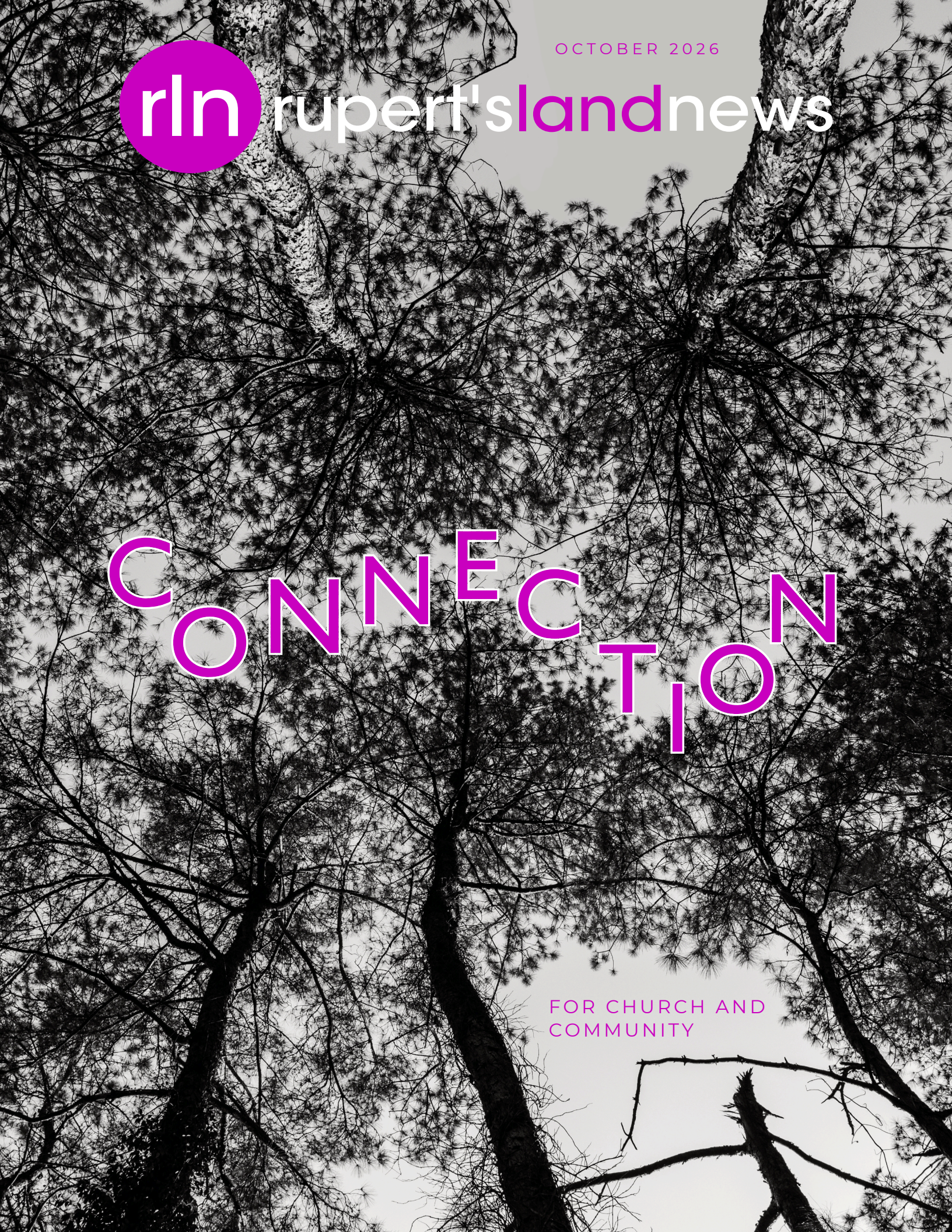


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CONNECTION

FOR CHURCH AND COMMUNITY

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CONNECTION

Rupert's Land News magazine 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 Dryden, ON, by offering news, events, opinions, and ideas to 1,200 readers per month. RLN is available in a variety of formats: Website • Instagram

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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: Photo by IAUN

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In case you are not aware—or in case this is the umpteenth time you have heard about it—Synod is coming up. It has been mentioned in parishes, in past issues of this magazine, in the weekly newsletter that RLN sends out, and hopefully by the people around you who ask about what matters to you in the Diocese. If you are involved in Synod, it comes as no surprise that it is being mentioned so frequently. But if you are not directly involved, you may be wondering why it matters, especially if you are not attending yourself.

Although I have only attended two sessions of Synod, I have come to see it as something more than a gathering to discuss and make decisions about the life of the Diocese. Synod, like this magazine, connects people beyond their individual parishes and Sunday gatherings. It reminds us that we are one Body—not merely a collection of separate buildings and communities.

Our individual parishes are wonderful, beautiful places of fellowship. But our connections to one another can extend far beyond the people we see each Sunday.

The other day, I had the privilege of hearing about a gentleman visiting a church for the first time in a very long time. He shared stories of growing up Mennonite, as many Manitobans can relate to, and of spending weekends helping family members dig ditches or roof houses. What stood out to me was how strong the sense of community was. Even when family members did not see one another regularly, they knew they could lean on one another for support. They belonged to something bigger than themselves.

This got me thinking about Synod. I see it as a gathering of extended family: people I have not seen in a while and look forward to catching up with, people I have never met and am excited to get to know, and people I see more regularly but am delighted to share in the joy of being reunited with others.

The church family I see on Sundays might feel like my immediate family because we spend more time together. Yet, especially during the Prayers of the People, I am reminded that my family extends beyond my parish. I belong to a much larger community, one that stretches across the Diocese and beyond.



Photo: Jonas Denil

There is, of course, a difference between our extended relatives and our church family: we choose to enter into this community of faith. But when we join a parish, we become part of something larger than that parish alone. We belong to a Diocese, and beyond that, to the one Body of Christ: a family of believers striving to love God above all else and our neighbours as ourselves.

Synod is one opportunity to see that family gathered together. Even if we are not there ourselves, its work reminds us that the life of the Church is not confined to our own pews. We are connected to one another, called to support one another, and united in a faith that reaches far beyond our own church doors.

In this issue, Bishop Naboth Manzongo begins with a reflection on the theme for this Synod, emphasizing that we are one team, Team Rupert's Land, together. Then, Anil Pinto-Gfroerer explains how the term "coinherence" not only applies to the church but is something to continuously strive for. After this, Obren Amiesimaka reminds us that through Christ, the True Vine, we flourish when we work as individuals, together. Lastly, Donna Royer shares some of her difficulties with and hopes for remaining connected with one another.



CINNA BARAN

Editor of Rupert's Land News

We Belong to One Another



As we prepare to gather for Synod, let us reflect on one word from our diocesan theme: connection. Our theme is "Team Rupert's Land: Courage, Connection, and Change." Each word matters. Courage helps us face the truth about where we are. Change invites us to follow where God is leading. But connection reminds us that we do not undertake this journey alone.

The Diocese of Rupert's Land comprises many parishes across many communities. Some of our congregations are large, while others are small. Some are in the city, while others serve rural communities. We worship in different styles and bring diverse histories, cultures, experiences, and hopes. Yet we belong to one another because we are in the same diocese under one bishop, but above all, we belong to one another because we belong to Christ.

Synod is therefore more than a business meeting. The word means "on the road together." We are companions on the journey together. Synod involves active participation and co-responsibility of all orders of the house: laity, clergy, and bishop. In it we collaborate and exercise communal discernment. This is not a top-down mandate; the emphasis is on mutual listening, dialogue and prayerful discernment to understand where and what God is calling for. At Synod, we come together to worship, pray, listen, make decisions, and discern the mission God has entrusted to us. Every parish brings something valuable. Every voice matters. No congregation should feel that it stands alone, and no ministry should believe that its struggles or hopes are invisible to the rest of the diocese.

Connection does not mean that we must always agree. It means that we remain at the table, listen carefully, speak honestly, and refuse to treat one another as strangers. Saint Paul calls us to speak "the truth in love," so that together we may grow into Christ, who is the head of the Church. Truth without love can wound and love without truth can become shallow. Our connection must also extend beyond the walls of our buildings. God calls us into deeper relationships with our neighbours, with Indigenous communities, with new-comers, with those who are hungry or lonely, and with people who may never enter one of our buildings. The strength of our diocesan life will not be measured only by how well we gather, but also by how faithfully we serve.

As we approach Synod, I invite every parish to pray for our delegates, our clergy, and the whole diocese. Let us come ready to listen and to learn from one another. Let us renew old relationships and make room for new ones. Let us ask where another parish may need our encouragement, our partnership, or our practical support.

Our connection is not simply organizational; it is spiritual. In Christ, we are members of one body, called to walk together with courage and to embrace the change through which God is renewing the Church. We are Team Rupert's Land: one diocese in many communities, pursuing one mission. I look forward to gathering with you at Synod.



NABOTH MANZONGO

Naboth Manzongo is the Bishop of Rupert's Land

Prayer and Presence:

Weaving ourselves into a load-bearing web



ANIL PINTO-GFROERER

Photo: Albert Stoynov

"Eagles effortlessly ride thermals; hummingbirds pause in midair; quail burst into flight heart-stoppingly. Taken all together, the flight paths of birds bind the planet together like 100 billion filaments, tree to tree and continent to continent."

Thus speaks the American writer Jonathan Franzen, in a wonderful article entitled *Why Birds Matter* featured in a recent sermon by Rev. Bonnie Dowling. Now you may be wondering why I am starting a piece on connection, presumably human connection, with an image of birds. I do so because it is a beautiful image and an apt metaphor for the notion of coinherence, an idea that grows in importance as we draw nearer to Synod.

While the number of "filaments" may be impossible to calculate, we humans—like the birds—also move from place to place weaving thousands of little imperceptible silvery strands together. One of these places of movement is in and between our parishes. If perceived from a birds-eye view, the movements of believers in and out of churches would form a web so vast it too would encircle the globe.

But what exactly is coinherence? Although the term, coined by Charles Williams, is crudely defined by the Collins Dictionary as "the act of inhering together," it could be better understood as the acceptance and recognition of these intertangled strands. The recognition that, as St. Anthony of the Desert puts it, "our life and our death are with our neighbour."

In the past few years, I have been fortunate enough to have visited many Anglican parishes across the country—some with booming congregations and others filled with a small handful of faithful churchgoers. Although these parishes have each differed greatly in terms of location, liturgical aesthetic, physical size, congregation size, the act of practicing coinherence has been evident at the heart of each one. Within each parish, congregants are sharing food, offering prayers for each other, giving and receiving care of various sorts (mowing each other's lawns, knitting socks etc.), exchanging stories, and singing together. When someone is sick or unwell, another will offer to fill their place in worship. Within our parishes, coinherence is, in many respects, our way of sharing in the Love of Christ poured out for us on the

Cross. But how is this coinherence being reflected in the life of our Diocese as a whole? I believe that this is a practice we need to strengthen.

All too often, and across our whole country, I have heard Anglican parishioners proclaim with sad remorse that "our Church is dying." It is my belief that this will only be true if we let it be. Of course, there are many social factors which have impacted this decrease in Church attendance: Covid, the true and real evils the church has been involved with in the last few centuries, the deconstructivist narrative popular among folks of my generation, the loss of churchgoing in public consciousness—the list goes on. However, it does not seem that our acceptance of this dwindling has done much at all to bring people closer to God, and to recognize the overwhelming truth that "all that is assumed is healed."



Photo: Alecsander Alves

Ben Crosby, an Episcopalian priest currently undergoing a PhD at McGill, writes: "everyone is beloved of God, who sent his Son to bring good news to a fallen and suffering world. There can be no doubt this world is suffering from evil and despair. So why on earth would we, who have been entrusted to share the hope of Christ, withhold or obscure it where it is so clearly needed?"

Here I want to make clear that I do not believe that we are attempting to withhold or obscure this hope. However, I do believe that in order to effectively share this hope with our communities, we ought to join together in the work of evangelism. To clarify, this vocation of evangelism which I believe is necessary to take up is not the violent evangelism popular among western Christians over the last few centuries, but rather the type of evangelism proposed by St. Gregory the Great.

In his *Book of Pastoral Rule*, St. Gregory suggests that "every preacher should be 'heard' more by his deeds than by his words." He continues "moreover, the footprint of his good living should be that path that others follow rather than the sound of his voice showing them where to go." I am convinced it is due time to forsake our "tiptoeing" and to step boldly (with care), establishing a path that can be followed. A path, grounded in a Love, which knows no bounds and a sure hope in "the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

In order to engage in this vocation, laid out for us as a Diocese, we ought to strengthen our web by practicing coinherence through *prayer*. There are countless ways we can do this, however a few options are: praying for the Diocese and for all churches in our neighbourhoods, attending each other's patronal festivals, going to prayer groups, and visiting each other's sanctuaries (we are lucky enough to have several which are quite spectacular). In our life of prayer, these words of intercession, sent heavenward, meet each other in the air like birds casting silver filaments over the earth. This mystical binding is the web which holds us together—which reminds us of our nature as kin in Christ.

One other aspect of parish life which can support this Diocesan vocation is the acknowledgement of kinship in *presence*. Here the opportunity presents itself for parishioners to attend social gatherings at various churches – for instance St. George's Wakefield Halloween Family Fun Dance (Friday,



Photo: Chris Stenger

October 23, from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. at the Petersfield Hall), or Smells and Belles at St. Michael and All Angels, or the Slater MacQuire Lecture Series at St. Margaret's (I speak only of the Churches I know but there are so many which host wonderful events). We can also join in the tradition of Mothering Sunday (this year it lands on March 7th) and visit our beautiful St. John's Cathedral. When we recognize the ties that we have to each-other by being present in each other's communities, we become more able to walk together.

As we turn towards each other in prayer and presence, as a Diocese, we can begin to truly coinhere. In this way, we become strong enough to carry ourselves and our communities forward into the uncertain future. In fact, in this practice we can weave those ephemeral silvery filaments so tightly they become one great refractory surface, reflecting to the world the infinite Love of the Divine and the sure Hope he gives us.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who by thy Holy Spirit didst preside in the Council of the blessed Apostles, and hast promised, through thy Son Jesus Christ, to be with thy Church to the end of the world: We beseech thee to be present with the Synod of this Diocese about to be assembled in thy Name. Save its members from all error, ignorance, pride, and prejudice; and of thy great mercy vouchsafe so to direct, govern, and sanctify them in their deliberations by thy Holy Spirit, that through thy blessing the Gospel of Christ may be faithfully preached and obeyed, the order and discipline of thy Church maintained, and the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour enlarged and extended. Grant this, we beseech thee, through the merits and mediation of the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (*Taken from the Book of Common Prayer for General, Provincial, or Diocesan Synods*).



ANIL PINTO-GFROERER

Anil Pinto-Gfroerer is a recent graduate of the University of King's College, Halifax, and is a lover of art history. She currently works as a bookkeeper and is part of the congregation of St. Margaret's Anglican Church. She spends most of her free time with her friends Seika and Iona, eating junk food and conversing about the world.



We Are One Body

Obren Amiesimaka

Photo: Christopher Akinlade

Growing up, we had two magnificent mango trees, along with several other plants, including coconut trees. Having been planted by my grandmother, of blessed memory, they were decades old with expansive roots which allowed them to withstand the tropical rainfall and winds. They bloomed in season with fresh tasty fruits—the memories of which will undoubtedly stay with me forever. Thinking of those trees, I am reminded of Jeremiah 17:7-8: "But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

Amongst the main parts of trees are the roots (obtaining water/nutrients and securing everything to the ground), the branches (holding up the leaves to the sunlight and fruits/flowers in blossom) and the trunk (providing support and linking the other parts together). These parts play different roles, but they are all connected to make up the tree and allow it to live and flourish.

This arboreal analogy of connectedness is used by our Lord Jesus Christ in John 15:5-8: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

Christ admonishes us that we must remain connected to him as the True Vine, for us to have life and be fruitful.

St. Paul continues this theme of connectedness in the 12th chapter of his letter to the Church in Rome, in the fourth to fifth verses: "For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

He goes further to reiterate that although we are one body, we all bring unique gifts that enrich us all in our unity: "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness." (Romans 12: 6-8)

Similarly, St. Paul underlines the equal value of all parts of the Christian body, reminding us that we all need one another and have a share in the others' blessing: "The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honourable we bestow the greater honour, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honour to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together." (1 Corinthians 12: 21 – 26)

Many parts, doing different things, all connected in one with shared outcomes!

As a member of the St. John's Cathedral Vestry and Choir, I am fortunate to have a vantage position, both figuratively and literally from the quire, wherefrom I witness people living out the meaning of being many but one body in Christ. From the Altar Guild to the sidespersons, the hospitality team to the children's and youth ministry, the acolytes to the choir, amongst others.

Likewise, as the mother church of the diocese, the Cathedral hosts several diocesan services which I have also been blessed to have attended and seen up close the many branches of the True Vine—the people of Rupert's Land, clergy and laity alike. We come together in connectedness with Christ, each bringing gifts in service of one another.

This connectedness will be on display at this year's synod to which I am humbled to be a delegate. Representatives from parishes across Rupert's Land will come together in an act of unity to help chart the course for our diocese at the Spirit's direction.

Our gathering, whether weekly or biennially, calls to mind Hebrews 10:25: "And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of His return is drawing near."

Being connected with others provides many a benefit and is important in all facets of life: "Again, if two lie together, they



Photo: Olga Serjantu

keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him — a threefold cord is not quickly broken." (Ecclesiastes 4: 11-12). Indeed, there is strength and safety in unity; we are able to do better and achieve more when we do it together.

As with all things, we must be watchful even in our connections. 2 Corinthians 6:14 says, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?" This is not to say that Christians should seclude themselves from those they consider unbelievers—after all, we are the 'light of the world'—and Christ tells us: "In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16). Rather, we are to be mindful not to enter entanglements with others that might cause us to stray from following the Way.

Beloved, let us stand together as the branches of the vine and the many parts of the body of Christ, growing together in love and unity "...speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." (Ephesians 4: 15-16)

Connected in Christ, unified in purpose, let us keep working in divine synergy!

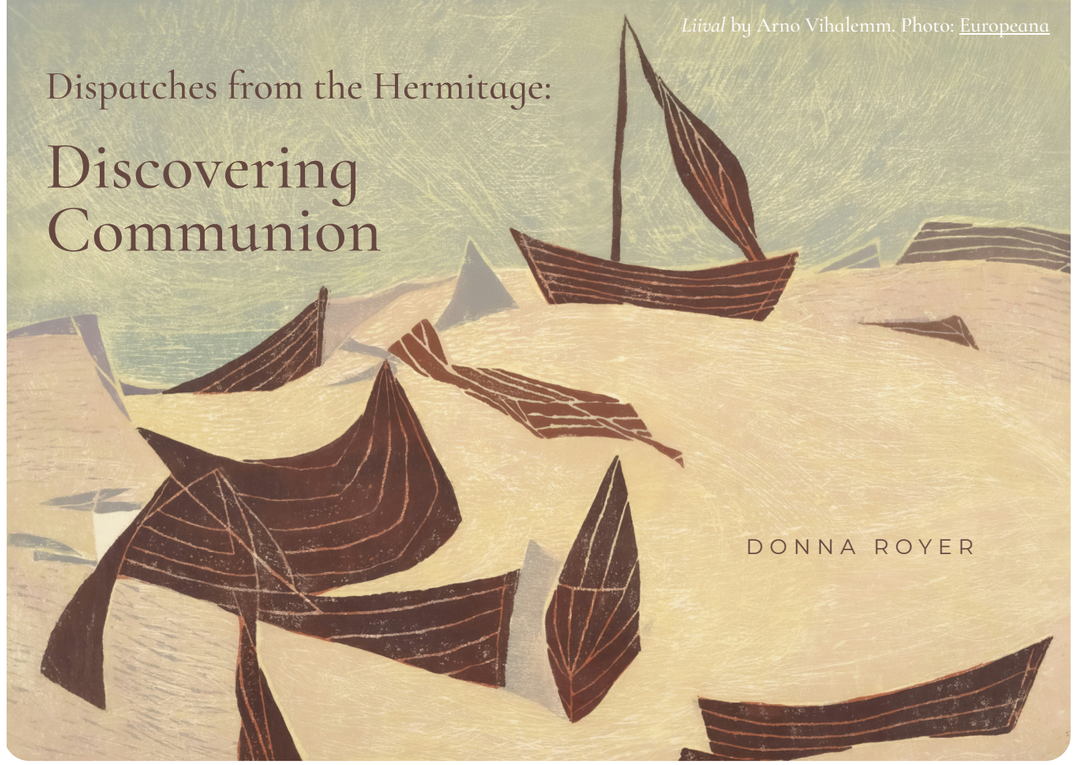


OBREN AMIESIMAKA

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: Milton Ahmed



Liival by Arno Vihalemm. Photo: Europeana

Dispatches from the Hermitage: Discovering Communion

DONNA ROYER

The background hum of adult voices was interrupted by excited cries of children. The visual chaos of assorted jackets all scrunched together on coat racks was broken by the odd long coat. The smell of damp hats, scarves, and mittens permeated the air. These snapshots are entwined with the memory of smiles, greetings called across the cloakroom, and, for me, the sense of coming home. I felt seen and welcomed—safe and cocooned amongst others of all ages. There was a comfort in the constantly swirling chaos. This was, however, not a gathering at a relative's home, but the weekly prelude to Sunday morning worship with my parish family.

Now my experience is different. The ancient fossils frozen in limestone silently greet me as I step into a portico and wrestle with the heavy wood door that sticks hard enough that it makes me wonder if it's locked. There's a quiet hush. With nods, smiles, and calm words of greeting, those of us gathered acknowledge each other. My fellow parishioners are not close intimates, but neither are they strangers. Papers rustle. Bodies and feet shift as we each settle for the midday, midweek Eucharist. This too feels like coming home—but to more of a formal living room rather than a messy family room.

Some thrive by remaining in one parish, worshiping in one style, and being known deeply by people who have witnessed their lifelong development. I, however, was called to a different path and have participated in many parishes over the years. Each has used the same set of Anglican liturgies; this could easily be overlooked given the differences in size, worship style, music and ministry focus. In the face of these differences, it was easy for me to question what makes a church 'family.' Agreement? Affection? Proximity?

Over the years, I've witnessed and participated in many differences of opinion, some of which became bitter disagreements. Questions of customs—like whether books could be dispensed with in favour of words being projected onto a screen—have created tensions at parish annual meetings. Budgetary conversations focused on prioritizing outreach ministries or 'saving for a rainy day' at diocesan synods have been contentious. And theological differences at an international level, such as that around sexuality, have required deep discernment. It seems we do not agree very often.

For many years I consoled myself with the idea that we chose our faith family by recognizing that our own individual

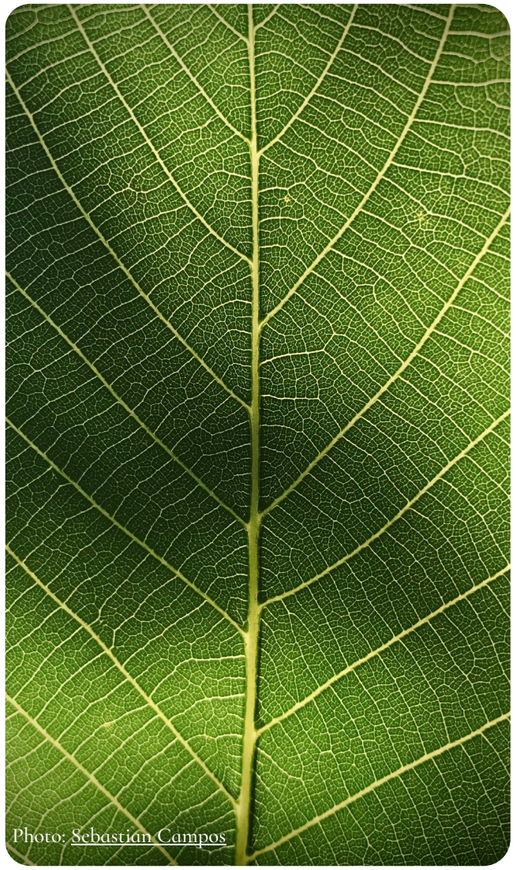


Photo: Sebastian Campos

relationships with God, while of immeasurable importance, did not replace our need for a sacramental connection to Christ. I thought it was our choice of parish and the Anglican denomination that created our connections to one another. Experience has taught me though, that our communion is not something we create.

I remember the sharp pain as my legs pulled free of the pew as I rose to go up for communion one sweltering summer morning. My mind had drifted throughout the service to the question of what to do. I was tired of the endless committee conversations and the seeming lack of action in the parish. It felt like the only thing we agreed upon was that we didn't understand or appreciate each other or our differing approaches. As I knelt and tried to focus on meeting Christ, I made the decision. And, by the time the postlude swelled, I was mentally planning which parish I'd be in the next week.

This one simply no longer felt like a welcoming family to me.

I thought that by moving on I'd have a fresh start. I'd find a parish family that saw me for who I was now and which might already embody the change I'd been advocating for. The idea that patiently working at deep change—of myself, of relationships, of systems—and the time such change could take was not something I considered. I didn't see that my decision was influenced by my impetuosity and inflexibility.

Several years later, at a diocesan gathering, two folks from that parish approached me—an acquaintance I had failed to keep in contact with and one of the folks I'd most publicly wrestled with. Our parishes disagreed on an important issue under discussion at this gathering. I braced myself, assuming I'd hear, yet again, how I was the same misguided woman I'd been years before. Yet, as they drew close, there were smiles and open arms ready to hug me. Confused and somewhat wary, I allowed them to steer me towards the edge of the room.

While we reminisced and caught up, they gently told me how hurt they'd each been by my abrupt leaving, but then went on to share how heartening it was to hear that I had found somewhere that felt a better fit. Their words helped me to discover that we are called to nurture our connection to one another—but we receive it through Christ.

Going forward, this understanding shaped my view of church communities. It is what allows my church family to now extend through space and time.

As I age, I'm increasingly aware that, just as others came before me, I am part of the story of those yet to come. I now consider the Communion of the Saints, men and women spanning history, family. These individuals once led lives every bit as messy and confusing as my own. The heroic or major dramas of their lives, while inspiring, don't detract from their real everyday struggles and triumphs—and it's there I often find them most inspiring. When did they struggle with darkness and their vocations? How were they kind to neighbours? Time is no barrier to our connection or their ability to offer guidance to my own journey.

Today, my church families in Uganda and Canada are no longer in visible communion with one another. I think fondly of the memories from my time serving in Africa that would surface unbidden each Sunday when we'd pray for our



Photo: Donna Royer

companion Diocese. The echoing sound of the drum calling the faithful to worship used to compete with the bells in my mind. Because of the many miles between us, the bright colours of the women's gomesi (dresses), the bubbling stream of the Lugandan language, and the smiles that lit up those children's faces will never welcome me to worship again. Because of the institutional breakup, I am saddened that I am no longer prompted to remember and pray for them while I worship in my church community.

Some disagreements which arise in our family of faith truly matter. Sometimes we must follow our conscience and continue our journeys apart. But, because our communion is received through Christ, I am assured that even our deepest disagreements need not break our connection. My Ugandan family, and others I have lost contact with over the years, will always remain in my heart. I pray that we shall always remain connected through Christ, even in our estrangement.



DONNA ROYER

After decades of active ministry on behalf of, and within, the Church, Donna now lives a quieter, slower life as an intentional contemplative Solitaire. She spends her days on her rural Interlake acreage reading, creating textile art, taking photos, and wandering in the woods.