity to whomever I meet. I am so grateful to Creator for all He has done in my life, and for always guiding my path forward. It is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that make me the person I am today.



Ben Girgis

Ben Girgis grew up in the city of Toronto, where he experienced the beauty of Christ's Church. From there, he served alongside his family in different elements in his church community. He later went to complete his Bachelor of Arts in Christian Ministry focusing on Youth and Children's Ministry and minoring in Biblical Studies from Briercrest College. While studying in Saskatchewan, he met his wife Kaitlyn and they moved to Winnipeg in 2021, rediscovering his love for cities! Currently, Ben is studying at Providence Theological Seminary, where he hopes to complete a Master of Divinity. Also, Ben has begun serving as a Parish Intern at All Saints Anglican Church. Previously, you would have found him sitting in the back pews at St. Mary Magdalene Anglican Church.



Edmund Laldin

Edmund Laldin was born and raised in Pakistan. His father was a priest in the Church of Pakistan, while his mother was an elementary school teacher. Edmund's call to ministry is rooted in Liberation Theology. He emigrated to Canada in 1991 and was ordained in 1995. Edmund has extensive experience volunteering on provincial and national Church committees and task forces. Edmund's academic interests include liturgy, preaching, and creating interdenominational, multicultural, and inclusive worshipping communities. Edmund believes that the church should purge itself of hierarchy and archaic governance models, and strive to be the church (community) of the first-century apostles.



Kirsten Pinto-Gfroerer

Kirsten Pinto-Gfroerer is a lay theologian, who is especially interested in the worshipful theology of the early church theologians and those whom one might call mystical theologians. She practices counselling, writes, and gardens near the woods on Lake Winnipeg. Her book *Anchorhold: Corresponding with Revelations of Divine Love* contemplatively explores the theology of Julian of Norwich. Her podcast, *The Viridescent Circle* exalts in the dynamics between the natural world and the Christian year. To learn more about Kirsten's work visit <https://www.kirstenpintogfroerer.com/>.

What do I hope for the church? That we can truly worship, that we can realize the beauty and magnificence of the love of the Trinity and respond with awe and wonder, and that we can remember the joy of the life of the church.

Why go to church?

AMANDA MCKENZIE

While the Bible does not directly say “go to church,” it strongly encourages Christians to assemble together, as seen in Hebrews 10: 24-25: “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another...” But my favourite passage that supports gathering with other believers is Matthew 18:20, where Jesus states, “For where two or three are gathered in My name, I am there among them.” I believe God places great importance on us as a people fellowshiping and worshipping together. We cannot grow in our faith by being a “stand alone” Christian. We all need each other, and Creator designed us for relationships.

We are learning how to be a part of a unified team while expressing our own individuality. Creator gave us all the gifts, abilities, and talents we have so that we can bless someone else. Christians should go to church to worship God our Creator, be strengthened by fellowship with other believers, and receive spiritual gifts and guidance. Church attendance is also seen as a way to fulfill Creator's commands, grow in faith, and work together in the mission of the Church. The Church provides a community where believers can support and encourage each other. It is a place to share our own journey, receive counsel, and be challenged to grow in faith. It is a place where individuals can discover and use their spiritual gifts to serve others and build up the Body of Christ. We have the opportunity to hear the word of God preached, receive sacraments like Baptism and Communion, and be disciplined by mature believers. The Church plays a vital role in sharing the Gospel and making disciples. It provides a structure and resources to accomplish this mission. In essence, going to church is not just about attending a service, but participating in a community of believers who are committed to growing in faith, serving others, and fulfilling God's purpose.

For me, church was always a big part of my life. I was baptized and confirmed in a little Anglican-United Church, which sadly burned down in 2012. I went with my auntie who raised me from 5 days old to 6 years old, and then I went with my granny until I was 12 years old. They were deeply rooted in the Anglican Church. I remember when I was young, the



Oil on canvas by Amanda McKenzie

United folks sat on the left side of the church, and we sat on the right. The United attendees drank communion from small little glasses with Welch's grape juice and ate bread. We drank wine from the chalice and wafers. I remember asking my granny if I could try communion their way. She sternly said, “No. We don't do it that way.” She was definitely stuck in her ways. I just chuckle now when I think about it. But that was the only thing different, everything else was the same. We heard the same sermon, sang the same songs, worshiped together, and ate at the same table after church downstairs. We were a strong community, and I look back fondly at my time there. I just don't miss the kneeling part. We were a family in the Body of Christ. We were strengthened by fellowship with other believers. I always knew the Church was a good place to be.

When I was 12, I was taken from my granny and put in Marymount School in Winnipeg, which was run by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, who were Roman Catholic nuns. I remember once when my granny came to visit me, I indignantly told her that they made me attend a Catholic Church. She looked at me square in the eyes and said “it's all the same my girl. Their prayers are a little different, but you're praying to the same Creator. Listen to what they say.” So, when church came around, I listened and obeyed most

times. I still didn't like the kneeling, though. But I felt safe in the Sanctuary. And although my time spent there wasn't easy, the sisters most certainly helped keep me in prayer and close to God.

After I left, I kept in close contact with them, and I would often go to do the rosary with my unit nun, Sister Bridgett. I carry my Catholic rosaries with me wherever I go till this day and pray with them. It is a welcomed blessing for me and has brought me so much peace and comfort. When I went back home for visits, I would see my father use our medicines and traditions more and more — from smudging and pipe ceremonies to traditional dances. I'm so grateful today that I was able to learn so much. My dad explained that the church was no different and that we pray to the same Creator. He said that they have a church, we have a sweat, they have holy water, and we have our smudge, they have a rosary and we have our tobacco ties, they have 10 Commandments, and we have our 7 Sacred Teachings. We must all walk in a good way and have good relationship with the Creator.

I was 16 ½ when I left Marymount and the Church, but I always had my faith, and I always prayed. I only attended church at Easter and Christmas. My three children were all baptized Anglican; I thought that was enough. It sure wasn't! I had no spiritual growth with a community, and my children weren't growing up knowing Christ like I had. Something always tugged at my heart, and I now know that it was the Holy Spirit. I asked Rev. Jamie Howison to baptize my last child, my daughter. He is a dear friend who has always been there for me, and he had already baptized my son and older daughter. He said of course he would, but he also said that I should be in church, and so should my children; the two visits a year didn't cut it. He strongly suggested that I go to St. Mary Magdalene church and meet this “Father Bob” guy, and so I did.

When I walked into St. Mary Magdalene 27 years ago, it changed my life again. All of Creator's promises were there, and it became my parish. I felt safe and the sanctuary brought me peace. But we still have our life struggles, and in 2009 I left the Church again, and was going through a divorce from a very abusive marriage. I found alcohol, and for the next 5 years I again only went to church Christmas and Easter. My life was most definitely unmanageable and going downhill fast! I will always thank Father Bob from the bottom of my heart for never giving up on me. Through the



Amanda McKenzie's rosaries (Photo by Amanda McKenzie)

grace of God, I walked into my first AA meeting, and another healing journey began. With all my humility I walked through the church doors of St. Mary Magdalene again, only to be received with open arms, compassion, and love. I was back with the Body of Christ. And God our Creator has been leading the way! I am now 12 years sober, I'm newly married to an amazing man (Richard), and Epiphany Indigenous Anglican Church is my new home parish. I take all the love and friendships from my past parish as I move into a new Body of Christ.

I am now serving others and fulfilling God's purpose. So, why should we go to church? I believe that when you fully embrace the church, God will show you the way and walk with you, no matter what, and will open doors that surpass all understanding. My story and my testimony are living proof of this.



Photo: Jon Tyson

Why go to church?

BEN GIRGIS

Why do we go to church? That seems to be the question each September as the summer comes to an end, and we go back to a normal schedule. I think there's a lot of reasons to go to church; it's a social place with lots of activities. The music isn't half bad, and the coffee is warm with potlucks that invite good laughter as we eat decent potato salad. We get sent into a place where time seems to stay still and tradition, reason, and Scripture play along with our experience of human emotions and concepts. My first church experience was at Chapel Place Presbyterian Church; there I was everyone's child and grandchild. My parents would walk into

the doors and hand me off to the closest Giddo or Teta (grandparents), and wouldn't see me until they were walking out of those doors. I was truly loved; I felt community, a blessed feeling, a place where I was known and was seen — a place where I belonged. That's why I go to church; it's a place where I belong. Belonging comes from the people — those who sit next to us in the pews, those who smile at us or get out of their seats during the sign of peace, the ones who speak the same words and laugh at the same corny jokes. Belonging creates equality, becoming equal with those amongst us as we explore our faith together. Equality invites questions to enter the room. Good questions to give pondering a chance. Questions that are deep enough for a scholar to drown in, but shallow enough for an infant to be safe from drowning. Belonging doesn't require us to have those answers, it doesn't require us to be ready, rather it invites us to be, be with those loved by Christ.

Thomas R. Kelly, a Quaker theologian, beautifully states:

"In the Fellowship,¹ cultural and educational and national and racial differences are leveled. Unlettered men are at ease with the truly humbled scholar who lives in the Life, and the scholar listens with joy and openness to the precious experiences of God's dealings with the workingman. We find men with chilly theologies but with glowing hearts. We

¹ Kelly describes this fellowship as "the relation that is so surprising and so rich that we despair of finding a word glorious enough and weighty enough to name it. Some men and women whom we have never known before, or whom we have noticed only as a dim background for our more special friendships, suddenly loom large, step forward in our attention as men and women whom we now know to the depths. Our earlier conversations with these persons may have been few and brief, but now we know them, as it were, from within" (Thomas R. Kelly, Testament of Devotion, "A Blessed Community," (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1992), 51-52.).

overleap the boundaries of church membership and find Lutherans and Roman Catholics, Jews and Christians, within the Fellowship. We re-read the poets and saints, and the Fellowship is enlarged. With urgent hunger we read the Scriptures, with no thought of pious exercise, but in order to find more friends for the soul. We brush past our historical learning in the Scriptures, to seize upon those writers who lived in the Center, in the Life and in the Power. Time telescopes and vanishes, centuries and creeds are overleaped. The incident of death puts no boundaries to the Blessed Community, wherein men lived and loved and worked and prayed in that Life and Power which gave forth the Scriptures. And we wonder and grieve at the overwhelming heady preoccupation of religious people with problems, unless they have first come into the Fellowship of the Light."²

Kelly's words, though originally written in the 1940s,³ speak the same in our modern times. The Fellowship, those living in the light within, is the center point to how community exists. It's one of the reasons I am a part of the Church; I am made equal with those who sit in the pews. We sing songs of praise as though we were one voice. We, though completely unique and different, enter into a relationship that goes beyond our differences. Our educational levels may vary, but our appreciation of the Gospels and the Good News that is preached on those faithful Sundays make us one. Our experiences, though different, get stitched into the tapestry of God's love for all creation. As we come to the table, our sins, blessings, fears, doubts, and beliefs muddle together and we walk hand in hand, standing, kneeling, sitting as one body, consuming the elements and being made anew. At the table, we find belonging and in the beauty of our belonging; we are not equal in our gifts, skills, and talents, but in them we lift one another up, delighting in one another.⁴ Just as the St. Paul states, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."⁵

In the Church, we are not required to be anything but ourselves. We come as we are and are welcomed by people as they are. Further, as we change and grow, we are still welcomed openly by the disciples of Christ. Perfection is for wishful thinkers. We experience grace and mercy, and our holiness — which comes from God — brings us back to childhood, where we first experienced belonging.

Unfortunately, throughout our history, the Church has not always been a place of belonging and we have lost our childlike ways. We have killed, scorned, and ruined people in the name of Jesus Christ. We have made people feel unwanted, casting out those who do not sound, look, or resemble what we believe a good Christian is or was. And if you are reading this and this was your experience with the Church, I'm deeply sorry; it was wrong for us to do such things. We forgot where we came from. We forgot the focal point of our belonging, that we were once strangers being welcomed by a loving God. We forgot what it meant to be like a child, welcoming all to our groups, and forgot our Father's voice saying, "You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."⁶ We forgot what it was like when we didn't know anything, but I think we're remembering. We're remembering to look toward reconciliation and take steps to make sure that all belong. Listening to voices outside of our own, participating in different cultures, understandings, or visions. Together, we move towards equality, equity, diversity: we move towards belonging.

That's why I go to church. It invites me to step back from the busyness of life and be myself. It's a place where I find people who are nothing like me, yet I become equal with them. It's the place where I went from stranger to friend. It's a place where I belong.

² Thomas R. Kelly, Testament of Devotion, "A Blessed Community," (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1992), 55-56.

³ This is why he uses male dominated pronouns and refers to humanity as men.

⁴ Please stop asking me to join the choir. I really can't sing well and it would be unkind to those who have to listen to me. My strengths are in other things and that's a good thing!

⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

⁶ Deuteronomy 10:19

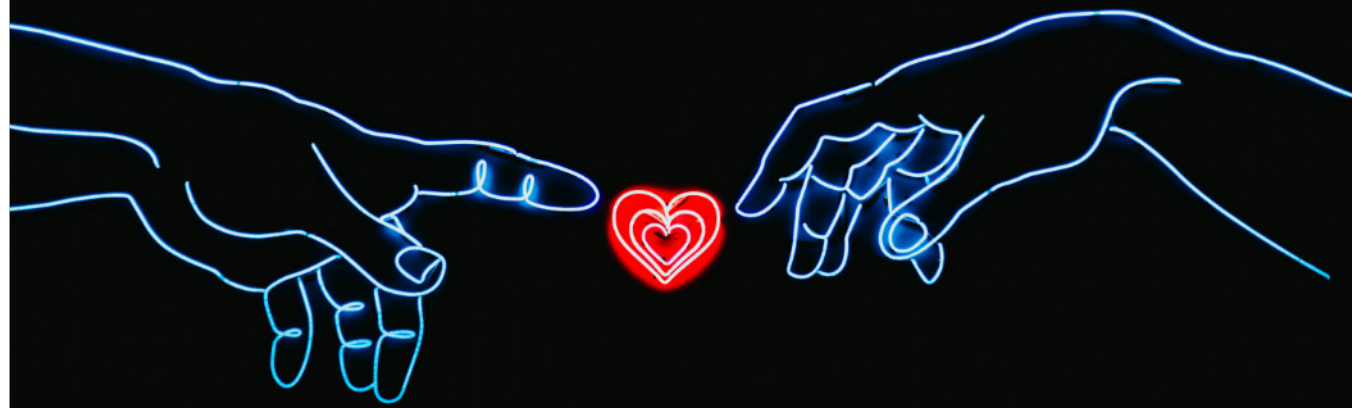


Photo: Jametlene Reskp



Photo: Jon Tyson

Why Go to Church?



EDMUND LALDIN

Photo: [Devin Avery](#)

In the post-modern and post-Christendom world, the archaic reasons to attend church are invalid and foreign to fellow pilgrims. People are going to churches to experience community, unity in the diversity of opinion and lifestyle, and to be nurtured and strengthened by God's word, so that they may love others as much as Jesus has loved us. The Church (institution) must embody the passion, vision, and mission of first-century believers or risk continued decline. I will argue that every human being, the creation, and the priestly offices are equal in God's eyes. I will also submit that the world and its inhabitants cannot be divided into the Sacred and the Profane. Finally, I will share my experiences in cultivating and nurturing inclusive worshipping communities, to show that the real Church is the people.

In traditional and conventional wisdom, espoused by the majority of churchgoers, attending church is considered a way to be present in the house of God, and God can only be worshipped in a church setting. The world is divided into sacred and profane. Sacred is hallowed ground, while profane is everywhere else. The demarcation of the created order in sacred and profane negates the essence of the created world. In varying degrees, we posit that God's hand was in the creation of our universe and the planet. The question arises as to how God's creations can be profane. Can human beings who represent the image of God be sacred and

profane? Are university classrooms and auditoriums profane because of the knowledge imparted in them? Furthermore, can knowledge, education, and technical skills be profane, as God is the source of all knowledge and wisdom?

Saint Paul, even though he lists five callings in Ephesians 4:11 (Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor, and Teacher), emphasised that all work, including his own as a tentmaker, is a potential means for serving God and can be a vocation or divine calling. The focus is on the attitude with which one works – doing it heartily for God or doing it for personal glory and ambition, rather than the specific occupation itself. Saint Paul instructs believers in Colossians 3:23-24 to work heartily as for the Lord and not for human beings. Thus, Saint Paul transformed secular tasks into acts of worship and service to God. In Corinthians 7:17, Saint Paul submits that God assigns each person their place in life and calls them to that position. It implies that everyone must discern and respond to their own call. In conclusion, every work and profession contributes to God's agenda for people and the world.

In Galatians 3:28, Saint Paul clearly states spiritual unity within the Christian community. The verse states that in Christ there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female; thus, all are one. Faith in Christ

transcends social, ethnic, and gender divisions. It highlights that all believers share the same status as children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and we shall add that this is also because of the image of God they depict.

Jesus reached out to and addressed the needs of people regardless of their ethnicity, gender, or social status. He presented a Samaritan as the example of a good neighbour, ate and communed with tax collectors, healed people on the Sabbath, protected a woman who was ready to be stoned, and talked with a Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus also stood against the oppressors. He called them out on their shortcomings, either through the parables, healing and curing, or teachings in their midst. According to Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus equates Himself with the marginalised of the world. In this parable, Jesus offers insight into the Day of Judgement. Nations of the world were separated as a shepherd separates sheep from goat. One group was cursed and punished, while the other was blessed and invited into God's kingdom. The reason was not their religiosity, spirituality, or ethnicity; instead, it was their response to people in need. Jesus told them that as much as you have done it to the least of my children, you have done it to me. At the Ascension, Jesus commanded Peter to care for Jesus' sheep and flock. It must be noted that taking care of the flock was done to follow Jesus'

example by curing the sick, feeding the hungry, visiting the prisoners, and clothing the naked. The worship, relationship with God, prayer life, and rituals strengthen a believer to be a beacon of hope and love in the world.

Pentecost, the birthday of the church, set the standard and the template for the church to follow and emulate. Every person, regardless of their ethnicity, heard the message in their own language. The native language, also referred to as the mother tongue, holds a special and intimate place in a person's psyche and development. Hearing the message in their mother tongue allowed them to experience God reaching out to them in a most familiar and intimate way. The challenge for the church has been, and remains, to speak a language that everyone can understand. The descent of the holy city in the book of Revelation reveals the image of God's kingdom. In Revelation 21, we are told that the city descended from heaven, and all the people of the earth were gathered around the throne of God; the temple was not in it. It should be noted that the temple was for the chosen nation. Thus, God took away the exclusive privilege of an ethnic group and replaced it with ethnic inclusivity.

The early church, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, strived to follow Jesus' example and commandment. They kept



Photo: [Claud Richmond](#)

a common purse, took care of the poor and the impoverished, had hospitals for the sick and the injured, ran a hospice for the old and weak, groomed future leaders, and spread the gospel to the ends of the earth. Despite internal conflicts and issues, they remained committed to Jesus' mission.

The above discussion can be summarised as follows:

- Every profession is a vocation and can be offered in thanksgiving to God.
- Every human being is equal in God's eyes.
- Faith is actualised and practised in the ministry to the marginalised.
- God's kingdom includes everyone.

The conversion of Constantine in the 4th century AD ushered in the institutional structure of the church. The hierarchy mimicked the Roman Emperor's court model. The Pope became the absolute monarch, Cardinals were the princes, and other orders (Archbishops, Bishops, Clerics) held their positions and exercised authority vested in their office. The church morphed into an empire at the expense of Jesus' mission. The dogma and the doctrine determined the membership and the ministry of the church. The Church became aloof, and ordained individuals served as the mediators between God and the laity. The Reformation and the creation of the Church of England challenged the system on a doctrinal basis. It created new denominations but continued the exclusive and hierarchical model in various ways. The evangelical, charismatic, fundamentalist redefined hierarchy and absolute authority through the division of saved and unsaved, and the imposition of a strict moral code and financial commitment to the organisation.

In 2025, we are discerning why we should attend church. It is a pertinent and relevant question, as the mainline denominations in general, and the Anglican Church of Canada in particular, have experienced significant decline. The diocese of Rupert's Land is dealing with declining numbers, ageing worshipping communities, empty buildings, and dwindling financial resources. The church leadership has addressed the situation by closing the churches, offering part-time clerical ministry, while maintaining support for the hierarchical system. The bishops enjoy absolute authority to veto any synodical decisions, and the laity is expected to follow the lead of their cleric in most cases. Dissenting voices are often disregarded and labelled as

arrogant, not a team player, condescending, and opposed to the institution and its leadership. The church has evolved within the ancient framework of governance. Doctrines and dogmas have been changed to align the policies with society and culture, but the governance system remains unchanged.

The emergence of post-modernity has confronted the modernity paradigm. Post-modernity has replaced society with community, religiosity with spirituality, raised awareness of the disparity between the poor and wealthy individuals and countries, and individual interests have been subsumed by the communal good. Movements to forgive the unpayable debt of the developing nations, advocating for fair trade practices, and championing the rights of peasants, farmers, and labourers are a few examples of the vision and passion of post-modern pilgrims. The pyramid form of leadership is replaced with the circular form of leadership.

Post-modern pilgrims are prophets of our times due to their passion for re-creating the world order and their obsession with equality for every person, regardless of ethnicity, social status, sexuality, or religious affiliation.

Post-modern pilgrims' values resonate with Jesus' mission and vision for the world. Jesus destroyed the barriers and united the human family. Jesus' commandment was to love others as he has loved us, and love acknowledges a person while transcending all differences.

There are several congregations within the Anglican Church of Canada that, through their liturgy, music, mission, ministry, and attitude, have created exciting communities. These congregants, through introspection, discerned the will of God for their context and, with courage and faith, followed the Spirit's call.

St. Saviour's is my fifth parish in my thirty years of ordained ministry. In all but one instance, the parishes I have worked with established unique worshipping communities. On the Lower North Shore, the congregations created an intergenerational community because the youth had been neglected for several years. In Stephenville, instead of disrupting established liturgies, we began contemporary worship with just five people. Within a year, we were averaging a hundred worshippers. Our community included Christians of various denominations, Hindus, Sikhs, Baha'i and Jewish families. In Pasadena-Cormack, the youth of both

churches wrote the prayers, delineated social outreach, and the community discussed equal marriage and their ministry to the dissenting voices. St. Saviour's congregants arrive at nine in the morning and leave around one in the afternoon. From 10:30 to 12:00, we worship, and before and after the worship, the community enjoys each other's company. The congregation has become a multi-racial community. The Parish is committed to cultivating and nurturing a culture of inclusion, regardless of ethnic origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, or theological and doctrinal differences.

The above examples are shared to support the premise of this inquiry, which is that the real Church is the people. The institution and its hierarchy serve the congregants. People go to church to be nurtured by the community. The world cannot be divided between the sacred and the profane. Doing so negates God's hand in the creation and image in every human being. The liturgy should be relevant and relate to the context, and the believer's passion must be cherished, nourished, and respected. We attend church to experience unity in diversity and equality as the children of God.



Photo: [Chris Zhang](#)

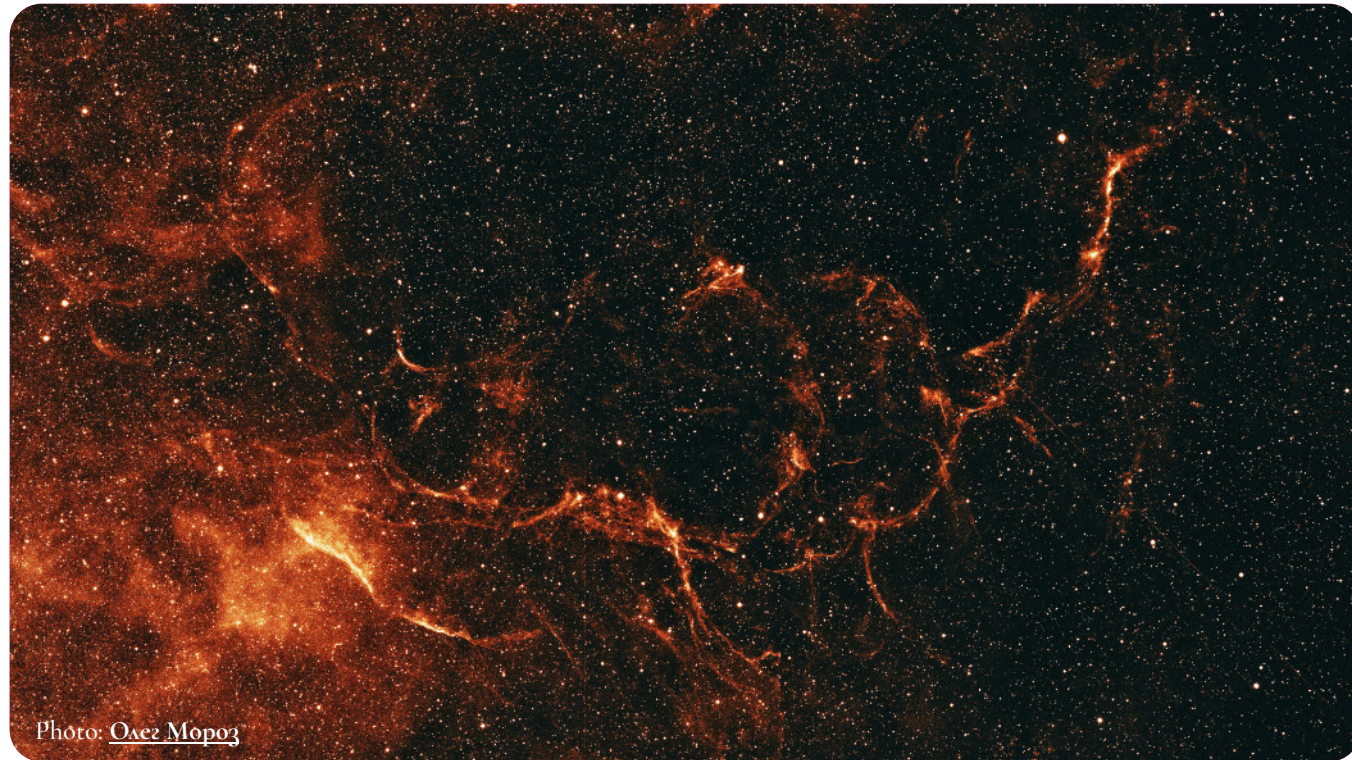


Photo: [Olaz Moroz](#)

Why go to church?

KIRSTEN PINTO-GFROERER

Near the end of his *Confessions* St. Augustine wrote,

My love is my weight. I'm carried by it wherever I'm carried. Through your gift we catch fire and are carried upward; we go up in flames, and up we go. In our heart we ascend the ascending staircase, and we sing the song of the rising steps. By your fire, by your good fire, we go up in flames, and there we go, since we go up to the peace of Jerusalem; since I rejoice in those who said to me, "We will go to the Master's house." Good will is going to set us in the right place there, in such a way that our will is for nothing but to remain there for eternity.¹

These words, by means of their poetry and imagery, describe why we go to church. Let me unpack the quote to tell you why I think this is true.

"My love is my weight."

What we desire, what we love, acts as the gravitational pull on our personhood. Love is nourished by presence, by hearing, seeing, touching, smelling, tasting. Church, at its

best, involves all the senses, and it involves the mind and spirit. The primary purpose of the life of the church is to reveal Divine love and to incite human love for the Divine. So, in a practical way, Christians go to church to be present to the force of love, to feast on it, and to let our minds be filled with it. We go to church to be moved by the beauty, truth, and goodness of what we desire. We go to church to be present to the gravitational pull of love in our bodies, in our minds, and with our strength. This is why we kneel and stand. This is why we bow and approach the altar with reverence. This is why we listen to the strange, hard words of Scripture and to preaching. This is why we love one another and exert our love for the world. We go to church to spend our time within a gravity that begins to act on our lives.

This is one of the reasons it is so important to be rigorously beautiful in our worship. We the Church must read our Scriptures with dignity, wrestle with Scripture and theology in our preaching, sing with full voice hymns thick with truth and heavenly glory, speak the Creed thoughtfully and with humility, offer our prayers in the Resurrection hope, and, most importantly, approach the Eucharist, the love feast of

¹ Augustine, *Confessions*. trans. Sarah Ruden (The Modern Library, 2017), book 13.10, 436-437

the Church, with open hearts, and reverent awe. We as the Church must offer to the human soul the strong food of love, which nourishes and sustains.

Where there is no beauty in the Church, it is hard to love. Beauty is compelling; it elicits worship. Beauty can be simple, and beauty can be complicated. We are equally called, whether there are only a few in the pews, or our pews are full, to join the Seraphim and Cherubim crying with the best of our being, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts." We cannot say these words carelessly or half-heartedly. We go to church to learn to cry out holy in harmony with the heavenly hosts.

The Church who is not grappling with the strange complexity of Scripture, who is not attempting to understand the love of the Triune God, and a church without its roots in the doctrine of the Incarnation and the person of Jesus Christ, cannot weight a soul toward love. Love is fed by understanding; it is hard to love that which we do not know. We love the one we can encounter. And the love of the Trinity is revealed in the person, work, death, and resurrection of Christ. He is our place of encounter. Christ is available to us as word and as sacrament. We are drawn into the life of God, into the body of Christ, by participating in word and sacrament. We go to church to encounter Christ.

"I am carried by it wherever I am carried."

We go to church to be carried. We need to be carried. Where one is weak, the other is strong. Where one is believing, the other is doubting. We hold each other up. We are not going to church just to have a good chit chat (though this is part of love), we are going to church to be carried by each other in God to God. Charles Williams says that when an infant is baptized into the church, that baby is being placed into a coinherence — a reality in which we all are attached to one another, in which we depend on one another by which we are all saved together.² In this reality, we are all sustained by the one who holds us all, the God-Man Jesus Christ. Our lives together are hidden in Christ in God and carried into life. Our job is to get to church, to come into the circle of transcendent love with other people. From there the transcendent takes over and picks us up and carries us. We are carried together, because we carry each other.

"Through your gift we catch fire and are carried upward; we go up in flames, and up we go."

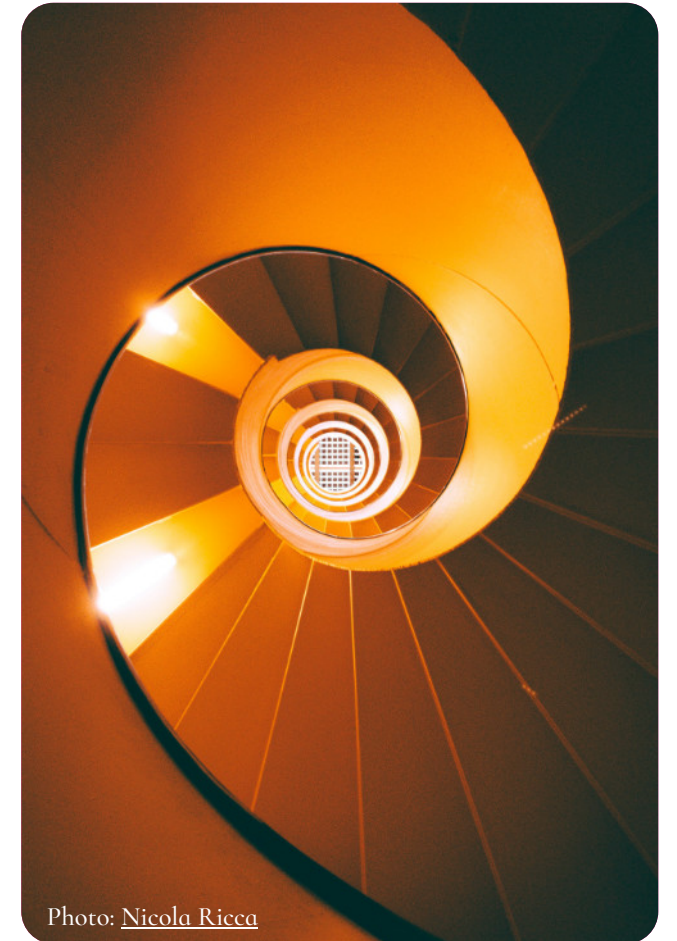


Photo: [Nicola Ricca](#)

We go to church to be exposed to the fire which emancipates upward movement. We go to church to confess our sins. The fire of God's love is good and freeing, but it is neither safe nor tame. Being in church can make us uncomfortably warm. Jesus says, "The Truth will set you free,"³ but the truth is not always easy. By our confession we bring those things that we want to hide, the issues we don't want to talk about, the shame we might feel, and we place them by the great fire. We want to feel clean, forgiven, hopeful, free, and this means that some things will need to burn away. This hurts, but we know that in order to be the people we long to be, we need to catch fire. We go to church to catch fire — to be forgiven for our sin and to be sanctified.

"In our heart we ascend the ascending staircase, and we sing the song of the rising steps."

² Charles Williams, *Descent of the Dove* (Eerdmans Printing Company, 1939), 235.

³ John 8:32

As we come to the fire of confession we need courage. In the fiery furnace, it is best, like Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, to sing.⁴ We go to church to sing. We sing with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven, and as I said earlier, this beauty, this singing, moves us; it gives us courage and strength. Worship in song also teaches us truth in our bodies; we learn to breathe when we sing; and breath is related to the life of the Spirit. We also learn with our bodies what it feels like to be in tune and out of tune. Singing changes what we know and how we know it. The former Archbishop Rowan Williams, in a lecture on singing in the church, said, “[I]t is that fundamental principle of ‘word made flesh’ that is perhaps the best theological justification for singing rather than just saying. Because singing is part of our fleshliness. And one of the ways in which our flesh becomes meaningful and beautiful...[H]ymns are never just decorations. Singing is not an afterthought in Christian action and worship.”⁵ We go to church to sing our faith, attuning ourselves to others and to God.

*“By your fire, by your good fire, we go up in flames, and there we go, since we go up to the peace of Jerusalem; since I rejoice in those who said to me, ‘We will go to the Master’s house.’ Good will is going to set us in the right place there, in such a way that our will is for nothing but to remain there for eternity.”*⁶

We go to church to find peace and rest — to find our place and make our home.⁷ We humans desperately want to know our purpose, our place in the world, and we want to have a home. We learn our place, our home, by moving our bodies to a particular God-filled place on a regular basis. By being fed with the bread of angels in the Eucharist we learn to feast together. By carrying each other we learn charity and coinherence. By standing close to the fire in our confession we learn to be real. By singing praise together we learn harmony. All of these actions give us a taste of eternity; we experience it and we learn to know it together. We go to church to prepare for our true home.

I hope that with all this poetic language, emotion, and singing, that this answer is also down to earth and practical. “My love is my weight.” We go to church to honour the laws of gravity on our lives.

⁴ The story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is found in Daniel 3. Their song is found in the apocryphal text *The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three* and is a canticle in the Book of Common Prayer.



Photo: Maxim Tاجر

⁵ Rowan Williams, “Treasure no. 72: What we are saying by singing”, The Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland, <https://hymnsocietygbi.org.uk/2006/10/treasure-no-72-what-are-we-saying-by-singing/>.

⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, book 13.10, 437

⁷ This phrase comes from Julian of Norwich. “He wants us to have true knowledge that he himself is being; and he wants our understanding to be founded in this knowledge with all our might, and all our purpose, and all our intention; and upon this foundation he wants us to take our place and make our home.” Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, trans. Barry Windeatt (Oxford World’s Classics, 2015), section 42.94.