



# FaithTides

RENEWED HEARTS, RENEWED SPIRITS, RENEWED PEOPLE

**April 2022**

This PDF is a simple printable document of FaithTides online, which can be found at [faithtides.ca](http://faithtides.ca). Questions or comments can be sent to the editor at [faithtides@bc.anglican.ca](mailto:faithtides@bc.anglican.ca).

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# Where God might be calling us next

By Anna Greenwood-Lee

About a month ago, all the clergy of the diocese gathered (on Zoom, of course) and, together, we pondered the question of where God might be calling us next. As we slowly move out of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions (was I the only one who felt strange having a cup of coffee after church again?), we would be remiss if we didn't stop and prayerfully reflect on what God is now calling and needing the church to be.

Below is a selection of the gathered responses to this query from the priests and deacons who lead your communities:

- Regather and reconnect.
- How do we address the social divisions that have become painfully obvious of over the past month?
- Reform of the church — rethink technology and rethink what it means to belong.
- Take time to lament and be reflective — what have we learned in this season of wilderness and what do we bring forward?
- COVID-19 has given us an opportunity to reimagine what the church can be.
- Rest and reconnect.
- People are hungry for relationships that are deep and authentic.
- Renew our hope in the family of God.
- The necessity of collaboration between parishes in regions to use the gifts present and share resources; new birth and a reimagining of what God is calling us to; listening — deeply listening — and examining the structures in place.
- Develop hybrid services, or continue these, so people have that option.
- Listening. Lamentation. Healing. Surrender.
- Issues of social justice to rally around.

- Is God inviting us to let go in order to experience a new thing the Holy Spirit is bringing towards birth?
- We are in a liminal space, and the spirit works powerfully in liminal spaces.
- Rediscover hope.

I hope that in the weeks and months to come, this conversation of what God is calling us to next can continue, and not just with the clergy, but with the whole diocese. The pandemic has changed the church and the world, and we cannot just continue as we were before as if nothing happened. The cracks and fault lines in our communities, our country and the world have become ever more evident. The world needs to be stitched back together into communities of love, trust, safety, justice and equity.

However, we, as Anglicans and communities gathered around a scripture that models persistence and resilience in the face of trial, carry deep wisdom and practices within our tradition that we are being called to share with the world. We innately understand how to love our neighbours, the value of service and sacrifice, the ritual power of fasting and almsgiving and the shared benevolence found in prayer and thanksgiving.

We have much to offer our fragile and broken world, and Easter will soon be here. Let us reconnect so that we can, truly, be resurrected — and let us reach out, gently inviting neighbours and strangers to break bread and join us in song and sacrament.

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## CoGS releases statement on #ACCtoo letter

By Naomi Racz

*This article addresses sexual misconduct and abuse within the church.*

On Ash Wednesday, March 2, [a letter appeared online from a group called #ACCtoo](#)<sup>1</sup>. The letter details allegations that a senior official in the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC) breached the confidentiality of three survivors of sexual abuse perpetrated by clergy in the ACC.

The letter details how, in February 2021, the three survivors shared their experiences with journalists at the *Anglican Journal* who were preparing an article on sexual misconduct in church institutions. The survivors shared their experiences on condition that their identities would remain anonymous.

However, an early draft of the article and, later, a list of the four church institutions involved in the allegations, were shared with the Council of General Synod (CoGS). According to the #ACCtoo letter, the draft named one of the survivors and included enough background detail on the other two survivors that they were identifiable. The #ACCtoo letter also notes: “We believe that the *AJ* staff provided this list under duress, and only after being assured the draft would not be circulated to the four institutions involved.” However, the draft was then shared with the four institutions. In June 2021, two staff members at the *Anglican Journal*, editor Matthew Townsend and staff writer, Joelle Kidd, resigned because of this issue. Their departure was [announced on the \*Anglican Journal\* website in September](#)<sup>2</sup>.

The letter attributes this breach of confidentiality to the [changes to the \*Anglican Journal\* passed by CoGS on March 15, 2019](#)<sup>3</sup>. These changes saw the amalgamation of two committees, including the Anglican Journal Coordinating Committee, to form the Communications Coordinating Committee. The Terms of Reference for this new committee included “oversight of the content and distribution of the *Anglican Journal*.” There were also changes to the mandate of the *Anglican Journal* and

an editorial board was established to oversee the *Journal*. This board would include at least one member from the Communications Coordinating Committee.

The #ACCtoo letter closes with three demands: “1. Release the unredacted findings of the investigation to a representative chosen by the survivors; 2. Require the resignation of the ACC church official who circulated a draft of the *Anglican Journal* article to four institutions outside the General Synod office; and 3. Submit an apology for publication in the *Anglican Journal* that summarizes the investigation report, confesses wrongdoing, and presents a plan of action that is a worthy beginning of repentance.”

Following a CoGS meeting from March 10–13, 2022, in which the #ACCtoo letter was discussed, [CoGS published a statement on the ACC website](#)<sup>4</sup>. The statement addresses and includes recommendations on journalism and the management of the *Anglican Journal*, the handling of complaints and accusations of sexual misconduct within the church, systemic and structural issues, and reconciliation.

The CoGS statement addresses the report of the independent investigation that was solicited by ACC and which is referenced in the first demand of the #ACCtoo letter. The statement states that the primate has offered to meet with the three survivors and a “mutually agreeable facilitator” in order to share the full report, “with appropriate mutual assurances of privacy and confidentiality.” In [response](#)<sup>5</sup>, the authors of the letter state that the stipulation for the survivors to meet with a church leader and provide assurances of confidentiality before being able to see the report is “inappropriate.”

The statement also offers an apology to the three survivors and references [an apology already offered by the primate](#)<sup>6</sup>. In response to the statement, the letter co-

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1. See <https://www.acctoo.ca/open-letter/>.

2. See <https://anglicanjournal.com/anglican-journal-loses-editor-writer/>.

3. See <https://anglicanjournal.com/cogs-passes-anglican-journal-changes/>.

4. See <https://www.anglican.ca/news/cogs-statement/30038789/>.

5. See <https://www.acctoo.ca/open-letter/responses/our-response-to-cogs/>.

6. See <https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/Open-Letter-Response.pdf>.

authors write that “it remains unclear who precisely is apologizing, and for what” and they reiterate their demand for “a public apology that takes personal responsibility and confesses wrongdoing with specificity.”

The statement does not directly address the second demand of the letter.

On March 15, [a response from Archbishop Linda Nicholls](#)<sup>2</sup> (dated September 2021) to the independent investigation report was appended to the CoGS statement. Referring to the draft article, Archbishop Nicholls stated that “[b]elieving it was a penultimate draft, it was shared by the General Secretary with dioceses/institutions reflected in the article.” However, on March 23, [a statement from the general secretary](#)<sup>3</sup>, Alan Perry, was also appended to the CoGS statement. In Mr. Perry’s statement, he writes: “Regardless of the circumstances, it happened on my watch.”

The following day, on March 24, the [#ACCtoo website](#)<sup>4</sup> posted a video from one of the survivors, Cydney Proctor (who has openly signed the #ACCtoo letter and identified herself as one of the survivors), in which she states that several sources have confirmed the *Anglican Journal* editorial board received an unredacted copy of the investigator’s report, which contained an appendix identifying her perpetrator and details of her story. The CoGS statement reads, “CoGS is assured that the written report of the independent investigator deals entirely with journalistic matters, and says absolutely nothing about the circumstances of the original complaints by the individuals.”

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1. See <https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/Summary-Response-to-Report-on-Anglican-Journal-Investigation.pdf>.
  2. See <https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/Summary-Response-to-Report-on-Anglican-Journal-Investigation.pdf>.
  3. See <https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022-03-23-Statement-from-the-General-Secretary.pdf>.
  4. See <https://www.acctoo.ca/>.

The open letter was penned by Michael Buttrey and Carolyn Mackie, PhD candidates at the Toronto School of Theology who, according to the #ACCtoo website, have presented case studies of sexual abuse at scholarly conferences and are part of a research project on responses to sexual abuse within theological institutions. So far, the letter has received over 300 signatures. A handful are from the diocese of British Columbia, including the diocese’s director of communications, Catherine Pate.

When asked why she signed the letter, Pate said, “I stand with victims of abuse by and in the church; those in this specific case and those throughout our history and in our future. Words are not enough. We know better, or we ought to know better. Naivety and ignorance can no longer be our excuse, especially when we repeat the same egregious injustices. Justice must be done, and it must be seen to be done.

“This is not a case of well-intentioned people making well-intentioned mistakes. The facts don’t bear that out. Furthermore, we must recentre this process on the victims. They have repeatedly put their trust in this institution, and they have repeatedly been failed by it, at great personal cost. The focus must be on what the victims require of us, not what we are prepared to offer. If we can’t get this right, how can the work of reconciliation we say we are wholeheartedly committed to be seen to have any integrity? I believe this case has widespread implications for the Anglican church across this country.”

On March 28, the #ACCtoo website published a [statement by Matthew Townsend](#)<sup>5</sup>, editor of the *Anglican Journal* at the time of the breach, and a copy of his resignation letter. He writes, “The survivors have spoken. It is long overdue for the church to hear them — and to hear the countless survivors who have experienced trauma inside of unsafe churches.”

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5. See <https://www.acctoo.ca/open-letter/responses/matthew-townsend/>.

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# More changes as Faith Tides unveils new download format

By Catherine Pate

The beginning of 2022 saw the launch of *Faith Tides* and a new website for the diocesan publication, and last month saw yet more changes at [faithtides.ca](http://faithtides.ca).

While we have been gradually moving away from print since 2020, we continued, for two years, to create a full-colour, 8.5 x 11-inch printable version of the newspaper that looked much like the full-spread print version you used to receive in the mail. In fact, the synod office, along with a few parishes across the diocese, printed the full-colour version to deliver to parishioners who requested it.

However, we decided to be an early adopter of the [AnglicanNews.ca](http://AnglicanNews.ca) platform earlier this year because of three connected factors:

First, putting together the full-colour PDF version requires the time and skills of a professional graphic designer. With a significant drop in total subscriptions (more than 50 per cent or 1,300 current subscribers) since the *Anglican Journal* began requiring individual opt-in subscriptions in 2019, this fixed expense is difficult to justify for the number of copies printed (approximately 200 per issue).

Secondly, Canadian Heritage, which previously subsidized postage for the *Anglican Journal* and the diocesan newspapers, has begun retracting funding to print publications such as ours, and it is to be eliminated in the next few years.

The third factor is that the contract with our editor is limited in scope. To produce a print version and post the same content online each month would require an additional commitment of time and financial allocations.

With all of this in mind, we know there are many parishioners who are either unable to access a web version of *Faith Tides* or who simply prefer to read the publication in print.

So, beginning with the March issue, we worked with the [AnglicanNews.ca](http://AnglicanNews.ca) website development team to add a feature that compiles all the articles from the latest issue into one downloadable PDF document. For the sake of those who might be printing it at home, we decided not to include images in this printer-friendly version, to reduce ink use.

We are now in the process of developing an iteration that will include images; however, it will not be as visually pleasing as what a graphic designer can create.

You, our valued readers, have been asked to adjust to a lot of changes in the last two years. We know that with each change there is loss and associated grief. But, the last two years have shown us, time and time again, that God is with us. Our story continues, and *Faith Tides* is but one way we will continue to share the story of us as people, here on these islands, for years to come.

We value hearing from readers, so let us know about your experience using the new website and the downloadable version. We also value hearing what kind of content you would like to see more of. You can contact the editor, Naomi Racz, at [editor@faithtides.ca](mailto:editor@faithtides.ca).<sup>1</sup>

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## A labyrinth for the community

By Naomi Racz

While you might associate images of twisting labyrinthine patterns with pagan and Celtic spirituality, labyrinths have had a presence in Christian spirituality since at least the fourth century. The most well-known example of a Christian labyrinth is in Chartres Cathedral, which dates from the early 13th century. At

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1. See <mailto:editor@faithtides.ca>.

that time, pilgrimage was an important part of Christian spirituality and labyrinths offered a form of internal pilgrimage. Many labyrinths have an entry stone where “pilgrims” can state their intention. Walking the twisting pathways offers an opportunity for prayer and reflection.

Victoria is already home to several labyrinths. There is one at Christ Church Cathedral, which was designed and built by inmates from the William Head Institution, and another at St Philip, Oak Bay. Now, the church communities of St Matthias and the AbbeyChurch, which share a site along with the Emmaus Community at 600 Richmond Ave, are adding to this list with a labyrinth of their own.

The seeds for the labyrinth were planted during the last few years when, as a response to the COVID-19 restrictions on in-person worship, the churches created spirals of stations on an area of lawn next to the sidewalk for Advent 2020 and Lent 2021. Since the lawn is accessible from the sidewalk, many people from the neighbourhood walked the stations and expressed their appreciation.

“It showed that people wanted this embodied, outdoor spiritual experience, even when the Christian messages didn’t necessarily resonate with them,” says Rob Crosby-Shearer, a leader with the Emmaus Community and the AbbeyChurch and a friend of St Matthias.

When the churches were approached by the Greater Victoria Placemaking Network (GVPN) about partnering, the groundwork had already been laid. GVPN’s mission is “to inspire people, neighbourhoods and communities to create vibrant public places that promote health, happiness and well-being.” One of its initiatives has been to map all the “little free libraries” that will be familiar to many Victoria residents. GVPN visited the site and helped the churches dream up a vision for an accessible outdoor community space. It also supported the churches in applying for funding from the City of Victoria’s My Great Neighbourhood Grant program, which allowed work on the labyrinth — just one element of their vision — to commence.

Rob and some of the other clergy had previous experience building labyrinths. With a simple and traditional design in mind, and a group of volunteers ranging in age from six to 80, the churches set to work in the fall last year. For Rob, it was a positive experience.

“It was a great way for the two churches to come together,” he says. “Planning out the labyrinth was fun. It took a lot of figuring out. It’s still a work in progress, we still need to add the brick edging and we’re working on signage to explain the universal and Christian significance of labyrinths. We may also plant something in the middle, perhaps a hazelnut tree as a nod to St Julian of Norwich, who saw the universe in a hazelnut.”

Speaking to the placemaking aspect of the project, Rob emphasized that place has always been an important part of the Anglican tradition.

“The parish as a land-based neighbourhood has always been part of the Anglican tradition, part of the Anglican consciousness — ‘this is my parish, my space,’” Rob says. “It’s a space that transcends religious affiliation.”

So, while the project was originally inspired by the necessity of moving worship and contemplation outside of church buildings due to the pandemic, it is also very much rooted in place.

Other plans for the area include planting native plants and providing seating and accessible picnic tables. St Matthias also has an enclosed outdoor area, which it hopes to make more welcoming to the wider community.

“It will be neat to see how it evolves,” says Rob. “Pathways are formed by the way people naturally gravitate and that’s one of the principles we used. We’re following the path that’s being set by others.”

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# St Andrew, Sidney parishioners on retreat, sharing food and friendship on the streets

By Marks McAvity

## *Pandemic-delayed retreat finally goes ahead*

By Marks McAvity

As you will see from the picture above, four red cars full of the Holy Spirit drove 14 parishioners of St Andrew, Sidney into a desert experience at Rivendell Retreat Centre. The centre is at the top of Cates Hill on Bowen Island, near Horseshoe Bay.

Our retreat took place from March 7–10, 2022. This was our third attempt to hold this retreat, which was twice cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It was a deep experience, with times of study, silence, worship, communion around meals, island exploration and music; and a special recognition of our Ukrainian sisters and brothers with the making of pysanky Easter eggs.

We used Joan Chittister's book *Illuminated Life* for our study. This book references the desert abbas and ammas of the Christian era's third century. Chittister's delightful book distills the wisdom of these early monastics into 26 values, and we participants — 16 in all — had a chance to explore the nuggets of wisdom she passed on. We took time for silence to pray on these values and to journal about our own interface with them, and then we each shared some aspects of what that value meant to us.

Our explorations included the island's finest spots, including a lake, a 1,000-year-old tree and a boardwalk along the northwest coast. These nature trips provided a break from the deeply focused morning and evening sessions.

As it turned out, we were a musical crowd. Those in our group who lead us often in music at church helped us master the Holden Evensong, which was our evening worship, and from which we went into silence until the next morning.

Our rector led us in a final eucharist and a table, decorated with symbols that reflected our time together, was set for communion. The eucharist was the perfect ending to close our three-day retreat.

Everyone found the retreat a rich experience, both in terms of their faith and as a getaway they had not really had for the last two years. Thanks be to God! After three years of trying, we finally made it.

## *Bringing food and friendship to the streets of Sidney*

By Catherine Whiteley

Each week, on a Wednesday or Thursday, a small group of volunteers from St Andrew, Sidney can be found in the church kitchen, mixing up a batch of muffins, assembling sandwiches or making a delicious and hearty homemade soup.

Every Monday and Friday, two St Andrew volunteers establish a safe place in a park corner, storefront walkway or nook hidden from passersby to dispense warm sandwiches, hot soup and coffee to newfound "friends" — for friends they now are, sharing stories and concerns for their acquaintances, as friends will do.

They come hesitantly at first, not trusting that seeming goodness can really be relied on, but with increasing confidence as weeks and months pass and generosity and friendship, as well as the hot coffee and soup, continue to prove reliable. They come for the unquestioning friendship and genuine care they receive as much as they come for the food.

How did this mission to feed and befriend those living in the streets and byways of Sidney come to pass?

It began as a holy whisper from the spirit of God to Lois Ainey, parish administrator at St Andrew. The notion seemed too immense for her, and at first, she disregarded it. It whispered again, undeniably, so Lois and her

daughter began to look for the homeless and uncared for in our city with five McDonald's breakfast sandwiches and five coffees in their packs. Slowly, the volunteers found their daytime locations and a mission had begun.

After a few months of determining how to structure this outreach, Lois approached incumbent Eric Patridge and the church council with a business plan, requesting their blessings and start-up funding. These were given freely and more help was recruited. There is now a roster of a dozen or so people who help in a variety of ways.

Just as important, there is a large group of people who have offered monetary donations to fund the work and another stalwart group of parishioners who help in best way they can — through faithful prayers for this work, for the friends we help, and for the workers on the ground cooking and dispensing food and friendship.

Through the sharing of simple food and caring interest, relationships are built and joy is created in the hearts of both the givers and the recipients. God's joy.

God is blessing this venture, and we encourage everyone to participate in the role the spirit whispers to them.

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## The Friday we dare to call Good

By Herbert O'Driscoll

Those who wrote the four gospels did so because they were convinced that the three fleeting years of the public ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, the relationships people experienced with him and the manner of his death, followed by their assured sense of his living presence among them, would have a bearing on what it means to live a human life in any age or culture.

Through their pages, we see the network of human responses to Jesus, and what those responses reveal about all who took part in those events. We see the fragile faith and the pathetic efforts of that first tiny

community. In them, we recognize the incomprehension and uncertainty that sometimes dogs our own efforts at faith.

We see the struggle of men like Peter to retain their integrity in the face of dilemmas that have no perfect answer. Should one lie to keep one's freedom and thus be able to continue the work? To this day, countless men and women have had to make the same choice in the struggle to survive in political regimes and corporate structures.

We see the agony of men and women as they seek to retain their faith in the face of crippling sorrow and loss. We see the struggle of men like Pilate and Caiaphas to survive the complex and unbending rules of structures that demand, above all else, the carrying out of official policy.

We see this extraordinary figure, the butt of cruel jokes, the focus of brutal violence, the victim of an unimaginably cruel death. In any human sense he is totally alone, yet he remains serene and controlled in the face of that which disintegrates the faith, courage and resolve of all around him. He displays an utter trust that is far more than the numbness of trauma or resignation. That trust and serenity breaks for a moment in the scream, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me," and then recovers again in the self-surrender of, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit," which has ever since haunted the human imagination.

To witness all this is to witness the utter tragedy that life can sometimes be. However, as we move through this season, we can discover new horizons within ourselves. To look at the cross, to know that this is no unwilling prisoner dragged to execution but rather a king offering himself to win a kingdom, is to catch a glimpse of our own humanity when it is open to the ultimate love and ineffable life of God.

When we realize such things, not merely intellectually but spiritually, we who witness a long-ago crucifixion find that we have encountered in our own experience nothing less than a personal resurrection. That is why we dare to call this Friday "Good."



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# The work of attention: a Lenten discipline

By John J. Thatamanil

“Not only does the love of God have attention for its substance; the love of our neighbour, which we know to be the same love, is made of this same substance. Those who are unhappy have no need for anything in this world but people capable of giving them their attention. The capacity to give one’s attention to a sufferer is a very rare and difficult thing; it is almost a miracle; it is a miracle. Nearly all those who think they have this capacity do not possess it. Warmth of heart, impulsiveness, pity are not enough.” — Simone Weil in *Waiting for God*.

Lenten disciplines, I suppose, are more honored in the breach than in the observance. That is certainly true for me. This Lent, I thought I’d try something simple; it has proved anything but. My goal: try to do one thing at a time. Concretely, that means no multitasking. When on a Zoom call, do nothing but attend to that call. When writing, write. Don’t hop about from one thing to another. It’s not going well. Still, I am learning just how fractured my capacity for focus is.

Why take on this discipline? My inspiration is Simone Weil, that most eccentric 20th century Catholic intellectual of secular Jewish heritage. She was never baptized but was, without doubt, one of the greatest disciples of “the way” we’ve had in the last century. For her searching reflections on the topic, she might well be called the patron saint of attention. Her words ring with the bracing clarity of truth. We know she’s right. The one thing the suffering need from us in their affliction is attention — that we empty ourselves of preoccupations, insecurities and egoism so that we can be present to the other without distractions. This is indeed “a miracle.”

Weil wrote her words before the arrival of the cellphone and social media. In my Ash Wednesday sermon, I cited the following snippet from Johann Hari’s fine book, *Stolen Focus: Why You Can’t Pay Attention and How to Think Deeply Again*:

“...a small study investigated how often an average American college student actually pays attention to anything, so the scientists involved put tracking software on their computers and monitored what they did in a typical day. They discovered that, on average, a student would switch tasks once every sixty-five seconds. The median amount of time they focused on any one thing was just nineteen seconds. If you’re an adult and tempted to feel superior, hold off. A different study by Gloria Mark, professor of informatics at the University of California, Irvine — who I interviewed — observed how long on average an adult working in an office stays on one task. It was three minutes.”

Sobering news for all who aspire to love in Simone’s way. If attention is “the substance” of both the love of God and love of neighbor, then our dwindling capacities for focus should sound spiritual alarm bells. After all, our Lord summed up the whole of the law as nothing but love of God and love of neighbor.

So, how can we love if we cannot attend?

I have no simple answer. Surely, the first step is to recognize the problem. Then, we must conduct what Gandhi called “experiments with truth,” or in our case, experiments with attention. This will require that we both pray for and practice attention. We pray that the one whom we call Love will work in us towards healing, a healing that takes the shape of concentration — a coming toward the centre. But then, we must also practice working to grow our capacities for attention, even if only a fraction more today than yesterday. What I do know is that I cannot hope to be a disciple of Jesus without the tender and necessary discipline of paying attention.

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# St. Brigid spans pagan and Christian traditions

By Adela Torchia

**Book review: *Brigid's Mantle: A Celtic Dialogue Between Pagan and Christian* by Lilly Weichberger & Kenneth McIntosh. Vestal, NY, Anamchara Books, 2015**

Saint Brigid of Kildare (c. 451-525) will be honoured with an annual public holiday, starting Feb. 1, 2023, in the Republic of Ireland. There, she is considered one of three national saints, along with Patrick and Columba.

Despite Brigid's influence in many places and times, she's often been left out of church calendars of saints. Presumably it's her historicity that's in question, but as to that, many argue the same about Jesus. There's much about Brigid the Christian saint that resembles the pre-Christian Celtic goddess Brigid, so the two are often seen as merged — the former, a Christianized version of the latter. It's a delightful confluence to some of us, while it scares those who still see paganism as the opposite of the sacred.

Brigid has three aspects that are described in various ways, including poet/priestess, blacksmith/arts and guardian of hearth and home. She is ageless and is seen as maiden, mother and crone. She is often depicted holding a bowl of fire, which alludes to the forge and her smithing skills. It's also a metaphor for transformation — in the “fires” of our lives, through trials and tribulations, we may feel hammered out of shape by life's great challenges, but in time we often discover that we've been forged into new, stronger versions of our older selves.

In *Brigid's Mantle*, Brigid is portrayed as a bridge between pre-Christian Celtic spirituality and Celtic Christianity of the earliest centuries after Christ. As the subtitle says, this is a dialogue between pagan (Lilly) and Christian (Kenneth). Kenneth McIntosh is an educator, pastor and prolific writer, one of his most popular titles being *Water from An Ancient Well: Celtic Spirituality for Modern Life* (2011). He might be a better place to start

for those uncomfortable with the “pagan” label. (The term “pagan” simply means someone connected to the land or to the earth.)

The book is divided into six chapters: 1. Celtic Christianity: An Overview; 2. Meeting Brigid; 3. Brigid and the Invisible World; 4. Brigid and the World of Nature; 5. Brigid and Human Relationships; and 6. Brigid's Mantle: Connecting the Past and the Present. Within each chapter, there are several “Kenneth” and “Lilly” sections, as the two authors dialogue to see the similarities and differences between the Christian and pagan perspectives.

For Kenneth, Celtic spirituality is “an ancient form of Christianity . . . that focuses on justice, tolerance, equality for women, creativity, and a love of Nature.” Meanwhile, Lilly celebrates the pre-Christian version of Celtic spirituality, especially connecting with the goddess Brigid. These two branches of Celtic spirituality have common ground but are also distinct. The first chapter provides an overview of Celtic history and indigenous Celtic traditions, as well as an overview of the persecution by early Christians of anything they saw as “pagan” — including three centuries in which up to 100,000 women, men and children were killed as pagan witches.

Among the fascinating stories or legends told by both Kenneth and Lilly in this book, is that of Brigid as a midwife and wetnurse at the birth of Jesus. This legend features Brigid somehow transformed into a servant in the Bethlehem inn, who leads Mary and Joseph to the stable and then stays to help young Mary give birth. Afterwards, teenage Mary falls into an exhausted sleep, and Brigid nurses the baby with her own breast milk. Because of this legend, Brigid is also called Mary of the Gaels or Mary of the Celts.

Kenneth explains that Christians through the ages have sought out sacred feminine images, such as Mary, Brigid or the Virgin of Guadalupe, because our traditions have repressed the divine feminine. For example, English Bibles translate the Hebrew *El Shaddai* as God Almighty, “but a literal rendering would be “The Many-Breasted One.”” And, the Hebrew word for the spirit of God is the

feminine *Ruach*. Jesus also identifies with feminine images, longing to be like a mother hen, for example, gathering and protecting her chicks under her wings.

In one of Lilly's stories, she goes on a shamanic journey in which she envisions meeting Goddess Brigid in a forest clearing, wearing a sword that Brigid gave her. Leaving her sorrows behind, Lilly is invited by Brigid into a new cycle of joyful abundance, but first she must use the sword to cut away the illusions of the past — the situations or relationships that have ended. "The more you hold on to these illusions," Brigid says, "the more you will be cut by them."

This wonderful book shows us an example of the gentle way in which Celtic Christianity grew naturally from older Celtic indigenous ways — without either side condemning, torturing, burning or killing the other. Goddess Brigid and Saint Brigid spread their mantle of loving and healing inclusion forward through the centuries, offering the divine feminine to nurture our divided world.

This review is the second in a series of reviews of books about Celtic Christianity. Read last month's review of *Persistent Resistance: Calls for Justice from the Celtic Traditions*: [Celtic spirituality and the great injustices of our times](https://faithtides.ca/celtic-spirituality-and-the-great-injustices-of-our-times/)<sup>1</sup>.

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## Port McNeill food distribution program grows

By Naomi Racz

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, St John Gualbert, Port McNeill (also known as the A-Frame Church) had already started discussions with a local supermarket about putting its unused food to use. In response to the increased need for food in the local community due to

the pandemic, the church decided to start distributing food in its community centre and sent out word on its Facebook page. On the first day, the church reached 30 people. The next time, it reached 60 people — this figure includes, for example, a family of four, even if only one family member came to the church.

The church's food distribution program evolved from there, opening for food distribution every two weeks. Then Loaves & Fishes, a community food bank in Nanaimo, reached out to partner with St John Gualbert. Loaves & Fishes has been able to access vast amounts of high-quality food from grocery stores and needed to find places to send the food. In 2019, the food bank started sending food to St Columba, Port Hardy, and, since 2020, on alternating weeks it sends food to St John Gualbert.

The church then expanded its relationship with other food sources, including local supermarkets such as Island Foods, and even community members growing vegetables in their gardens. Some community members donated items such as fridges and freezers. The church started to open for food distribution three times per week. To keep the program going, 26 willing and dedicated volunteers stepped in to help. The church was also able to access funding for youth summer job placements supporting the food distribution program.

The church's food distribution program is now available seven days a week. It's open on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, with hot soup available on Wednesday and breakfast wraps on Friday. The church also runs a bookshop, which provides coffee and cookies, and on Tuesdays and Thursdays anyone who needs food can ring to be let in. As well as fresh food, the church also has a stock of frozen meals that people can access in emergencies, and there are IGA cards available for families with young children. Soap for Hope, a Victoria-based non-profit, has also delivered toiletries and personal hygiene products.

Deborah Murray, volunteer director of the food program at St John Gualbert, says that the church never felt called to start a food bank.

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1. See <https://faithtides.ca/celtic-spirituality-and-the-great-injustices-of-our-times/>.

“It’s not a bank, there’s no intention of holding on to it,” she says. “There’s no need to prove who you are or if you have a need. Anybody who comes is welcome. We have lots of working poor, those who are on assistance, those who are off assistance, those who are between jobs. There’s no shortage of food, the problem is the waste of food. Ninety per cent of the time we have something to give.”

Deborah also mentions that the food is laid out on shelves, much like a supermarket, though no one has to pay. As well as food, the program has started to provide other services. Every second Wednesday, a social or crisis prevention worker is on hand to meet with people, and there are also plans to start a literacy program.

Peter Sinclair, executive director of Loaves & Fishes, echoes Deborah. He agrees that the term “food bank” is problematic and thinks of the work that Loaves & Fishes does as being more like a “food pipe.” But he acknowledges that the work is necessary.

“We wish we didn’t have this problem but there is a need and there is enough food,” he says. “We have a responsibility to care for the vulnerable. We need to do something, we can do something, so we’re going to do something.”

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## Learning to love a hybrid Lent

By Alastair Singh-McCollum

As we continue to journey through the COVID-19 pandemic, we at St John the Divine, Victoria — along with so many of our church communities — are continually adapting and responding to changing needs and restrictions. To that end, we have decided to go with a Lent that combines what we’ve learned during the past two years of online activity with tentative steps to gather our community together in person.

It’s become something of a tradition — remembering the old Anglican adage, “If you do it once it’s an innovation, and twice it’s a tradition” — for us to mark Lent and Advent, the reflective seasons of the church year, with daily blog posts written by members of our team and other invited guests on a particular theme. In previous years, we’ve had “a poem a day for Lent,” “Art and Soul” (an artwork/poem/piece of music for every day), “Advent Doors,” “Advent Journeys,” and others.

This year, we decided to look at Lent through a particular lens — one we’ve called “LOVELent.” Every day we post a piece of scripture that addresses love, along with a reflection on that passage and a prayer for the day. It’s been quite the experience researching and sharing thoughts on all these different parts of our Christian and Hebrew stories. Our hope was that a short reflection would give folks the opportunity to take a short pause, wherever they are and whatever they are doing, and remember the multi-faceted love of God, the place of love in our lives and our calling to “the discipline of love” — not a bad Lenten discipline to aspire to.

We also have an in-person discussion group and a Zoom discussion group on our excellent Lent book from Isabelle Hamley, called *Embracing Justice*. It has been interesting to see how most people have preferred to meet on Zoom, while the in-person conversation has had a very limited appeal for the time being.

Though we have been meeting in person (and via Zoom and Facebook Live) on Sundays for some months, Lent gave us the opportunity to try to meet again with a smaller midweek Eucharist. Again, it will take some time for many to feel confident gathering physically in one space, and many still find the idea of sharing Eucharist “in one kind” (without the common cup) less attractive for them. For Lent, we have reinstated a simple service of Compline on Thursday evenings at 9 p.m., which we hold on Zoom and livestream through our Facebook page.

We observed Ash Wednesday in person and we plan to do the same through most of Holy Week, when we have services every Monday through Thursday evening, and then during the day on Friday. We are still discussing

whether we want to record some reflections and put them online alongside our physical gatherings, as it seems many more access our online offerings than ever attended groups and events when we held them in person. In the same way, our online daily prayers continue to gather a small but worldwide community that faithfully watches or takes part every day, Monday through Friday.

We will continue praying, experimenting, learning, listening, hoping and gathering in every way possible, as we learn to live in this strange and sometimes confusing new world where physical and virtual spaces each offer their own opportunities to connect and grow.

Details of all these Lent activities can be found on the [St John the Divine website](#)<sup>1</sup>.

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## ‘We want to invite the wider community in’

By Naomi Racz

*A new kitchen at St Mary Magdalene, Mayne Island is set to serve the local community*

The kitchen at St Mary Magdalene, Mayne Island, was small, dated and difficult to work in. Before the pandemic, the church’s Women’s Auxiliary (WA) group was hosting monthly community dinners. But without a dishwasher, dishes had to be washed by hand. The dinners were done in two seatings, with around 40 people per seating, so it was taking a small army of volunteers to get through the dishes — and the group was concerned about hygiene.

Then, Mary Jane Tiller, a member of the church and the WA group, came across the federal government’s [New Horizons grant for projects that benefit seniors](#)<sup>2</sup>. Since most of the people attending the monthly dinners were

in their 70s and 80s, Mary Jane wondered if the church could apply for a grant towards the renovation of the kitchen. She applied for \$15,000 and was successful.

“I just had a feeling it was going to work,” says Mary Jane.

But \$15,000 wasn’t going to be enough to fully fund the renovation, so Mary Jane applied for a New Visions grant and was awarded \$7,500 from the diocese. Bake sales and church dinners, as well as a generous donation from the local Lions Club, helped the church reach a total of \$38,000.

Mary Jane worked with a contractor who understood that the budget was tight, and she was able to put her recent experience renovating her own kitchen to good use. Together with volunteers from the church and donations of a fridge and microwave, Mary Jane was able to realise her vision of a light, bright and spacious new kitchen. What’s more, the church was able to install an industrial dishwasher — it can wash a single load in just one minute.

The work was completed last year and in February 2022, Bishop Anna visited the church and blessed the new kitchen. The grand opening has had to wait but Mary Jane is hopeful the WA group will be able to host a community dinner at the end of April.

“We want to invite the wider community in,” says Mary Jane. “We want to do themed dinners, Valentine’s Day, St Patrick’s Day. We’re hoping to do a Ukrainian fundraiser. There aren’t many places to eat out on Mayne Island and we really want to do something for the wider community.”

So, while the kitchen may be the heart of the home, the new kitchen at St Mary Magdalene looks set to provide warmth, connection and community to the people of Mayne Island.

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1. See <https://www.stjohnthedivine.bc.ca/>.

2. See <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/new-horizons-seniors.html>.

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# Aging food shelf receives new lease of life

By Naomi Racz

Holly's Hamper has stood on Comox Avenue for years, inviting the local community to "take what you need and leave what you can." No one knows who installed the community food shelf, but local church St Peter sees it as an important way to help those who might find it awkward to request food through its Bridging the Gap program, which has distributed parcels of food from the church office to those in need since the start of the pandemic.

Age and weather were beginning to take a toll on Holly's Hamper, leaving it in desperate need of repair. So, Peter Sidey, who volunteers at St Peter, decided to build a new food shelf using wood from an old pallet donated by Slegg Building Materials. On March 19, the new hamper was installed and dedicated by Sulin Milne, incumbent at St Peter, along with members of the local community.

At the ceremony of blessing, Sulin reflected on Deuteronomy 15:4 ("there need be no poor among you") and 15:11 ("there will always be poor people in the

land"). While the two verses might seem contradictory, Sulin noted that there is a proviso attached to "there need be no poor among you." There need be no poor if the Israelites fully obey God's commands to be open-handed, to cancel debts and to share God's provision.

"God knew that the people would not be fully obedient in these things," says Sulin. "He was right, so the poor remain among us even to this day. Sponsoring this community food shelf is one way St Peter's church can follow God's command to feed the hungry and reach out to the poor among us."

Staff and volunteers at the St Peter food bank will continue to keep a watchful eye on the community food shelf and top up donations as needed from time to time, as well as calling on the local community to help keep it stocked. After all, it has always been a community venture — a way for everyone to help those who are having a hard time making ends meet.

And, while the food shelf will no longer be called Holly's Hamper, the structure of the original food shelf is awaiting renovation to be used as a free Christian library at the church.