



The Rev. Nancy and the Rev. Richard Bruyere, shown speaking at the Road to Warm Springs gathering in 2017, are non-stipendiary priests in Sagkeeng First Nation.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF ANGLICAN VIDEO

By Matt Gardner

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THE UNPAID LABOURERS

IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES, NON-STIPENDIARY CLERGY TREAD VAST, CHALLENGING MISSION FIELDS, JUGGLING PASTORAL OBLIGATIONS AND PUTTING FOOD ON THE TABLE

■ Straddling the shores of the Winnipeg River at the southern end of Lake Winnipeg is Sagkeeng First Nation, an Anicinabe community in the heart of Treaty 1 territory, roughly 90 minutes' drive from the city of Winnipeg.

Formerly known as Fort Alexander Indian Reserve, Sagkeeng has an official band membership of 7,367 people, of whom an estimated 3,352 live off-reserve. Poverty is a major problem in the community, with a very high rate of unemployment. Where the people of Sagkeeng were once largely self-sustaining, today the majority must survive on social assistance. Those fortunate enough to find employment often work government jobs, such as at public schools or the local band office.

The site of Christ Church Anglican, Fort Alexander, Sagkeeng is also the home of the Rev. Richard and the Rev. Nancy Bruyere, Anglican priests of Ojibwe heritage. For more than 20 years, Nancy has served as a non-stipendiary or unpaid priest, the first Indigenous female priest in the area. Richard, who served as a band councillor for more than 10 years, was ordained in 2007 and became a non-stipendiary priest after spending seven years as a deacon.

With a background in engineering, Richard currently

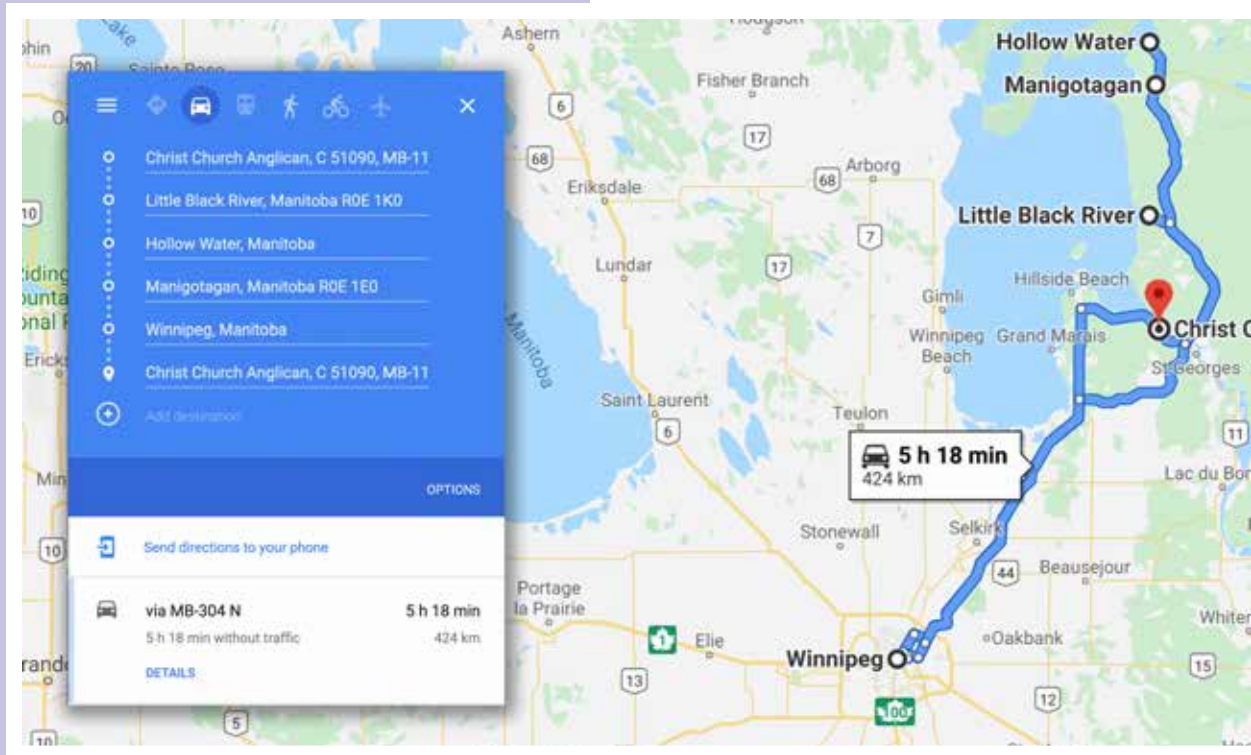
“It’s very hard. I would prefer being a full-time minister, but it’s always a struggle for us. We have to support our families, and also support the church at the same time.”

— *The Rev. Richard Bruyere*

works as the director of public works at Sagkeeng First Nation. His day job can require him to work seven days a week, called out on various assignments.

On top of that paid work is Richard’s unpaid ministry as a priest. Working together with Nancy, Richard serves as a priest not just for Sagkeeng, but for the neighbouring communities of Little Black River, Hollow Water and Manigotagan. Aside from Norman Mead, an Anglican deacon who serves in Hollow Water, the couple are the only two Anglican clergy for this entire swathe of southeast Manitoba.

“It’s very hard,” Richard says. “I would prefer being a full-time minister, but it’s always a struggle for us. We have to support our families, and also support the church



The Bruyeres travel to conduct funerals, weddings and baptisms, and they are often called to Winnipeg in response to requests for pastoral care. All in all, their pastoral work can take them hundreds of kilometres per day.

PHOTO: GOOGLE MAPS

at the same time.”

Every Sunday, the couple holds a worship service at Christ Church. Every two weeks, they travel to Little Black River to lead a service at St. George’s Anglican Church. In addition, the priests travel to each of the communities on request to conduct funerals, weddings and baptisms.

Often, the Bruyeres must travel to Winnipeg in response to requests for pastoral care, such as from a family with a loved one in the hospital.

“Sometimes we get a call about 2 o’clock or 3 o’clock, in the middle of the night, and we have to drive to Winnipeg to go see some people that are very sick—and sometimes people are not going to live very long,” Richard says.

Depending on their situation, some families will cover the cost of gas and parking for the priests. But when those who require pastoral care are without means, the Bruyeres must cover the cost of their own ministry.

The high unemployment in Sagkeeng often means that the couple must cover the cost of hydro and other bills at Christ Church out of their own pockets. Some elders provide a tithe to the church, and the Anglican Church Women hold fundraising dinners or pancake

breakfasts to try and pay the bills.

Members of the community “do give what they can,” Richard says. “That’s all they have, that’s the thing. And I really appreciate them. I thank God for them, for their faith and their generosity, and they give what they can.”

Yet, he acknowledges, paying for ministry and church upkeep inevitably eats away at one’s personal savings.

“After a while, it puts a toll on your finances for your family.”



The issue of non-stipendiary clergy is one that looms large over the Anglican Church of Canada. In reporting on this story, it was hard to pin down just how many clergy are stipended and how many are unpaid, a ratio that is constantly in flux. [Declining revenues](#) across the church suggest that it is increasingly difficult—and will only become harder—to compensate priests in the way the church has historically.

The situation is the most stark in Indigenous communities, where unpaid priests make up a far larger proportion of Anglican ministers.

Both Primate Linda Nicholls and National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop Mark MacDonald call the prevalence of non-stipendiary clergy a “critical question” as the emerging self-determining Indigenous church takes shape.

“It’s a matter of justice, but it’s also a matter of providing what I would call prophetic pastoral care to some of the most besieged communities in Canada, besieged by poverty and suicide and a number of other issues,” MacDonald says.

“It is, I think, one of our premier pastoral issues for the church. But it’s also a strategic issue, because we have the capacity to grow very much in Indigenous communities. Solving a problem of resourcing what are now non-stipendiary clergy and providing a structure of ministry for these communities—we will live or die on that issue.”

Non-stipendiary clergy are “easily” most prevalent in Indigenous communities, the archbishop says. MacDonald calls the persistence of non-stipendiary clergy in Indigenous communities part of “a system that uncovers some deep inequality within the life of the Anglican Church [of Canada].”

In the Indigenous Spiritual Ministry of Mishamikoweesh, all clergy other than Bishop Lydia Mamakwa are non-stipendiary. Many deacons,



PHOTO: SCOTT BROWN/ANGLICAN VIDEO



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*—Mark MacDonald,
National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop*





A view of Split Lake, Man., as seen when entering town from Manitoba Provincial Road 280.

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

archdeacons and priests work jobs in addition to their ministry, and some work multiple jobs.

The Rev. Janet McIvor, a non-stipendiary deacon at St. John the Baptist Anglican Church in Split Lake, Man., works from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. as elementary principal of Chief Sam Cook Mahmuwee Education Centre. She engages in ministry on evenings and weekends, “but usually whenever I’m needed.”

“I have always found the strong need to help out, and to be part of the ministry,” McIvor says. “When you’re called to serve the Lord, it’s anytime.”

Other non-stipendiary clergy in Mishamikoweesh are retired. Whether they work other jobs or not, these clergy all share a common experience of ministering to their communities without pay.

Bishop Isaiah Larry Beardy, who serves as Indigenous suffragan bishop of the northern Manitoba area mission in Mishamikoweesh, describes the lack of stipends for priests as “a human rights issue that should never happen.”

He points to the challenging situation faced by Indigenous priests across Canada, serving communities ravaged by the intergenerational trauma of residential schools, day schools and the Sixties Scoop; missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, men and boys; and issues of chronic illness and addiction.

“We have to deal with healing, with people that are in the hospitals...and also to deal with the death that’s happening at an alarming rate across the land,” Beardy says.

“Just recently in our area, we’ve had suicides that are happening in communities at an alarming rate, and elders are dying on us, it seems, almost every week. That’s how dire it is.

“We’re in a crisis situation. We need our church to step up to the plate, and let’s get some help out here.”



“The average non-stipendiary Indigenous clergyperson deals with more trauma in a week than the average stipended non-Indigenous clergyperson in the Anglican Church of Canada deals with in a year,” says MacDonald. The social traumas affecting Indigenous

communities have often left a mark on non-stipendiary priests themselves.

The Rev. Wilfred Sanderson is a resident of James Smith First Nation in Melfort, Sask., located roughly one hour's drive east of Prince Albert. As a child, his parents brought him to church every Sunday, and his father served as a vestry member.

When his siblings were taken away to residential schools, Sanderson's parents stopped working for the church, and then fell into alcoholism, due to what he believed was a case of "blaming each other... like they lost the right to be parents."

As they grew older, his mother and father quit drinking. But Sanderson ultimately ended up fighting an alcohol addiction himself. In 1994, his first wife died of a heart attack after a long battle with diabetes. Sanderson's recovery from alcoholism came after spending time at a sweat lodge, where he met his current wife Theresa and began attending his childhood church.

There, he received his calling.

"I was spiritually awakened...when I received Christ and [he] healed me," Sanderson recalls. He trained at James Settee College, through home studies and one excursion to Toronto. In 2006 he became a deacon, and in 2008 he was ordained as a priest.

Sanderson currently serves as the main Anglican priest for James Smith First Nation, following the retirement of the Rev. Martha Stonestand. James Smith has a population of approximately 2,000 people and two Anglican churches: St. Stephen's on the western part of the reserve and St. Luke's in the south.

For 24 years, Sanderson has also worked a job delivering water to the community. The combination of his secular job and priestly duties made for long work days. In recent years, after developing an illness that makes driving difficult because he tires more easily, Sanderson has contracted out much of the delivery work to a driver. He still handles orders and directs the driver where to go.

"When I delivered water to the community, I'd go to a funeral," he remembers. "I'm done the funeral, get on a



In April 2018, fire consumed St. John's Anglican Church, Shamattawa First Nation, northern Manitoba. Rebuilding of the church began in July.

PHOTO: RCMP MANITOBA



Sanderson, rear centre, poses with a ministry team from King's College, Halifax, on the steps of St. Stephen's Church in James Smith First Nation.

PHOTO: THERESA SANDERSON



The Rev. Wilfred Sanderson (right) used to attend to his priestly duties after hauling water to about 50 houses for his secular job.

PHOTO: MARY BROWN



The Rev. Nancy Bruyere (right) officiates at a wedding in Sagkeeng First Nation with her husband, the Rev. Richard Bruyere (not pictured).

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

truck and go and haul water to about 50 houses I had to deliver to.

“I had enough energy to go and finish my work at the same time,” he says. “I think if it wasn’t for that [secular job], I wouldn’t be able to do lots of the things that I do today.”

In carrying out his ministry, Sanderson also has the support of Theresa, who serves as a lay reader, and helpers in the community who provide assistance as vestry members or during funerals.

Along with Sunday services at St. Luke’s, Sanderson teaches vacation Bible school in the summertime and is preparing to begin leading annual confirmation classes. Like the Bruyeres, he also makes regular visits to sick people in the hospital.

Balancing paid work and unpaid ministry can take its toll.

“Sometimes it gets pretty stressful,” Sanderson says. “Sometimes it gets pretty hectic. Sometimes we have funerals back to back.... Each community, I think they all take turns [with] that happening in our communities. So it gets pretty heavy sometimes.”

Since non-stipendiary priests already take on so

much responsibility, unexpected events can make their stressful workload even heavier and force clergy to quickly adapt.

The Rev. Mary Anne Miles, who serves as a non-stipendiary priest in Shamattawa First Nation in northern Manitoba, faced such an occurrence last year when St. John’s Anglican Church burned down. RCMP investigators determined that a recently malfunctioning furnace was responsible for the fire, which destroyed the only Anglican church in the community as well as books and recordings that Miles had stored inside.

In the absence of an Anglican church building, Miles is presently conducting worship services in the local Pentecostal church. The rebuilding of St. John’s began in July, supported by a church insurance policy as well as tithes and monetary offerings.

Miles is the only Anglican priest in her community. She finds some help in her ministry from three choir members and a lay reader, but she is otherwise largely on her own. However, she notes that Bishop Mamakwa and Bishop Beardy in the Mishamikoweesh office regularly offer support.



For more than 20 years, Nancy Bruyere has served as a non-stipendiary priest, the first Indigenous female priest in the area. Richard Bruyere, who was ordained in 2007, became a non-stipendiary priest after seven years of serving as a deacon.

PHOTOS: CONTRIBUTED

“Whenever I need anything or I’m not sure of how to go about things, that’s [when] I phone Lydia...and Larry... They do help me when I need help,” she says.

“They usually ask me if I need any help...like in the community when something happens very tragically, very serious. At times there are things [that] are really, really terrible happening in the community, and they usually ask me if I want any help, that they would support me, send someone to come and help me here.”



Throughout much of the history of Canadian Anglicanism, priests in Indigenous communities were largely non-Indigenous, travelling into the communities from outside and receiving a stipend from the church.

Over time, Archbishop MacDonald says, a transition began to take place as the church found it increasingly difficult to continue providing those stipends and realized the importance of transferring ministry to Indigenous people themselves. That transition happened unevenly across Canada and in many communities is still happening. But it also created a new system with

major difficulties.

MacDonald says the church “put non-stipendiary clergy in positions that had been stipended” while making “the same demands” that they made on paid priests. The resulting situation has proved difficult for non-stipendiary Indigenous priests “to sustain any semblance of healthy life,” due to the stress of working multiple jobs and the larger background of poverty, addiction and suicide that plague many Indigenous communities.

The uneven transition described by the National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop has resulted in a diverse picture across different communities.

In some dioceses, Indigenous ministry includes stipended clergy. In the diocese of the Arctic, for example, there are paid Inuit and non-Inuit clergy as well as non-stipendiary clergy, resulting in what MacDonald calls a “mixed [clergy] economy.” In some cases, stipends are paid if the local band council has funding to cover salaries. In other places, such as Mishamikoweesh, almost all clergy are unpaid.

In 2010, Indigenous Ministries staff from General



Synod hosted two meetings at Church House in Toronto to address the issue of unpaid clergy. The most recent figures available on the precise numbers of non-stipendiary clergy in the Anglican Church of Canada are from a 2011 study by the Council of the North.

That report cited a roughly equal amount of paid (15 full-time) and unpaid (16) clergy in the diocese of Saskatchewan, as well as Caledonia (14 paid priests, seven unpaid deacons and six unpaid priests). The diocese of Keewatin had by far the highest proportion of non-stipendiary clergy, with 50 unpaid priests and 20 unpaid deacons compared to three full-time and several part-time paid clergy.

(The diocese of Keewatin was closed in 2014. Its northern region is now the Indigenous Spiritual Ministry of Mishamikoweesh.)

Other Council of the North dioceses, such as Brandon, Moosonee and the Arctic, had numbers of unpaid clergy anywhere from one-half to three-quarters as large as the number of paid clergy. In the diocese of Yukon, the number of unpaid priests (five) and deacons (four) was far higher than the number of paid full-time clergy (two).

The Indigenous Spiritual Ministry of Mishamikoweesh was created in June 2014, comprising an area previously covered by the diocese of Keewatin. In Mishamikoweesh, almost all clergy are unpaid.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF ANGLICAN VIDEO

In the years following this report, as the church moved forward the formation of a self-determining Indigenous church within the Anglican Church of Canada, the issue of non-stipendiary clergy was never far from the surface.

The establishment of the Jubilee Commission in 2018 marked an effort by the church to find a sustainable funding base for the self-determining Indigenous church. The resolution put forward to the Council of General Synod for the appointment of the Jubilee Commission suggested that the new body consider “current salary levels of Indigenous clergy and strategies to move towards parity,” among other tasks. This mandate was recently confirmed at the meeting of General Synod in 2019.



In the Indigenous Spiritual Ministry of Mishamikoweesh, the advancing age of non-stipendiary clergy, many of whom are in their 50s or 60s, has created a growing concern for the need to attract more young people into ministry.

But just as economic factors make it difficult to provide stipends for existing priests in Indigenous communities, they pose equally great challenges for youth entering ministry. When Sanderson speaks to “young kids” about the possibility of becoming clergy, he is regularly confronted by the same question: “How much do you get paid?”

“How can you encourage our young people to get into ministry when there’s no pay?” Sanderson asks. “I always tell them, ‘Towards the end of your journey, your pay will be great.’”

“We need a young leader in the future.... I don’t know how many years I’ve got left in my ministry, so I’ve got to try and continue on until they find some young people that are interested.”

Richard Bruyere has faced a similar problem when trying to encourage Indigenous youth to go into ministry.

“We’re praying for some younger people to take over, but...if you try to recruit young people, it doesn’t look very attractive financially to them,” Bruyere says.

“You know some people when they go to school, they look at getting these jobs [that] have a higher income, and then they get a good job. Then you look at the clergy,” he adds with a laugh.

“There are some people that are coming out, some young people that are dedicated to their faith and their belief in Jesus, and that keeps them going.”

— *The Rev. Richard Bruyere*

“It takes a special person to have that commitment. So recruiting, it’s kind of tough for us. But we are praying. The harvest is ripe, but the [labourers] are few ... There are some people that are coming out, some young people that are dedicated to their faith and their belief in Jesus, and that keeps them going.”

In the meantime, to provide greater support for non-stipendiary clergy in the present, McIvor suggests that the church needs to start involving Indigenous communities in all aspects of ministry, and to provide parity with resources enjoyed by other dioceses and parishes.

“I would greatly appreciate if we can get the support other Anglican Church of Canada [clergy] receive such as stipend[s], pension, funding and programs,” she says.



Nicholls says she is “deeply concerned about the lack of support for Indigenous clergy in remote areas where ministry is non-stipendiary and the pastoral care burden is overwhelming.”

The church needs “new models for supporting ministry in life-giving ways for the context faced,” she says. The primate also acknowledges that many congregations cannot afford to pay a full-time or part-time priest, and urges the church to provide “sacramental ministry and pastoral support” for these congregations.

She also suggests that some clergy have a greater capacity to be non-stipendiary. They might be retired; have another, paying job that fits well with ministry; or simply have the commitment and passion to engage in local ministry without a stipend. However, she cautions against viewing such cases as a “cheap fix” for the church.

“The choice to be non-stipendiary must fit both the

cleric and the community and is in partnership with stipendiary clergy, not an alternative to it,” Nicholls says.

Traditionally, the primate says, the model for ministry in the Anglican Church of Canada has been of a family of dioceses within which congregations were expected to either be self-sustaining or grow into that over time with help. The church has also supported mission work across Canada in isolated communities to allow economically stronger parts of the church to assist those in other areas where needed.

“Together all parts of the Church will need to discern how we can best support ministry across our country and discern where stipendiary ministry is needed or where other models of local ministry and non-stipendiary clergy will be appropriate,” Nicholls says. “We will need to find ways to support full-time stipendiary ministry in some areas.”

As an example, she points to her experience as bishop of Huron, in which the diocese was able to offer health benefits to a non-stipendiary cleric. Because the diocese of Huron self-insures its benefits program, it is able to decide which clergy are eligible for benefits, whether they are stipendiary or not. The diocese of Yukon has also presented a form of alternative remuneration beyond a stipend by providing housing for pastoral volunteers who serve the local church.

Archbishop MacDonald identifies two elements that he says must be part of any Anglican response to the “pastoral crisis” in Indigenous communities.

On one hand, the church must find more money to support full-time clergy to act as a regional support system for volunteer clergy. On the other hand, he believes the church must also develop more volunteer ministry in the form of lay readers and catechists to support the ministry of both paid and unpaid clergy.

“We can’t just shift to stipended ministry,” MacDonald says. “We have to expand the way that we do ministry, and we have to put to death once and for all the Western model of an omni-competent clergyperson, one clergyperson serving over the life of a parish.

“For us, there has to be, I think, paid clergy, non-paid clergy, and a lot of lay ministries that support that work. We’re really talking about a very different Indigenous model of ministry. We’re not just talking about money. We’re also talking about a different way of doing ministry in those communities.”

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Different methods of clergy formation are already underway in Mishamikoweesh. Twice a year, students gather for the William Winter School of Ministry, which since its establishment in 2003-4 has trained more than 70 people from northern Manitoba and Ontario in specifically Indigenous forms of ministry.

With the approval by General Synod of a self-determining Indigenous church, the next meeting of Sacred Circle in 2020 plans to look at four major categories of concern for the emerging church: vision (preamble), covenant (constitution), way of life (canons), and ministry development (formation, training and deployment of ministers in the life of the church).

Meanwhile, the work of the Jubilee Commission continues to unfold, with its most recent meeting taking place in October 2019. Archbishop MacDonald, who attended the meeting, says that the commission will “certainly try” to address funding issues for non-stipendiary clergy.

“I cannot predict success,” he adds. “But we have a lot of hopes in the Jubilee Commission. It is, I think, an essential component of moving forward.”

Other ways of helping non-stipendiary clergy are in various stages of development and discussion. Judy Robinson, director of the Anglican Church of Canada Pension Office, said the church is working on “finding viable ways to provide life insurance, medical and dental benefits, and possibly pension plan participation for non-stipendiary clergy.”

Robinson said much work lies ahead in this process—for example, government regulations exist pertaining to participation in pension plans. However, she noted that many people in the church “want to see something happen” to help clergy.

An existing benefit for non-stipendiary clergy through the Pension Office is the Continuing Education Plan. Robinson said that non-stipendiary clergy could access the benefit—a \$750 contribution in 2020 and \$900 in 2021—by finding a third-party source for the funding, such as the parish they serve. These funds could then provide education and training resources and materials to the clergy person. Robinson said interested clergy can contact the Pension Office for more information.

In October, Robinson spoke to the national Indigenous archbishop about ways to provide more benefits for non-stipendiary clergy, and she presented the concept for increased benefits to a meeting of executive archdeacons in November, where it found “high levels of support.”



Despite the pressures and challenges that non-stipendiary Indigenous clergy face, to reduce their ministry to these hardships would be to paint an inaccurate picture—one that fails to explain the resilience of these priests and deacons in such difficult conditions.

To persevere through such obstacles, clergy are driven in large measure by their faith.

“I really believe in the Lord, and when I got saved, I made a commitment I’d work for him,” Richard Bruyere says. “Some of the ministries, it’s not rewarding in monetary stuff, but it’s rewarding spiritually... It’s also at the same time very stressful. Some days you worry, ‘How are we going to get there?’ But it helps you to put your faith and trust in the Lord, and he does provide.

“So we just keep going. And I love the ministry, I really do. Same with Nancy—she’s got great faith and she loves the ministry. She loves what she’s doing and the church.”

For the last two years, Mary Anne Miles has been getting an honorarium of \$100 per month from Mishamikoweesh. While she is happy to receive the payment, her drive in practicing Christian ministry continues to be the words of her elders and a decision she made more than 20 years ago to work for the church.

“I was interested in helping around the church with the elders that were there before,” Miles remembers. “They used to talk to me a lot about how to help around

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in church, and I really enjoyed working with those elders.... I just carried on to do what they taught me, and...not to give up on anything.

“That’s why I was there, and that’s why I’m still there. I still think of those words, what [they] used to say to me ... ‘Everything is going to be hard, but you just have to do your bit.’”

Along with the faith of the clergy themselves are the positive effects of their ministry on those around them.

Bruyere acknowledges “the struggle that we have in our communities. But there’s also a good story.... We have joy, too.

“We have joy when we work with the elders and also the young people. When we work with them, it’s fulfilling. You get joy. Even though in the background you’re worried about the financial stuff—it’s something that you need done, but it’s not something that’s the most important.”

Describing the experience of Nancy teaching Sunday school, he notes, “Sometimes we get about 20, 30 kids, and when you see them with joy, it’s fulfilling.... Our elders come too..., they gather and then they tell stories. We have a meal every Sunday in our church when we gather and we have fellowship. That’s what I mean [about non-stipendiary ministry]. It’s hard and it’s good at the same time.”

In assessing the role of unpaid clergy in the Anglican Church of Canada today, the national Indigenous archbishop is effusive and unstinting in his praise.

“Non-stipendiary clergy are my heroes,” MacDonald says. “They serve in very challenging circumstances with great commitment and, I think, great courage.” ■