

# MARCH 2026

# FAITH TIDES



Photo: J. Abram Photography



Bishop's Column: Welcoming everyone to the table

Churches get creative to raise funds for new keys

Diocese to host a summer retreat on Salt Spring Island

# March 2026 content

By Faith Tides

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# Welcoming everyone to the table



*The kitchen at St. Peter, Lakehill.*

*By Anna Greenwood-Lee*

Perhaps this is an inappropriate topic for Lent, a season of fasting, but as bishop I am pleased to see that many of our parishes have recently or will soon undertake kitchen renovations. In the past few years, St. Mary Magdalene, Mayne Island and the Parish of Salt Spring Islands have both significantly upgraded their kitchens.

St. Philip, Cedar and St. John the Divine, Courtenay are about to, and even St. Columba, Tofino, where the building is too small to have a kitchen, is looking at expanding their “hospitality station” so that they can better host the coffee time they enjoy after their Sunday worship.

Other parishes, like St. John the Baptist, Cobble Hill and St. Peter, Lakehill, already have lovely big kitchens

that host a variety of both parish and community events.

Finally, I think of the parish of St. Margaret of Scotland on Galiano Island that doesn’t have a kitchen but nevertheless manages to host amazing salmon barbeques out on their deck, and of St. Barnabas, Victoria, whose regular Sunday lunches have their parish hall bursting at the seams.

Diana Butler Bass, in her new book *A Beautiful Year: 52 Meditations on Faith, Wisdom and Perseverance*, reflects on the centrality of meals for our Christian life. She suggests that it wouldn’t be hard to argue that Jesus’ primary work was in fact organising suppers to embody the Kingdom of God:

“Throughout his ministry, Jesus welcomed everyone — to the point of contention with his critics — to the table. Tax collectors, sinners, women, Gentiles, the poor, faithful Jews, and ones less so. Jesus was sloppy with invitations. He never thought about who would be seated next to whom. He made the disciples crazy with his lax ideas about dinner parties. All he wanted was for everybody to come, to be at the table, and to share conversation.”

As we prepare for the Easter feast, I invite you to think about how your parish already eats together and what you could do to spend more time at table with one another and to invite more people, from all walks of life, to join you at the table. It is, in my experience, the best way to grow a parish both in bonds of affection and trust and also in numerical size.

I would also argue that in this day and age, when the fastest growing demographic in our diocese is individuals living alone, it is imperative to create tables

where all are welcome, all are included, all are fed and nourished, no matter their family, socioeconomic or any other “status.” Proclaiming the Kingdom of God must always and everywhere include the feasts where the people come east and west, north and south, and feast (Luke 13:29).

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## Churches get creative to raise funds for new keys



*Photo credit: J. Abram Photography.*

*By Naomi Racz*

Music is an important aspect of Anglican worship and for many, services wouldn't feel complete without the accompaniment of a pipe organ or piano. That's why a number of our parishes are currently fundraising to buy or pay for new pipe organs and pianos — and finding creative ways to raise funds.

### **Pianos new and old serve Victoria music ministry**

In November 2025, St. Luke, Cedar Hill purchased a used grand piano to add to their already rich music ministry.

St. Luke's has had a music director on staff since 1940 and is currently looking for a new music director while Alan Whitmore, who has extensive schooling and experience in playing and teaching piano and organ, steps in as interim director. Alan oversees the whole music ministry at St. Luke's, which includes a choir and a handbell choir.



The church is home to a

*The new Baldwin grand piano at St. Luke, Cedar Hill. Photo by Barb Prescott.*

Casavant organ, and now a Baldwin grand piano. “The former piano was a small spinet model upright which was really inadequate to support worship,” says Alan. “Since purchasing the grand, the improvement in the singing of the parish in general but also our choir specifically is huge. The warmth of tone and the availability for a much broader dynamic range is wonderful.”

In 2023, St. Luke's launched the Reflections series, with monthly installments that offer poetry, prose, prayer and contemporary music to create a time of stillness and connection. Alan hopes that the new piano will

help expand the opportunities for using the sanctuary as a concert venue.

To recoup the costs of the piano, as well as moving and tuning costs, St. Luke's is currently trying to raise \$9,000. At the beginning of

the  
year,  
St.  
Luke's



*The keyboard of the new grand piano at St. Luke, Cedar Hill. Photo by Barb Prescott.*

launched a "Buy a Key" fundraiser, which allows donors to sponsor a key or pedal. As of mid-February 2026, the church has raised \$5,815 towards that goal and has plans for more fundraising concerts.

A short drive down the road, the parish of St. George the Martyr, Cadboro Bay has also been fundraising to carry out repairs to their much-loved Baldwin grand piano. The piano needs new strings, hammers, hammer shanks and felts, as well as a protective cover, all of which will cost \$15,000.

The church investigated buying a new or used grand piano but refurbishing the existing piano was more cost-effective, and the repairs mean the piano will last another 25 years without needing further major investments. The piano is also an important aspect of worship at St. George's and serves the wider community.

So far, the church has hosted two fundraisers: a family Christmas carol sing-along in December 2025, and

Celtic music for meditation in January 2026.

### Goodbye Cassie, hello Clement



*The model of digital organ that will be installed in St. Paul, Nanaimo.*

Nanaimo has been fundraising to purchase a new Makin Thirlmere digital organ to replace their Casavant organ, which has served the church for over 83 years.

While refurbishing the beloved organ (affectionally known as Cassie) was considered, it was more cost-effective to buy a new, more modern organ.

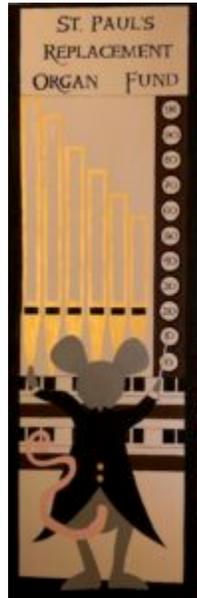
The new organ will set St. Paul's back \$120,000. They are aiming to raise \$98,000, with the remaining \$22,000 coming from the church's existing organ funds. St. Paul's has an organ replacement fundraising committee, led by Lynda Avis: "We have an extraordinary fundraising committee. Our meetings are full of fun, energy and imagination. They are a dream team!"

Up  
island,  
St.  
Paul,

The committee has used a variety of channels to reach potential donors. They sent out over 250 appeal letters. These went to everyone on the parish roll and anyone in the wider community who had donated to St. Paul's in the last three years.

The committee decided to use a fundraising thermometer to gauge the campaign's progress. One member suggested using

a church mouse as a mascot, and another member, who happens to be an illustrator, agreed to draw and decorate a mouse, dressed in tails, and the thermometer, which is updated as funds are received.



*A thermometer to gauge donations to the St. Paul's organ replacement fundraiser. Illustration by Michele Collins.*



*Lynda Avis dressed as Clement the church mouse. Image courtesy of Lynda Avis.*

Lynda decided to expand on the idea of a church mouse, naming him Clement. She even appeared in a mouse costume to address the congregation, in a bid to add some humour and fun to the campaign. The incumbent, Vernon Foster, also engaged in a bit of banter with Clement at one

service.

St. Paul's held a fundraiser bridge tournament on Valentine's Day, which attracted 56 players from the wider Nanaimo community. One hymn sing has been held, and another is planned, using the new organ.

Other fundraisers in the works include an art auction and a musical evening with talent from within St. Paul's and from the community, as well as "selling" the new organ's 36 stops. The fundraising committee has approached local and island media in hopes of receiving some coverage. Lynda notes, "All fundraisers not only aid us in reaching our goal but raise awareness of St. Paul and it's many ministries. At the end of February, total funds raised are \$69,000." Lynda is very confident that the target will be reached.

## A gift to the community that keeps giving



*The facade pipes of the cathedral's Hellmuth organ. Photo credit: J. Abram Photography.*

Christ Church Cathedral declared 2025 the “Year of the Organ” to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the cathedral’s Hellmuth Wolff organ. For 20 years the organ has seen daily use and has been played for more than 20,000 hours. This much use means that the organ’s delicate mechanism needs renewal. The four keyboards

require rebalancing and repair, and some of the pipes have fallen silent. It is estimated that this work will cost \$150,000.

Thomas Chase chairs the organ renewal committee and he points out that replacing the organ would cost in the millions. “The organ was a gift to the diocese and we need to keep that gift going.”

“The organ is the voice of the cathedral, the choir and the organ work together,” adds Donald Hunt, Christ Church Cathedral’s director of music. “We are called to make music by God, as Anglicans. We are not just a parish church; we are the cathedral to the city. We are engaging people throughout the community.”

This engagement, which was an important aspect of the Year of the Organ, could be clearly seen with the opening concert held on Jan. 4, 2025. For this opening

gala, Donald Hunt and Mark McDonald premiered Mark’s transcription of Tchaikovsky’s *The Nutcracker* suite for two organists. Around 900 people attended the concert. “It shows the organ is not a dusty, stuffy instrument,” says Donald.



*Mark McDonald (left) and Donald Hunt (right) perform Mark’s transcription of Tchaikovsky’s Nutcracker suite for two organists. Image courtesy of Christ Church Cathedral.*

The repair work will be carried out by Juget-Sinclair, an organ building firm based in Montreal. Stephen Sinclair worked with Hellmuth Wolff, who built the cathedral’s organ. Pipe organ building in Canada is heavily centred in Quebec and while there are some local organ builders, including Grant Smalley, Donald sees a need to continue passing on the baton. “If a kid hasn’t seen an organ, they’re not going to go into that career. I hope a young person sees the organ and decides to become an organ builder or organist.”

If you would like to donate to one of these fundraising campaigns, follow the links below.

- [St. Luke’s Anglican Church, Cedar Hill](#)
- [St George the Martyr, Cadboro Bay](#)
- [St. Paul’s Anglican Church, Nanaimo](#)
- [Christ Church Cathedral, Victoria](#)

# Lenten challenge enters its tenth year



*Elizabeth May speaking during the 2017 Metchosin Challenge.  
Photo by Sharleen Thompson.*

*By Naomi Racz*

Lent 2026 will see the tenth installment of the Metchosin Challenge, a Lenten challenge set up and run by St. Mary, Metchosin parishioner and long-time parish council member Sharleen Thompson.

Sharleen was inspired to start the challenge because she saw a need to reach out to the wider community and to show the community that the church is not just a place for spiritual connection, but that it is deeply connected and committed to the real world.

During Lent, Christians reflect on and examine how they live in the world, which is why Sharleen felt Lent was the perfect time to run a speaker series that prompts people to think about the big issues facing the world. Indeed, the theme for the first Metchosin Challenge, in 2017, was “Big Issues Facing the World.” Speakers that year spoke on topics including protecting

species diversity, climate change, food security and homelessness.

In subsequent years themes included “Human Rights,” “Little Things That You Can Do That Make a Difference,” “Embracing Change” and “Spirituality in the (Post) Modern World.”

There are typically six speakers for each series, and Sharleen allows the speakers to decide on the format. Some prefer to interact with the audience throughout their talk, while others prefer to present, then do a Q&A. Past speaker have included Herbert O’Driscoll, Green Party MP Elizabeth May, Orange Shirt Day founders Edie Charlie and Kirsten Spray, and former Green Party MP for Nanaimo-Ladysmith Paul Manly.

In 2020, the series was cut short midway by the COVID-19 pandemic, but the following year St. Mary’s was able to offer the series on Zoom and since then the challenge has been available both in-person and online. Sharleen says the Zoom link usually sees around 10 to 15 people attending, while in-person attendance can range from 10 to 80 people, depending on the speaker — Elizabeth May usually draws a large crowd.

St. Mary’s has grown from a congregation of 14 in 2008 to having around 100 people on the parish list today. “It’s not unusual to have two or three new people attending on Sunday,” says Sharleen. This growth has been particularly rapid in the last five years, and Sharleen puts it down to the energy the church has put into going outside the church community. She says two-thirds of attendees at the Metchosin Challenge talks are from outside the church. Messy Church and the church’s summer day camp have also been big draws for young families.

For this tenth speaker series, Sharleen decided to revisit the topic of “big issues” explored in the first series. “The issues have changed,” says Sharleen. “There are new threats and new knowledge.”

The first talk was held on Tuesday, Feb. 24 with Wally Eamer talking about “Rupture — Individual Rights, Identity and Collective Action.” On Tuesday, March 3, at 7 p.m. Elizabeth May will talk about climate change, and on Tuesday, March 10 Andy McKinnon will be talking about endangered species. For a full list of this year’s speakers and a link to the Zoom feed [visit the St. Mary’s website](#).

As to whether there will be an eleventh Metchosin Challenge, Sharleen is unsure. She does most of the planning and organizing for the challenge and it’s a lot of work. But each year, she says, “God presents me with a theme.”

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## New year brings new energy to St. Peter, Quamichan



*Photo credit: J. Abram Photography*

*By Theo Robinson*

There is some exciting new energy happening at St. Peter, Quamichan! A new year seems to have brought with it a desire for new liturgical activity.

Throughout the season of Lent, I will be teaching those interested in learning how to pray Holden evening prayer. This Lutheran format of evening prayer was composed by Marty Haugen during the winter of 1985-1986 while he was at Holden Village in Washington State.

The service is known for its beautiful melodies and reflective prayers. The liturgy includes readings, hymns, prayers and a final blessing, and is perfect for use during contemplative times such as Advent and Lent. Marty Haugen has a way of creating music that gets stuck in your head for days.

Beginning on Feb. 25, every Wednesday during Lent at 7 p.m., anyone who is interested in learning Holden evening prayer is invited to come to St. Peter, Quamichan. Even if, or perhaps especially if, this is something you’ve never experienced before, you are welcome to join in. We will all learn together!

Another exciting new thing that’s happening at St. Peter’s is a youth and young adult service on April 26 at 7 p.m. According to the coordinators of the event, Hannah Smith and Max Zalinko, “This evening service is intended for those ages 13–30, and will be led by youth and young adults, with opportunities for participation in readings, music, prayer and fellowship.

“Our hope is to create a welcoming space for young people from different parishes to gather in worship,

build connections and share in community together... There will also be social time following the service, with refreshments and goodies, providing an opportunity for youth and young adults to meet and connect informally.”

All in the diocese, and our ecumenical partners, are invited to attend this service.

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## Diocese to host a summer retreat on Salt Spring Island



*By Naomi Racz*

Bishop Anna and Christine Conkin, incumbent at St. George, Cadboro Bay, will be hosting a diocesan retreat this summer on beautiful Salt Spring Island. The retreat will take place from Aug. 4 to Aug. 6, 2026 and all in the diocese are invited to attend. The theme of the retreat is “We are the Salt of the Earth” and retreat participants will spend time reflecting together on our call to be the salt of the earth amidst the challenges of

these turbulent 2020s.

The retreat will include three sessions, which will look at biblical and contemporary examples of how people of faith have resisted empires, as well as reflecting on how we as a diocese have both been the empire and resisted empire.

Christine hopes attendees will go away feeling empowered to act in the world. “I notice in the church world we get very discouraged about our ability to bring about the Kingdom of God in the world,” says Christine. “People feel powerless — and we are not powerless. So how can we engage the power of God, which is different to the power of empire, for the common good, for our world?”

The sessions will look at what lessons we can learn from biblical stories about facing down the empire, as well as ways that churches can engage in community organizing. “The Christian narrative is helpful to living in these turbulent 2020s and does provide us with tools for making sense of life when everything feels chaotic in the world right now,” says Bishop Anna

Bishop Anna also emphasizes that the retreat is supposed to be relaxing, and there is plenty of time in the schedule for attendees to get to know each other, and for enjoying the island.

The retreat will begin on Tuesday, Aug. 4 with dinner and an opening session. On Wednesday, Aug. 5 there will be a morning session, followed by a free afternoon to explore the island’s offerings — which include provincial parks, a thriving local arts community, agricultural heritage and food — or to rest and reflect.

On Wednesday afternoon there will be an evening

prayer service, followed by dinner and an evening session. Thursday, Aug. 6 will wrap up the retreat with a final session and closing eucharist.

The cost of registration is \$100 — this includes two dinners — and can be completed by filling out [the registration form](#). If you require financial assistance, you can apply to the [Education Trusts Committee](#) for assistance.

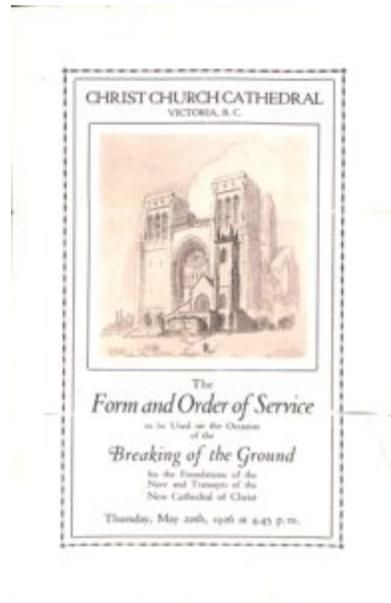
Registrants will be responsible for arranging their own accommodation. There is a range of accommodation available on the island, including hotels, rentals, B&Bs and campgrounds, as well as marinas for those coming by boat! Accommodation books up quickly on Salt Spring during the summer so make your reservations as soon as possible. There are [some options listed on the diocesan website](#).

If you have further questions, please contact the Synod Office at [synod@bc.anglican.ca](mailto:synod@bc.anglican.ca) or 250-386-7781.

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# 100 years since breaking ground at the cathedral

By *Justine Soles*



*Form and Order of Service programme, May 20, 1926 (CCC History Collection)*

cathedral opened in 1929.

The cathedral was designed by architect J.C.M. Keith, who was awarded the project in 1891 after an international design competition. A breaking ground ceremony for the cathedral was held on May 20, 1926, from which the diocesan archives hold an order of service programme.



*Laying of cathedral foundation stone, March 21, 1927 (Ph. 208)*

This year is the 100th anniversary of the beginning of construction on Christ Church Cathedral in Victoria. This building is the 3rd iteration of Christ Church. The first wooden building burned down in 1856, and the second (seen in the foreground of the form and order of service programme) was deconsecrated when the new

Nearly one year later, on March 21, 1927, the foundation stone for the cathedral was laid by the Bishop of London. The ceremony was attended by many Canadian and American bishops, including Bishop Charles Schofield, then-bishop of the Diocese of British Columbia, as well as a large crowd of onlookers, as can be seen in the photograph above. The building was consecrated three years later, and the first service was held in the new Christ Church Cathedral on Sept. 28, 1929.

## Ripples: March 2026

*By Faith Tides*



*Pictured (left) are (l-r) Brendon Neilson, executive director; Bishop Anna Greenwood-Lee; and Jenny Replogle at Jenny's collation as executive archdeacon. And (right) St. Michael and All Angels, Chemainus serves up fluffy pancakes, very berry compote, sizzling sausage and decadent desserts at a Shrove Tuesday pancake supper.*

### **A woodworking Fantastic Friday**

*Words and photos by Barb Prescott*

Fantastic Friday is St. Luke's version of Messy Church. We start with a craft or activity, have "chapel time," which includes a story and songs, and finish with a

communal dinner. On Feb. 6, St. Luke, Cedar Hill held a woodworking Fantastic Friday. Children, youth and adults enjoyed making creations using scraps of wood. Many children and adults don't get the chance to work with wood, and it is always fun to see what they produce.

As Claire White, people's warden at St. Luke's, commented: "The woodworking flowed into our theme during chapel, as we talked about Jesus learning to be a carpenter when he was 12."

For this Fantastic Friday, we invited members of St. Luke's Players to take part. St. Luke's Players are based in St. Luke's hall and produce four plays per year, including the ever-popular pantomime at Christmas.

Two St. Luke's Players set-builders came and helped with the woodworking at Fantastic Friday. Dave Hitchcock, one of the set-builders, commented, "It was a lot of fun hearing about their enthusiastic woodworking projects and then suggesting how they might go about making them."



As the pictures show, this was a very successful and enjoyable Fantastic Friday.

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# The stories we tell ourselves



People waiting at a train station. Photo by [Jay Clark](#) on [Unsplash](#)

By Lisa Alexander

I have a vivid imagination and one of the things I do to entertain myself when I'm waiting is make up stories about people using clues from what they are wearing, their body language, how they are interacting with those around them and whatever else my imagination can grab hold of. These harmless stories entertain me and help pass the time.

I know lots of people have a storytelling habit like me. It's fun, free and keeps us off our phones. I also know that a lot of people have a storytelling habit that goes much deeper and seriously impacts the way they move through life.

*He didn't phone me back because he's mad at me.*

*She is purposely delaying emailing me the information because she thinks I should already know the answer to the question I asked and wants to shame me.*

*They didn't invite me to the event because I don't matter to them.*

*He reacted angrily to me because I messed up again and this proves I'm stupid.*

I have been a part of number of interesting conversations in the last couple of weeks, some of them extremely difficult and painful. In one conversation, the participants were curious, open, careful to think before they gave voice to their opinions, eager to hear other's thoughts and intentional about making sure no one was interrupted or rushed. Hard decisions were made with relationships and dignity intact.

In another conversation, a person thought it was their responsibility to intervene on behalf of someone feeling hurt, they made accusations veiled as concerns and assumed a negative motive for someone's action — the conversation was a disaster. There is a rift in that relationship that has yet to be repaired.

Lord knows we all make mistakes. One of the biggest mistakes we make in human interactions is the stories we tell ourselves about another person's motives or reactions to us. This is wildly amplified when we are feeling emotional or protective of someone else who is having a big emotional reaction.

We impute malice, assume the worst in people's words, lose perspective about how heavy or light the message might be and grab with both hands any evidence that confirms the biases we already hold. It's one thing to read this, nod sagely to ourselves and think, *of course*

*Lisa is speaking the truth. We know this.* However, when we are right in the middle of it, we are almost always blind to the stories we tell ourselves.

I've been talking about curiosity for the last couple of months and this month I want us to turn our curiosity inwards again. Can you start to surface within yourself the stories you tell yourself during challenging interactions? Your self-talk might sound something like, *I might not have all the information I need right now. What story is my big reaction telling me? What other explanation might fit?*

Some of us might also find it helpful to add something along the lines of: *Even if she is angry at me, everyone makes mistakes and I can reach out and repair the rift.* As you do so, I encourage you to remind yourself each time: *I am the beloved of God.*

Big feelings are uncomfortable, but nothing separates us from the love of God in Christ. Let's grow our capacity for tolerating big feelings together without succumbing to the stories we tell ourselves.

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# Alongside Hope partners understand the challenges their communities face

By Lynn Schumacher



Alongside Hope supports projects in Canada and around the world in

*Justine Nyiruhirwa at her tailoring work station in Wakiso District. Image courtesy of Alongside Hope.*

collaboration with local partners. These partners understand the cultural, social, economic and political contexts of the communities and people they serve. This knowledge is invaluable for designing and implementing programs that respond to the specific

challenges community members encounter.

Action for Rural Women's Empowerment (ARUWE) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization dedicated to advancing the rights and well-being of women and girls in Uganda. ARUWE is committed to fostering gender equality and providing women and girls with the skills to overcome poverty, patriarchy and social inequities. Alongside Hope has had the privilege of partnering with ARUWE since 2013.

Justine Nyirguhira, a 25-year-old mother of two from Wakiso district, was able to complete four years of high school before she was forced to quit due to financial constraints. Married, with two children, her life was a struggle as her husband's shoe repair business did not bring in much money. She tried working as a nursery teacher and later selling second-hand clothes, but both ventures failed due to low pay, lack of capital and lack of support from her husband.

When ARUWE introduced the vocational and business skills program, Justine saw it as a chance to change her life.

Despite resistance from her husband, she remained determined, waking up early in the morning to prepare for training while caring for her children. Through the tailoring and entrepreneurship training, she learned to make pillowcases, table mats, dresses, shirts, skirts and trousers, as well as how to plan and manage a small business.

With the skills she acquired, Justine now earns income by sewing and selling her products locally. The profits, though small, have helped her buy more materials, support her children and prepare for an upcoming exhibition to showcase her work. Today Justine dreams

of owning her own tailoring business and expanding into selling clothes again. "The training has given me the courage to stand on my own and the skills to build a better life for my children."

[Support for Alongside Hope](#) helps us to connect with partner agencies and provide funds to help families like Justine's around the world.

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## How a Salt Spring Island experiment recovered Christian contemplation



*Cynthia Bourgeault (right) with Richard Rohr, OFM at a retreat at The Contemplative Centre on Salt Spring Island in 2001.*

*Photo: Mary-Clare Carder*

*By Nicholas Fournie*

*This article originally appeared in the [Anglican Journal](#) and is republished here with the permission of the*

*Journal and the author.*

When the parish of All Saints by the Sea consecrated its new church in 1994, it did something unusual: it placed meditation and silent prayer at the very centre of the celebration.

That choice, made on a quiet island in the Diocese of British Columbia, launched a spiritual experiment that would soon ripple far beyond its local roots. Nurtured by Margaret Haines' founding vision for The Contemplative Society, this initiative used a parish setting as a laboratory to prove a vital point: the Anglican tradition already possessed the spiritual depth many Western seekers were crossing oceans to find.

At a time when common wisdom held that to find transformation one had to "go East," this small society demonstrated that the water of life was already flowing in the West, if only someone would teach us how to drink from it.

That guide arrived in the form of Cynthia Bourgeault [mystic, Episcopal priest, writer and retreat leader]. When Haines' mentor, the internationally renowned Father Thomas Keating, was unable to attend the consecration, he sent his protégé in his stead to help the parish drink from the waters they sought. It was a meeting of kindred spirits.

Cynthia told the *Diocesan Post* in 1998 she found "a group of dedicated and self-motivated spiritual seekers with a tremendous depth of creativity." This mutual recognition birthed The Contemplative Society, not as a rogue operation, but with rare institutional foresight. Bishop Barry Jenks and the Anglican Foundation funded Bourgeault as a "hermit-in-residence," officially

prioritizing spiritual growth. Yet the driving force behind this container remained founding president Margaret Haines.

A voracious seeker herself, Margaret counted Tibetan Buddhist rinpoches, Sufi mystics and Fourth Way masters among her teachers. Cynthia later described her as a "midwife" to the movement: "Margaret was the spiritual mother... everything she touched, from plants to people to fledgling organizations, grew sturdy and strong in her graciously nurturing hands."

To understand how radical this work was, one must remember the spiritual climate of the 1990s. Yoga was beginning its meteoric rise, with the number of practitioners growing by 21 per cent annually in the late '90s.

As millions sought physical and spiritual grounding outside traditional structures, the institutional church was facing a precipitous decline. Anglican membership in Canada, having peaked in the 1960s, would drop by nearly half by 2001, and regular church attendance among Canadians would fall from 39 per cent in 1985 to just 22 per cent by 2005. For a generation of seekers, the assumption was clear: the church offered belief and morality but if you wanted transformation and direct experience, you went to the zendo or the ashram.

The Society's wager was that the transformative experiences drawing people East could actually be addressed by Christianity's own lost wisdom tradition. In an interview with the *Salt Spring Island Driftwood* in March 1998, Cynthia diagnosed the problem with characteristic bluntness: "The Christian path tends to make the mistake of talking all the time," she noted, adding that her "long-range dream and wish would be to see Christianity reclaimed in this fashion as an

authentic wisdom path so people don't have to leave Christianity to deepen their spirituality.”

The Anglican tradition, fluid, sacramental, and historically capacious, proved to be a fertile wineskin for this new wine. Unlike more rigid confessional streams, the Anglican ethos allowed The Contemplative Society to be both seriously Christian and open to the wider world.

It was here that the ancient concept of kenosis (self-emptying) was brought down from the theological shelf and applied as a practical method of prayer. Rather than a void to be feared, silence became a space of consent, a way of joining the self-emptying love of Jesus.

The “little church that could,” as Cynthia affectionately called the early Salt Spring Island cohort, eventually gave a gift to the wider world. The work incubated on the island launched Cynthia into an international teaching career, earning her a place on the Watkins list of the “100 Most Spiritually Influential Living People” and sparking a global network of wisdom schools and contemplative prayer groups. It demonstrated that a

local community could be a transmission line for a global renewal, offering a how-to for the interior life that the broader church had largely forgotten.

Today, The Contemplative Society's mission feels newly urgent. The church's decline that began decades ago has only continued but so has the thirst for wisdom. The story of The Contemplative Society offers a blueprint for how the church can meet this moment: not by competing for attention, but by teaching attention.

Ultimately, this is a story of cultural recovery. For too long, the narrative has been that the West is a spiritual void, a place of dry intellect that one must leave to find the water of life. But as texts like the 14th-century *The Cloud of Unknowing* remind us, the same non-dual thread of wisdom that runs through the East has always run through the West, buried under the floorboards of our own tradition.

The Contemplative Society stands as a testament to what is possible when a community decides to stop looking elsewhere and instead trusts that the water of life is flowing in its own well, waiting only for someone to help draw it out.

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