



# FaithTides

**RENEWED HEARTS, RENEWED SPIRITS, RENEWED PEOPLE**

**May 2022**

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# Discerning a postcolonial presence on ‘Yalis

By Anna Greenwood-Lee



*U'mista Cultural Centre, Alert Bay, houses potlatch artifacts that were seized by the government. Photo by BC Gov Photos used under a CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 license.*

During the second week of May, I will be travelling with Brendon Neilson, vision animator, and Elizabeth Northcott, archdeacon of the Mid-North Islands region, to ‘Yalis (‘Namgis Nation, Alert Bay, Cormorant Island) to engage in an intentional listening process with the people there as to how the Anglican church can best be present on ‘Yalis. I ask for your prayers.

The spirituality of the people of this island is rich and complicated. For generations, there was a rich religious and ritual life centered around potlaches. The feasts and ceremonies marked births, deaths, adoptions, weddings and other rites of passage. They featured masks, gift giving, ritual, song and dance. As Elder Agnes Axu Alfred explains, “Our Creator gave it to us, to be our way of doing things, to be our way of rejoicing, we who are [Kwakwaka’wakw]. Everyone on earth is given something. The potlatch was given to us to be our way of expressing joy.” (Quoted from [Living Tradition Virtual Exhibit](#), 2016.)

Potlatches were made illegal in 1885, and the prohibition was not lifted until 1951. Imagine for a moment what it would be like for Christians if it were illegal to celebrate the Eucharist for 66 years.

The Kwakwaka’wakw defied this immoral law and kept their religious and ritual life alive. They very vividly remember, however, how, in 1921, they were betrayed to the Indian agent. That day, 45 people were arrested and 21 people were jailed. Over 600 ceremonial objects were confiscated and the Indian agent, William Halliday, displayed these items across the pews at Christ Church, Alert Bay. This was incredibly painful for many reasons, not the least of which was that protocol required that ceremonial objects be kept out of sight when not in use. William Halliday charged admission to enter the church and see the items and many were bought by collectors or shipped off to museums.

“And my uncle took me to the Parish Hall, where the Chiefs were gathered. Odan picked up a rattle and spoke, ‘We have come to say goodbye to our life,’ then he began to sing his sacred song. All of the Chiefs, standing in a circle around their regalia were weeping, as if someone had died.” (James Charles King, at Alert Bay, 1977; quoted from [Living Tradition Virtual Exhibit](#), 2016).

All of this was, of course, happening while the Anglican church administered St. Michael’s Residential School. While the school building was torn down in 2015, a stained-glass window in Christ Church still prominently features the school.

I am travelling to ‘Yalis because I have been called, in this day and age, to discern what a postcolonial way of being present on ‘Yalis might look like.

I have much to learn, but it seems to me that there are at least two major questions. First, how do we repent for and atone for our part in degrading and destroying the potlatch? How can we be present as a life-giving Eucharistic community in a way that respectfully exists alongside and honours the potlatch? As I understand it, both are ritual feasts of thanksgiving.

Second, how do we atone and repent for the intergenerational harm done by St. Michael’s Residential School?

When I visited ‘Yalis in May of last year, I spent time listening to survivors of that school and the overwhelming message I heard from them, apart from the pain of their own experience, was their distress for their grandchildren.

They asked me to help them improve the lives of their children and grandchildren so that the next generations do not suffer.

I ask your prayers for our diocesan leaders, for the people of Christ Church, Alert Bay, and for the 'Namgis First Nation. May God grant us the wisdom we need to find a new, postcolonial way of loving God and neighbour.

#### **Additional References**

[The Potlatch Ban – The Bill Reid Centre – Simon Fraser University \(sfu.ca\)](#)

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## **Holding space for climate grief**

By Selinde Krayenhoff



*Burning beeswax candle on an old log. Photo by kazmulka via iStock.*

Because we've just come through Holy Week, it strikes me that the way to be church for people who are grieving climate change, grieving anything, is to have the courage to stay close to the cross. For if we are willing to stay there, close to suffering, grounded in our hope and in mystery, it becomes possible to stay close to those who are grieving.

It's not easy to do. Not many people did or can.

The women who stayed present with Jesus through his suffering and death on the cross did so out of love. They didn't know about the resurrection. They stayed without

knowing what lay ahead, what might be transformed. They probably felt helpless, a terrible feeling. Yet they stayed there in that place of agony out of love and compassion for someone they loved who was suffering. They stayed so he would not be alone in that suffering.

And we, in our time, on the other side of the cross know that what seemed to be a dead end was transformed, completely. And we also know that it is not for us to know how God will act in the world. Our call is to be with suffering, with "no knowing" — yet as Christians we hold hope with and for others.

Climate change is here. Those who have the courage to face it feel grief at what is already lost and seems likely to be. If we can create a space to simply be with that grief, in ourselves and in others, we allow God in, to transform us and the situation, without knowing how it will be. By witnessing and staying close to our own grief and close to others who are grieving, we change the situation.

We may not change the outcome as we imagine it, but we can change the moment — the experience for those for whom grieving alone might lead to despair and desperation. And so, by staying present and close, we become more inclusive as a community, more able to be present to life with all its pain, all its wonder, all our unknowing and all our love for this world. And when we allow grief to move, it becomes possible for us to move, to act. Grief, then, can become the fuel for action. As with every experience and emotion, God will compost what we are able to release and let go of.

And so it is in this present moment, only this moment, with our grief, anxiety and fear, that God can change us and the world.

When someone is at the edge, overcome with grief, it is that edge that is bound to another edge that will greet it. There is always someone or something on the other side. But, in my experience, there are no shortcuts. We can try, but we can't trick God, ourselves, or others by promising a happy ending, or pretending to know what that other edge will be.

We have to build up our muscle of love by standing at the cross, learning to bear the pain, holding it gently, listening to what it has to teach us and being willing to be changed

by it, willing to be touched by another's suffering.

As a mother, I can barely bear to imagine Jesus' mother, Mary, in that little group of women watching and loving her son through his suffering. That is the kind of courage we are called to as church.

We can learn how to do this. It takes practice. It's called "holding space." It's not trying to make things better or assuming to know what another person "should do." Rather, it's the practice of sitting with another's grief or pain and remembering to breathe, to notice, to be compassionate — to give space to that grief.

Grief transforms us; grief informs us; grief can guide us. It can bind us together at a time when self-centredness, self-determination and consumerism have driven us apart. And grief can show us a new way. The way forward is through our relationships — with God, self and neighbour. Learning to hold space for what is, so that what was, is and ever shall be is allowed space to breathe and to become. And to recreate the Earth.

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## Divesting from the dystopian real estate market

By Rob Crosby-Shearer



Picture by Diane Parkhouse used under a CC BY2.0 license.

*or, why flipping your house is an unjust act*

When we bought our house in Victoria, BC, eight years ago, we had already been selected for a Habitat for Humanity build. The executive director of Habitat at the time told me that, because of their model, where Habitat holds the loan at very low interest and communities come together around low- to mid-income families, many of their homeowners came out ahead of those who were able to scrape together enough for a mortgage in the market.

I responded to her: "Why doesn't this model get replicated everywhere?" As a society, we have the means to decentre interest and work together for the common good so that everyone can own a home!

She cautioned me, however.

She had come from a context in Northern Europe where home ownership was not considered a right or a goal. She explained to me that rather than personal ownership, they had a model where public ownership was the norm. This concept balanced security with a need for housing — and created a foundation where one didn't need to own a home, where one could feel secure without owning the land and house.

**Land is not capital to which we have property rights; rather it is the place for which we have moral responsibility in reciprocity for its gift of life. Here is the question we must at last confront: Is land merely a source of belongings, or is it the source of our most profound sense of belonging? We can choose. — Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Dear America: Letters of Hope, Habitat, Defiance, and Democracy***

She wondered what it was in our consciousness — in our hunger — that would make us want to take on massive debt? And what made us feel like we had a right to own a piece of land?

We left the Habitat project when our real estate agent asked us why we hadn't considered co-purchasing a house with a willing friend, who had equity and capital (which we did not). That was, and continues to be, a real blessing. We own a home — and have our extended intergenerational family living here — and that's been a beautiful thing.

Financially, instead of going from paycheque to paycheque to pad a landlord's wallet, we have a place we can call our own — and have built some of our own equity. For many of us, this kind of collective ownership — which is [increasingly](#) common — is the only way we could ever dream of owning a house with our income.

However, as good as home ownership has been for us, there is something that's increasingly been eating at my conscience.

A [recent news article](#) called Victoria's current real estate market “dystopian.”

**“All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. Do not seek your own advantage, but that of others... for “the earth and its fullness are the Lord’s.” — 1 Corinthians 10: 23-24, 26 quoting Psalm 24 (NRSV)**

Since we co-purchased, I've watched this market heat up to red hot. When we bought our three-suite house, it was assessed at around \$650,000 and we bought it for under \$700k — a number that, at the time, felt astronomical to me. That was before waves of folks moving here from even hotter real estate markets drove demand and prices up. And now those fleeing this city are doing the same to the [small towns](#) all around this island. And though the hunger for property ownership from individuals and families is surely a factor to be reckoned with, the bigger issue is real estate speculators, who now [outpace first-time buyers](#) in my home province of Ontario. Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITS) have been buying up huge swaths of rental properties and driving up the market, as housing is nothing more than a commodity and is traded

as such. [Starlight Investments](#) are the biggest landlord in my city of Victoria — they own [60,000 units](#) in Canada — and they're all about the value extraction model. Add to REITS the proliferation of commercialized short-term rentals (e.g., Airbnb, Vrbo) — which [are only adding to](#) this dystopia.

**You are in for trouble! You take over house after house and field after field, until there is no room left for anyone else in all the land. — Isaiah 5:8 (CEV)**

In the eight years since we purchased, the assessment on this old house has nearly doubled to \$1.2 million. I think we could sell it for more than \$1.5 million. Even in a co-ownership, where our friend fronted the down payment and co-owns 50/50 with us, we would come out with hundreds of thousands of dollars if we chose to sell now. If we wanted, we could flip our house and get something bigger and better. Maybe even give a few crumbs to the poor! And possibly even get more houses if we flipped again! All because we had connections and enough cash at the right time. And for those who have even more cash, more equity and more income — the market is their oyster! Imagine how this works beyond the individual, when you're a corporation doing the same thing.

And as much as playing that market is tempting for some of us, I increasingly wonder if one can be considered to be a moral person when we profit off the earth? I wonder if we can be ethical when the houses we own, and our part in the market makes it difficult — even impossible, for others to have a home? I wonder about the impact of the market, and our actions in it, on those without homes, those who are underhoused, those who are renting.

**The land must never be sold on a permanent basis, for the land belongs to me. You are only foreigners and tenant farmers working for me. — Leviticus 25:23 (NLT)**

Let me ask a blunt question: Do you think you can flip your house for personal profit, to climb a ladder you don't really need to climb without engaging in an act of economic and racial aggression?

With the dystopian state of this market, those who speculate in housing, those who are driving up prices, those who flip properties so that they can go higher up on the ladder of wealth can no longer be considered ethical and just people.

Yes, you could tell me it's the system — and I'd agree with you — but that doesn't justify our collusion with it or our willing participation in it. Homeowners like me, landlords, financial institutions, REITS and real estate agents are implicated in a system that commodifies land and that, by our actions, makes home an elusive thing — and disproportionately more so for the poor, for women, [for the young](#), for newcomers, and for racialized individuals, families and communities.

And we need daring dreamers to live into other ways of being.

**‘...I was a stranger and you welcomed me...’ ‘Lord... when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you...’ ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ — Matthew 25, selected verses (NRSV)**

What's clear is that for many, land, and the buildings that sit on top of it, have become little more than a commodity for trade. The [10,000 vacant homes](#) in my city attest to this. Notions of the sacredness of land and of *making home* have been lost and consumed by a hungry real estate beast. Notions of the common good have been lost with the allure of home ownership.

As deflating as that all is, others in my sphere have been

challenging capitalist and colonial concepts of land. They have been listening to traditional [Indigenous voices](#), as well as voices from the great spiritual traditions: *the earth is not for sale*. It does not and cannot belong to one person. It is sacred. *Home. Family. Earth. Place*. Now these are things to invest in. And we have the models out there: [land trusts](#), public housing, and housing co-operatives are among them. But the market is set up to discourage these transformative approaches — even for those of us who have equity.

**The way of Jesus is radically different. It is the way not of upward mobility but of downward mobility. It is going to the bottom, staying behind the sets, and choosing the last place! — Fr Henri Nouwen**

I'm part of a faith-based community — and so it is that requests for hospitality often come our way. This week it's a Syrian refugee. Last month it was a person who lives rough who had a bike accident. A woman and child fleeing a violent situation. A person who struggles to find a space due to health issues... It's heartbreaking.

With those human stories in mind, I'd like to humbly underline the proposal here: to play in this market, to profit from it, without some commitment to re-commoning the land, to creating space for not-for-profit hospitality, to making a world where there are more spaces to create *home* is unjust and immoral and is bred in a colonial and consumptive attitude toward the land. What would it mean for individuals, families, corporations and churches to radically shift our conceptions around land “ownership”?

The good news is that, though it's slow, attitudes are changing.

I've been hearing about more and more people banding together to turn their equity into co-operative or commonly held land trust options, more and more folks who are looking at divesting from this market, rather than shamelessly profiting from it.

**“I want churches to unmask the developers. The most hidden people on the planet are not the CEOs of fortune 500s or the IMF or World Bank... These people are making the most fundamental decisions of our existence... [Let’s] start a movement where those people are known... Decisions are driven by building profit... The immorality of the structure must be challenged... Until you put on the table those who control place, so much of what we want to see happen in the world will not happen. If I control the land, I control the shape of living.” — Willie James Jennings (on the Inverse Podcast).**

There are whole websites emerging about such divestment — transforming your equity into creating commons — and there are people who are deeding away their land to re-commoning, sometimes to the Indigenous communities the land was stolen from. I was recently on a call of folks trying to form co-operatives, among them a culturally diverse group of millennials who have had enough of this market.

The tide is turning. The challenge to divest from a violent and privileged system of ownership and land use is emerging.

How will we respond? How will we land- “owners,” individual and corporate, let go of our privilege to be part of making a world where it’s easier to make home?

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## Three empty graves

By Roy Darcus



*The Staveley grave plots in St Luke Cedar Hill cemetery. Photo by Barb Prescott.*

I have recently learned a piece of family history many years after the event. I learned that two grave plots in St Luke Cedar Hill cemetery had been unclaimed for many years. The cemetery committee was seeking descendants of the original purchaser.

My great-grandmother Leonie Staveley is buried in the central plot and, beside her, two grave plots are still empty. The two unused grave plots were apparently reserved for Leonie’s two daughters, Jane and Olive. They were to lie next to her, on either side. But Jane and Olive chose to be buried elsewhere. What is the story here?

I know from family anecdotes that my great-grandmother was quite the Victorian tyrant. She had five daughters, Jane, Eleanor, Ethel (my grandmother), Olive and Anna, called “Treasure” because she got things done. Eleanor, Ethel, and Anna had married, but Jane was plain and Leonie chased away any suitor who came near Olive. She needed two dutiful daughters to help her with her Ferndale Tea Garden in Gordon Head. Possessing an ample income, she had commissioned a Craftsman-style cottage for her Tea Garden, where, during the 1920s, she and her daughters — “as a hobby” — served tea on the veranda, in the sunroom and in the garden. By appointment only.

Leonie died in 1934. She had bought the triple plot for herself and her two daughters. But Jane died in 1975 and Olive in 1983, and both their ashes were scattered behind

the chapel in Royal Oak Burial Park. The lioness in winter now rests alone, bereft of her cubs. That is the story of those two empty graves. I like to think that Jane and Olive's decision to forgo their appointed resting places was an act of relative spiritual freedom on their part. They were more than mere appendages.

In respect to a third empty grave: at Easter we have the story of the empty tomb. Why is this tomb empty? Because its occupant lived a life of absolute spiritual freedom. Resurrection is spiritual freedom even over death. "He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said." (Matthew 28: 6)

If you don't like the word "absolute" you may use "definitive" or "constitutive" of spiritual freedom. Resurrection is God's promise of salvation for all, while not overlooking the claims of justice upon us. We do not usually think of the story of the empty tomb as a visionary account. It is a record of an absence, not of a positive appearance.

The initial accounts of the risen Christ were of visionary experiences. From Paul, we learn (1 Cor. 15: 3-11) that the first understanding of an "apostle" was one, male or female (Junia), who had witnessed Christ's appearance in accordance with the scriptures. The reference is perhaps to Ezekiel 8: 1-4. Christ as risen was perhaps an ecstatic experience for many, for the five hundred.

Your brief glimpse of a risen Christ makes you an apostle of a wild hope! The story of the empty tomb, however, is not a record of a presence but of an absence, a discovering of an emptiness. The original ending of Mark is very stark: despite the reassurance of the young man, the women flee in fear from the empty tomb. "He has been raised; he is not here." (Mark 16: 6)

A positive vision of course can be exhilarating but a negative vision of emptiness may be very frightening. But I refer back to the empty graves of Jane and Olive. My reaction was an uplift of my spirit when I heard about those empty graves. I realized that in that symbolic act, they had chosen their own destiny.

And I think that is what the empty tomb signifies. It means to tell us that Jesus has chosen his own destiny apart from all other designs on his body. "He is not here

but has risen." (Luke 24: 5)

It is thought that the empty tomb narrative may have been constructed to counter the charge that the disciples stole the body. But the issue is deeper than a missing body. The issue is the spiritual freedom that Jane and Olive showed about their bodies. In freedom, we dispose of our own bodies.

While alive as a Jew, Jesus bodily lived a life of absolute spiritual freedom. Jesus bodily announced the kingdom as the living reign of God among us, a reign exercised through an open invitation to accept this reign's forgiveness and sharing of spiritual power. God was no withholder! God does not begrudge us the best, and in this spirit, we can freely offer our best in healing and forgiveness.

Religious authority and political power, however, want the worst for Jesus. We may not all have to deal with a tyrannical mother, but we all must deal with religious authority and political power, which function by allocation and withholding of social good. Jesus, however, neither condemns nor endorses any structure of religious authority and political power. He threatens them by not fearing them. All the same, they will have blessing beyond measure under God's reign, if they seek justice, love kindness and walk humbly with their God. (Micah 6: 8)

But religious authority and political power live and die by set measures and intricate sanctions, so Jesus must die. He dies not with curses but words of forgiveness. Final judgement is passed on them. "It is finished." (John 19: 30) These structures can never again claim the absolute authority of God.

Christ's definitive act of spiritual freedom for Paul was his willingness to die even for his enemies. (Romans 5: 10) It "crosses" our predisposition for fear and exclusion (flesh) and sets the template for spiritual freedom for us as spiritual beings. In patriarchal categories, God does not withhold even his son, so we are now free to offer our groaning hearts to the spirit's healing.

The empty tomb, therefore, poses the great question of absolute spiritual freedom. Freedom from our predisposition for fear and exclusion. Freedom for love

and forgiveness. Can we answer? Work it out. This freedom extends beyond all limiting human structures, whether they be patriarchal or feminist; religious or atheist; vegan or omnivorous. Easter chocolate, of course, transcends all categories.

*This article was originally published in the St Luke Cedar Hill quarterly magazine The Prescription.*

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## A silencing of doubt

By Herbert O'Driscoll



*Picture by Gerardofegan used under a CC BY 2.0 license.*

Sometimes when I wonder at the scriptures of the resurrection, asking the questions and experiencing the doubts that people have voiced since the extraordinary events of that long-ago weekend, I find it helpful to come at it all from another direction.

Let's start at something wonderful that we do most certainly know. Sometime in the dark hours between sunset on the Friday of Jesus' execution and the dawn of the following Sunday morning, something happened that utterly transformed a small community of men and women. From being traumatized by grief, their most heartfelt hopes and trust brutally destroyed by unimaginable cruelty and suffering, they became a community bound together by bonds of energy and commitment that withstood every effort to defeat them.

As years became decades and decades centuries, even millennia, when asked for the source of their loyalty and commitment, they would reply with a statement that is

uttered to this day in many languages. They would say "Jesus Christ is risen."

On each Sunday of this Easter season in the year of our Lord 2022, these words will have been voiced in churches across Ukrainian cities, towns and villages. Many of those who uttered these will have been women who reach for the sacred bread of Eucharist with one hand while hugging a small child to their bodies with the other, not knowing whether they or those whom they love have hours or days to live.

I find that knowing this helps me to join my voice to theirs, saying the words "Jesus Christ is risen" without questions or doubts.

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## Parish of Salt Spring Island looks to the future

By Naomi Racz



Even though it is the largest of the Gulf Islands, there are a

*St Mark, Salt Spring Island, established 1892.*

surprising number of churches on Salt Spring Island. The Anglican parish alone has supported six churches over the years, and is currently home to St Mark (1889), St Mary (1894) and All Saints by-the-Sea (1994). Part of the reason for this abundance of churches is that there were very few roads connecting the different settlements on the island up until the 1930s, and the only way to reach those

communities was by boat or on horseback.

But as more roads were built, the religious life of the island began to concentrate in the island's largest village of Ganges and, therefore, at All Saints (formerly St George). During this period, St Mark maintained a dedicated but vital community, with a distinct identity. However, by the early 2000s the congregation had begun to decline due to illnesses, deaths and parishioners moving to All Saints to be part of a larger congregation.

When Gyllian Davies joined the parish as incumbent in 2018, St Mark was hosting services every Tuesday and twice a month on Sunday. The most well-attended was the Tuesday morning centering prayer service, BCP communion and Bible study, which attracted people from a range of denominations and spiritual practices. In winter 2019, St Mark was closed for the winter, in part due to the fact that the church is inaccessible in snowy or icy weather as it sits at the top of a steep road. The plan was to reopen for Easter 2020. But, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic meant that didn't happen. The parish council reached out to the households that had been associated with St Mark for a meeting; only a handful attended and only one was intending to return to worshipping at the church. Kathy Darling, 94, said, "I feel badly to abandon St Mark's but I want to be at All Saints where all the people are!" St Mark has remained closed ever since.

Following this long and then sudden decline, at the beginning of 2022, the parish council took the decision to, if possible, sell St Mark.

However, life continues to happen in the parish. During the same period that the congregation at St Mark was reaching the end of its lifecycle, the parish of Salt Spring Island hummed along as a thriving hub for the community.

At the south end of the island, St Mary has hosted the Star of the Sea Centre for Spiritual Living and Practice since 2017. Pre-COVID-19, the All Saints building in Ganges (mid-island) hosted community activities every day of the week, including tai chi, a range of exercise and dance classes, and painting lessons. The church hall also boasts the best acoustics on the island and hosted year-round monthly (weekly in the summer) music concerts, featuring Salt Spring Island musicians. Many of these are about to

or have now resumed. The parish also has an agreement with the local emergency services that All Saints will act as a shelter in emergencies.

St Mark has been an important anchor in the life of the island and many on the island have connections to the church going back generations. "I had one couple approach me wanting to be married in St Mark's," says Gyllian. "I told them I couldn't do that because the church building was closed and hadn't been used in a long time. It turned out the groom's father and grandfather had both been married at St Mark's. But once they saw that All Saints was actually a more suitable venue—it has more seating—they were happy to get married there. They just wanted that connection to the island and their family history.

Walter Stewart, a member of the parish and diocesan council, is keen to see as much of the sacred and historic elements of St Mark as possible preserved. "We don't want to lose the presence of St Mark's as a pioneering Anglican church. We want to preserve as many items as possible and incorporate them into All Saints." It is also hoped that the historic church will be renovated as a private residence, so that the building will be lovingly restored and remain a part of the island's history for decades to come.

"The goal of All Saints is to be a community centre. We want to be a centre of Anglican life, but also to welcome, to provide shelter, to strengthen and nourish the wider community. We also want to be sustainable. All Saints is 28 years old now; it needs new windows and the access ramp is falling apart," says Gyllian. "Some of the funds from the sale of St Mark's will go towards making these improvements."

The decision to close any church is not undertaken lightly nor without heavy hearts. For some this was a painful though obvious decision. As parishioner Dave Phillips said, "Many of the people on Salt Spring think of it as a community treasure and it would be great if it could be set up as a historic heritage building. I sincerely miss the mid-week contemplative services and... I know I'm speaking with my heart and not my head."

Now that diocesan council and the diocesan finance committee have approved the closing of St Mark the next

step will be to plan the deconsecration as a celebration of the life it once housed. Consultations with professionals will inform how some components of St Mark can be incorporated into the All Saints building.

“We look forward to as many decades and more of worship and life at All Saints as were lived out in St Mark’s,” says Gyllian.

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## Women’s Retreat quietly building community

By Naomi Racz



*Fall 2017 Women’s Retreat. Picture courtesy of Brenda Dhaene.*

The Women’s Retreat has been running since 2004, when it was established by Pam Orman, a retired priest of the diocese. It was originally coordinated by Diane Marks and held at Camp Columbia.

In its early years, the retreat faced a number of setbacks and obstacles, including the closure of Camp Columbia, and Diane’s announcement, in 2006, that she would be stepping down. Luckily, the Women’s Retreat had an ardent supporter who was determined to see the retreats continue.

“When Diane announced that she was stepping down and that the retreats would stop if no one took her place, I thought, no way,” says Brenda Daene, Women’s Retreat planning team coordinator. “I could see how much the

women needed this. They needed a break away from their home life. We don’t ask why, but we know many of these women need a break. Their strength is incredible.”

The retreat found a new home at the United church’s Camp Pringle, where it has been held every spring and fall since 2009. The retreat takes place twice per year to give those who can’t attend in one season the chance to attend in another. A strong sense of community has formed around the retreat and Brenda stays in touch with all the attendees throughout the year, even sending cards at Easter and Christmas.

The last in-person retreat took place in fall 2019, and though there was an online retreat in spring 2021, Brenda is looking forward to gathering at Camp Pringle again in June. In the past, the retreat took place over three days, but this first physical gathering will be just one day, which has made the administration side of the planning easier. “We don’t have to worry about bed placement!” says Brenda.

Four years ago, Brenda was made a lay canon for her work in organizing the retreats, which, she’s keen to emphasize, have always been strongly supported by the diocese. Brenda recounts how, when the Anglican Camp Columbia closed, the retreat planning team went to the then-diocesan bishop Bishop Cowan to ask for his blessing to hold the retreats at Camp Pringle and for the retreats to be independent from the church, since they would no longer be held on Anglican soil. Instead, he assured them that the diocese would continue to support them in whatever way they needed.

To this day, the diocese provides bursaries for women who would like to attend the retreat but face financial barriers to doing so. Brenda also urges parishes to support women who might want to attend the retreat with financial aid.

Despite being honoured by the lay canon title, Brenda is clear that organizing the retreats is a collaborative effort. In fact, it was a condition of her taking on a role in coordinating the retreat that she would only do it if she had a team to work with. Brenda works closely with lay canons Barbara Coleman and Diane Hutchison. Nancy Ford, retired deacon, is the retreat chaplain. There are a further six members on the planning team and Brenda

says they all bring their own talents.

“It’s really the team that pulls it off,” she says. “We respect each other’s ideas, and if we don’t agree on something then we talk about it.”

Brenda also has her eye to the future of the retreats. The retreat planning team and attendees range in age from their late 60s to early 80s. Brenda has been trying to bring in younger women to ensure the retreats continue for many years to come. “We have to be realistic,” says Brenda. “We’re not going to be around forever!” But for now, she’s looking forward to June 18 and hoping they will again be able to gather for three days in October, when the fall retreat will be facilitated by Bishop Anna Greenwood-Lee.

For more information about the spring Women’s Retreat, visit the [diocesan website](#).

*The other members of the planning team include Pip Woodcock, Carol Ann Zenger, Pat Fraser, Noelle Davis, Lindsay Pedlow and Christine Knowles. Sheila Flynn, retreat facilitator; Diane Bell, who was music director for the retreats; and planning team member Cathy Beise, have sadly passed away but are remembered fondly for their contributions to the Women’s Retreat.*

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## Q&A with a military chaplain

By Naomi Racz

*Sarah Priebe is a military chaplain at CFB Esquimalt and a parishioner of the Church of the Advent, Colwood. Faith Tides editor Naomi Racz spoke to Sarah to find out more about what a military chaplain does and the role that chaplains and faith play within the military. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.*

### **Q. How did you come to be a military chaplain?**

A. A lot of military people come into the military because they have family members in the military, and that was

my case as well. My husband came up through the cadet program and the reserves, and he’s a ranked force military chaplain now too. So, it was through that influence.

I started out as a parish priest but since my husband was in what we call the ranked force, so the full-time military chaplaincy, I knew that we would have to move every three to four years and it was coming up on four years where we’d been in Quebec City. So, it was time to make a change. A change was coming, we were going to have to move eventually... am I going to continue working in a parish context or make the leap to the military?

When I started out in ministry, I didn’t think I’d end up being a military chaplain but when I watched what my husband was doing, it was actually really appealing. When I was in parish ministry, he was working as a chaplain to the Van Doos, which is a French-Canadian infantry regiment based out of Valcartier, Quebec. The nature of the work I just found interesting; it was fast paced, people facing, task oriented, which suits the way I like to work. There was travel involved, frequent skill development, hands-on learning, a diversity of responsibilities. You have to think on your feet constantly and adapt, and it just seemed very appealing as a work environment.

And I think ideologically, I joined the military for the same reason I joined the priesthood — I wanted to do good and to make a difference. I think that’s a reason a lot of people join the military and the priesthood. Military people tend to be people who want to contribute and to build something together. And we’re trained that way in the Canadian Armed Forces, that chaplains and everyone else work together and we can accomplish more together than separately. So, I felt that in that environment, as part of a team, that could be a way I could do something good, be of service to people who serve and build up our society.

And it was a question of timing, too. There was going to be a change in my work environment either way, so it was time to make the leap and join the military. That’s pretty much it!

### **Q. So, when you decide to make that transition do you have to undergo any special training? How does that work in terms of going from parish priest to military chaplain?**

A. There's an application process that you go through, and part of my work now is working as a recruiter for military chaplaincy so I'm intimately acquainted with the application process, which can involve a lot of paperwork.

You go through the recruitment centre and you go through the chaplaincy branch to see if you meet the criteria on both sides. In the military we have an educational criteria; we have an experience component: you have to have a certain level of experience on the civilian side; and there's also a medical component. In the Canadian Armed Forces there's mandatory retirement at age 60, so there's a certain maximum age where you can come in, and there's some health things, because it's a physical job you have to meet certain health criteria.

So, there's quite a bit to go through in terms of enrolment, and once you're in, as a chaplain, you go through basic training, the same as every other military member does. It's a three-month course, which is generally given at Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu in Quebec. After that you learn to be a chaplain. There's a basic course you do for that and then more specific courses on ethics and deployment and counselling and things that you would use specifically in chaplaincy.

**Q. I don't know if you have such a thing as a typical day but maybe you could walk me through what a typical day would look like? What are some of your tasks on a day-to-day basis?**

A. It's a bit like parish ministry in the sense that you're assigned to what we call a unit, which is a group of people, between 250, sometimes up to 600, that are led by a commanding officer. I might be assigned to a ship and so you get to know people. The idea is that you spend time with them, you do a ministry of presence, you linger with intent, you go where they go, whether you're at shore or at sea or on deployment.

Like you would do in parish ministry, you're with your people. But in parish ministry you primarily work with other Christians; that's the main thing that a priest would do. You would hopefully do some community outreach, but your main work would be with the church. But as chaplains we're there for all who serve, we're not limited to our specific denominations, and actually most of our work isn't religious in nature at all. And most of the

requests that are made for our services are not religious in nature.

It depends on the base; we do have chapels, churches, multi-faith centres where we do hold services, but because we work as a team, we're usually not presiding every Sunday. We could get requests from other Anglicans in the service for baptisms, for weddings, occasionally for funerals, and we do fulfil those. But generally, that's a pretty small part of our ministry. Our mandate is to support serving military members, their families and civilian employees of the department of national defense.

People will often come to us when they're hurting or when they're in a difficult situation and they need some help. Sometimes it's because they don't know where to turn, or sometimes, they know ways that we might be able to help. Our job is basically to be there for them and to support them in any way that we can. Sometimes we are lending a listening ear, but often we might suggest or refer to specific resources.

We can also help by approaching the chain of command and making recommendations if there's some workplace accommodation needed or some help that could be lent in that direction. And that's an important one because the military environment is very different; it's got its own culture and generally in the navy and in the army — I've never worked in the air force, I've heard it might be a little bit different — there's certain people that you may or may not be able to approach directly depending on rank. Chaplains are the only military profession who are allowed to directly approach any military member, no matter what their rank is.

We do wear a rank, but we're not in anybody's chain of command. We're not anybody's boss, at least not at my level! We don't give orders, so when people come to us, they don't have to be worried about possible effects on their career. You don't always want to go to your boss for help; you might be worried about how that might be perceived. We also respect confidentiality; that's part of our work ethic.

Another thing we do, we're the resident experts on ethics and morale. The chain of command often looks to us for recommendations on a course of action when there's a difficult ethical or pastoral situation, either in the unit or

with an individual person. Because there's an expectation that we know the people in the unit and that we serve, we can advise the chain of command on how things are going in general with morale or specific issues in the workplace that might be helping or hurting the group.

We also take turns being on call, so that means that we have a duty phone, generally for a week at a time, and we trade off. We have that phone with us 24/7 in case there's an emergency. When those calls come through, sometimes it's just people wanting to talk, but sometimes we can be injected into really tumultuous situations like the immediate aftermath of domestic violence, someone's just lost a loved one or received a bad diagnosis, or into the inner world of someone who's thinking about self-harm.

Sometimes we can be called to help in the process of informing a family that their loved one has died. It can be someone in the service who has died or maybe someone in the service who has a loved one outside the service and they're serving in a place where they need to have that communicated to them. We accompany the families through that in their grief, and we try to walk alongside them and to provide as much help or support as they need and to be that calm presence for them.

**Q. That's interesting, so it's almost like you're a link between the military, the spiritual and the civilian world.**

A. Exactly.

**Q. Maybe we can zoom out a bit and talk about how you reconcile war and the teachings of Jesus. Is that something that you look at in your training? I assume that's something you've reflected on.**

A. It's not something that we look at in our training, and the reason is because chaplains aren't uniquely Christian, so when we do our training, we do it together. We have Jewish and Muslim chaplains, Buddhist and Humanist chaplains as well. It's certainly a question that comes up and not just with chaplains, with military members as well. Although I would say, in the general military population, we might not hear the name Jesus mentioned, but reconciling war with spirituality, what we believe about the world and peace, are certainly things people do struggle with internally.

I think probably what you're getting at is the lawful ordered application of military force and how to reconcile that with what we believe about Jesus. The way I perceive the Canadian Armed Forces is, we have the sacred trust with the Canadian public. So, the Canadian public democratically elects its leaders, who direct the armed forces, and so, as members of the armed forces, we have this trust with the public. We have to be politically neutral in our service, not necessarily personally but in terms of our service, to take legal orders willingly from whatever democratically elected government is in power. Because there are countries where the armed forces don't have the trust of the public and they basically work however the government, who may or may not be democratically elected, directs them to. But in Canada, the armed forces are really an arm of the Canadian people. So, the public decides, and we execute those decisions. And it's because of the Canadian public's desire to maintain an armed force that we even exist. And so, I think if we're going to have those important conversations in the church around reconciling violence and what we believe about Jesus, it needs to happen in all of the church.

What I might say, personally, is that we live in a complicated world and it's literally never possible to extricate ourselves from sin. Violence or harm visited on somebody else is always sin. I think we can just infer that from the general teachings of Jesus. But at the same time, I live in the tension of... I can't imagine seeing somebody vulnerable or a population who's vulnerable being oppressed or hurt or killed and having it within one's power to stop it and doing nothing, because to me that would also be sin.

I don't want to generalize every engagement overseas that the Canadian Armed Forces has as war, because it's not. There's so much more that we do than participate in war. In fact, that's a smallish part of what we do. But the way I look at it, in terms of institutions and being part of institutions, is that we all have our ways of moving and breathing and living and being in the world and we experience the world in different ways, and we come to it with our own gifts. And we all live and function within systems of oppression, institutions of oppression, because a system or an institution will always seek to defend itself to a certain extent. We have to figure out how we're going to navigate within those systems.

When Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount — because whenever I think of the teachings of Jesus that's what my mind defaults to... I think the beauty of that sermon is it can be implemented from different perspectives, including from within the systems. Some of us are called to be dreamers, to see issues within the system, to name them and to think of better ways to do things. Some are implementers and some transform from within or find ways to inject mercies or grace into the system where it's lacking. I think all of those are doing the work of God to prepare the kingdom on Earth.

I'm going to say this for me, but I suspect from what I know of fellow military people and fellow chaplains, there'll be a lot of rejoicing if there was no more need for military in Canada and in other countries. I know I'm not alone in that. But for the moment, that's not the case and I think you would be hard pressed to find a Canadian soldier or sailor or aviator or padre who wants war and all that it brings. Because military people are just like civilian people: we value life, we value our own life, we value the lives of others, we don't want to be away from our families, we don't want to harm others.

Like I said, war is a small part of our mission and what we do, but a lot of military people join because they want to help, they want to make a difference. We have missions that people like to go on and they tend to be things like when we have natural disasters in Canada. Not that anyone likes to see them happening but the sense of being able to help and being of use to people at home. Canadian soldiers have an international reputation for being really well trained and having really good work ethic and so we're often called on to help train other country's troops. Those are things that people often tend to enjoy doing in the military.

I remember when I was serving in Valcartier in Quebec and the floods were happening one spring, as they have been the last few years, and the army was being called out again to go and help sandbag and that kind of thing. I remember having these young men bound into my office and they were so happy to go. They were fairly young and fairly new to the military, and they were just happy to go help, and they were asking for a blessing for the work that they were going to do and the help they were going to give.

That's it. That's the tension that I live in, and I don't have any easy answers except that we do the good that we can, where we can. I've just been amazed at that strong desire to help that so many military people have, it's such a neat thing to see.

**Q. Well, that was a big question, so thank you for your really thoughtful answer. That's really interesting, like you say, that soldiers would be happy if there was no war. And what you say about living with that tension, I think a lot of people can relate to that, a lot of people have those experiences as well. So, my other question then is what role can faith play in times of conflict? It sounds like your role is beyond just the spiritual, but how does that element feed into your work?**

A. Well, it's certainly beyond religious but I think a lot of the work we do, although we might not name it as such, is highly spiritual. It's people who are in critical situations, often where they're called to rebuild their sense of the world, and really that's what spirituality is, it's how we look at and make sense of the world. So, in situations of conflict, chaplains actually have really important I can talk a bit about that even though I haven't done it myself because I know what they do.

So, we deploy with the troops, we go with them and we support the way we would do at home. Chaplains who are deployed with the troops and chaplains who are behind will often work together if the families need support or if the need arises, basically. So, we have two lines there. The chaplains who are deployed, their role becomes that much more precious to people who are under enormous amounts of stress in a deployment situation, and certainly when people die, sadly, we are there, we accompany the body and the family and friends in the aftermath.

We have chaplains who served [during the war in Afghanistan] who saw a lot of that. We have ramp ceremonies when the bodies are repatriated and brought back to Canada, and the chaplains are there and are a part of that. We can preside at funerals; we can be there in whatever context we are needed. When I talk to chaplains who have been there, accompanying families of wounded or soldiers who have died, they talk about what a privilege it was to be able to just be there for them in that moment.

I think also it affects our faith when we as chaplains are

put into those situations where we have to walk with people when their whole world has been shattered. We ask ourselves questions too. I think that's a good thing. I think it trains us to be open to making space for people and not providing easy answers and letting them find their own way. But we are very much present in deployment situations, as we are at home. We go where our people go.

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## St Peter celebrates Earth Day

By Tony Reynolds



Photo by Jim Peacock.

On April 22, St Peter, Comox, transformed its gardens into a celebration for Earth Day. For any who have been discouraged by hearing so much about the climate crisis, exhibitors from across the Comox Valley set up booths and displays to demonstrate numerous ways individuals can make a practical difference. Comox Valley Nature, Save Our Trees, Project Watershed, Breathe Clean Air, Merville Water Guardians and Rails to Trails, among others, offered opportunities for engagement that catered to almost every taste. During the afternoon, the church was open for meditation and a slideshow illustrating the wonders of creation.

The St Peter green team, a small but vigorous band of volunteers led by climate activist Jay Van Oostdam, organized the day. They enabled dozens of their fellow citizens to find ways to participate in this “partnership for the planet.” Each of the exhibitors addressed the crowd,

laying out specifically the contributions their group makes to restoring creation.

Sulin Milne, incumbent at St Peter, and the green team led the crowd through a half-hour “Celebration of Creation,” with readings from scripture, poetry, and great thinkers.

St Peter raises funds for one organization a month that is making the gospel reality in a practical way. In April, that organization was A Rocha, an international Christian group actively restoring creation on the ground. Its outreach literature was given pride of place during the day's celebrations.

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## Diocesan council approves property sales, puts refugee sponsorship on hold

By Anna van der Hooft

Diocesan council met online on Thursday, April 27, 2022.

Bishop Anna opened the meeting by introducing the Stockdale paradox, which is the ability to have unfailing hope that you will prevail in the end, at the same time as having the courage to face “the most brutal facts of your current reality.” This idea comes from Jim Collin's *Good to Great* which is about the common attributes of long-lasting, successful companies and not-for-profits.

### *Parishes in transition and financial update*

In her opening conversation, Bishop Anna presented a “Diocesan scan.” Highlighted was the fact that one-third of our parishes are currently in transition. Out of the sixteen parishes in transition, only four are in the position to be able to advertise for a full-time incumbent. Bishop Anna also talked about how parish assessments for 2022 are approximately \$200k lower than 2021, and it is unlikely that they will rebound quickly. Diocesan council

discussed how we need to be aware of this reality while at the same time, not lose hope.

### ***Welcome to new council member, Tim Ray!***

Diocesan council, in consultation with the bishop, appointed Tim Ray, a parishioner at St John the Divine, Courtney, as a member of council. Tim has served as warden and parish council member, had a secular career as a judge, and leads weekday Celtic services. He has also agreed to join the canons committee. Welcome aboard Tim!

### ***Human resources***

Diocesan council formally accepted a rewrite of appendix G, the human resources policy manual, in the canons. It will be uploaded to the canons shortly and clergy and wardens will be invited to a Zoom presentation with Isabel Weeks, vice-chancellor, to walk them through the new regulations and forms.

### ***Property sales***

A motion was passed to sell the St Mark property on Salt Spring Island. A second motion was also passed to sell the Strawberry Vale property to the preschool that has been renting that facility from the diocese for several years.

### ***The refugee program***

Brendon Neilson, our vision animator, gave an update on the refugee program. There are currently 101 individuals sponsored by the diocese who we are still waiting to welcome to Vancouver Island. We will soon be facing a decision about our capacity (both financial and human) to fulfil all the government requirements of a sponsorship agreement holder. In anticipation of this, we have decided that (with a few exceptions) we will not be submitting

new applications this year, until we have a clearer picture of what those requirements will be. The refugee program anticipates having this information by September 2022.

### ***The retirement of Gail Gauthier, finance officer***

Diocesan council took some time to say goodbye and thank you to Gail Gauthier, as the April meeting was her last meeting before retirement. We presented Gail with a print of a heron entitled *The Warrior* and thanked her for her tireless work for the diocese.

### ***The next diocesan council***

The next meeting of diocesan council will be on Thursday, June 2, 2022.

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## **Staff departures at the synod office**

By Faith Tides

Catherine Pate is no longer serving as communications officer for the diocese. We are grateful to Catherine for the work she has done for the diocese over the past six years, and we wish her well in all her future endeavors. For communications enquiries or support, please contact Anna van der Hooft, administrative assistant, at [synod@bc.anglican.ca](mailto:synod@bc.anglican.ca).

Gail Gauthier retired from her position as diocesan finance officer on April 30, 2022. We wish her all the best in her retirement. The new finance officer is Gillian Astbury-Heinke, who can be contacted at [finance@bc.anglican.ca](mailto:finance@bc.anglican.ca) or [gastbury@bc.anglican.ca](mailto:gastbury@bc.anglican.ca).

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