EPIPHANIES

FROM THE ANGLICAN JOURNAL

Assumptions & Expectations

"We are invited to consider new ways that may yet be life-giving."

—Archbishop Linda Nicholls, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada

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COVER IMAGE: "Above the Eternal Tranquility" (1894), Isaac Levitan.
PHOTO: TRETYAKOV GALLERY, MOSCOW & WIKIPEDIA

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FALL-WINTER 2020

ART: WIKIPEDIA

By Matthew Townsend
EDITOR

BLURRED VISIONS

2020 SHATTERED OUR ASSUMPTIONS. WHAT WILL 2021 BRING?

If you've heard someone use the phrase "20/20 vision," you've probably gathered that they meant perfect vision—the ability to see something complex in crystal clarity. To optometrists, however, 20/20 vision merely implies normal visual acuity when tested at a distance of 20 feet. As the American Optometric Association puts it, "If you have 20/20 vision, you can see clearly at 20 feet what should normally be seen at that distance. If you have 20/100 vision, it means that you must be as close as 20 feet to see what a person with normal vision can see at 100 feet."

In other words, 20/20 vision is eyesight that's good enough to see the writing on the wall, when you're more or less in front of the wall. And perhaps that's a good

If one gives answer before hearing, it is folly and shame.

—Proverbs 18:13

way for us to think of the year 2020, too. The writing is on the wall, we're in front of the wall, and our eyesight is decently average.

I don't need to say it, but I will anyway: it's been a long year. For most of us, 2020 has brought unwelcome surprises and challenges across the world, from a deadly pandemic to turbid political elections (and I'm not just talking about Bolivia) to storms and fires and racism and—it just goes on. We have come to see some things in clarity that seemed obscure before; the light now touches the landscape before us, and our eyes are open. We see things that are encouraging—like people working together to ease a pandemic, as Dean Peter Elliott put it this summer—and we also see things that are not so encouraging. Such is the price of normal vision.

For those possessing extraordinary vision, though—the people who saw the writing on the wall from a mile away—very little about 2020 was surprising. They warned us that we were carrying assumptions about modern life that just weren't so. For example, scientists like Stephen Morse and journalists like Laurie Garrett spent decades warning us that life would change radically upon emergence of a bad bug, and that we'd have to change our lives if it did. And here we are.

In the church, we've adapted quickly to learning that assumptions we carried into 2020 wouldn't make it to 2021. We have collectively participated in an Apollo program that has launched the church far from the comforts of *terra firma* and towards an entirely new way of being—which has completely shifted what we prioritize in worship. But now, as we peer again into haze before us, what assumptions might we reconsider before stepping into the next year? What questions have gone unasked?

In this issue of *Epiphanies*, we consider a few assumptions that may have underpinned our expectations for this year. As usual, we open our issue with theological reflections from Archbishop Linda Nicholls, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, and National Indigenous Archbishop Mark MacDonald. In her column Nicholls considers how COVID-19 has challenged our assumptions about life and church—but points out that Jesus also challenged our assumptions, inviting us into new ways of being. MacDonald takes a look at the central role of the Eucharist in the life of the church and wonders how we might, together, work to find new ways to safely practice communion in these times.

We kick off our long-form, journalistic content with a consideration of preaching. At the start of 2020, who amongst us would have imagined a church in which Eucharist, choral and praise music, coffee hour—even just uniting in physical spaces—would be supplanted by an online gathering of the dispersed in which a simple homily often takes centre stage? Yet here we are—and I can't imagine there's ever been a time where more reflections upon the word have been offered online. But what is Anglican preaching, anyway? Is there such a thing as an Anglican way of preaching? What differences do we find in style, length and purpose? What are people

finding when they log on to livestreams? Tali Folkins talks with a sampling of Canadian Anglican preachers to explore these questions.

Indeed, the pandemic has changed more than Sunday worship; it has transformed how we live out common life. In my 25 years on the internet, I can attest that I have seen communities come and go—and divide. I have seen love blossom among complete strangers, and I have seen the closest of friendships utterly destroyed at the touch of a button. I think many of us have assumed that community *just happens* on the internet, but is this so? What draws people together, and what pushes people apart? Joelle Kidd considers our assumptions about the internet with Joanne McNeil, technology essayist and author of *Lurking: How a Person Became a User*.

Avid readers of the *Anglican Journal* may recall that we kicked off 2020 with a deep dive into the church's statistics—considering how and even whether the church would exist beyond the year 2040, given statistical trends. In that issue we featured "20-40 vision," a series of essays by young Anglican leaders on what they imagined in the years ahead. Since 2020 hasn't played out precisely as expected, Matt Gardner has reconnected with those same leaders for "20-40 hindsight"—to ask how the pandemic has affected their expectations for the church's long-term future.

There are more long-held notions to question before we enter 2021. Among the most important, I think, is the assumption that colonialism is a thing of the past. As we've seen in 2020, though, many of our old demons—like racism and sexism—haven't been as well exorcised as we might have imagined. Is colonialism still with us? If so, what should we do about it? I talk about these questions with the Rev. Graham Singh, priest at St. Jax Anglican Church in Montreal and church transformation consultant. Singh, who has recently published opinion pieces that overtly suggest that shrinking, predominantly white churches should make their buildings available to struggling community organizations and nonprofits, wrote his master's thesis at the London School of Economics on decolonization in British Guiana.

For much of my life, I had assumed that the year 2020 would inaugurate the future, with a serious break between what we think of as past and what we imagine to be a new present. When I was growing up in the '80s, 2020 was often the year in which the future materialized. In those visions, even the terrifying ones, we saw androids indistinguishable from people; exciting missions to Mars; machines capable of destroying civilization and of saving it; and incredible advances in medicine and science. Humans would be starting their expansion into the universe.

These days, the future falls flat, as we lift our eyes not to the stars but turn our ears toward the pronouncements of virologists. Meanwhile, we search for a "new normal," failing to consider that the "new normal" may be that there is no normalcy to come. This year may have well put an end to the past, to the usual. We may be entering a time that will continue to look very different from what we've seen before. But if I've learned anything this year, it's that it can be incredibly hard to imagine what December might bring when you're still inside of November. Some days, it seems difficult to consider Wednesday when you're trapped within Tuesday evening. It's in this uncertainty that I find hope in Scriptures and in the gospel message of Jesus Christ, who reminds us to abandon worry (Matthew 6). My friends, no matter how much we toil and spin, we are not going to be able to predict tomorrow's events. Next year is as unknown to us as 2040. But what we do know is the cross—we can look to the cross. Through it we can learn from our mistakes, our oversights and our misinterpretations. We can ensure that our attention isn't elsewhere, waiting for God to restore an order that was never holy in the first place.

What may replace that order? That's up to God—and maybe us, too. Let us move forward with our eyes open. Let us open our minds and hearts to God. Let us set aside our assumptions, expectations and worries. Let us walk with Christ into this new year, which will bring new things.

By Linda Nicholls
PRIMATE OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

FINDING JOY IN OUR CHALLENGED ASSUMPTIONS

When life is stable and all its interlocking parts are running relatively smoothly, we simply assume it will always be that way. We make plans for the future based on present expectations. Then suddenly our lives are turned upside down by something unexpected. The plans are jettisoned, and all our assumptions are in doubt. What worked in the past will no longer be helpful in the present and future, or we are invited to consider new ways that may yet be life-giving. ▸

PHOTO: RENE BERNAL

This can occur on a global scale, as we are now experiencing, or in our own lives and families due to a personal tragedy or a chosen transition. I remember well my first months living in India, where assumptions were challenged daily! The lack of consistent—and clean—water supply changed daily routines and woke me up to the privileges I took for granted at home. It is a lesson I carry with me to this day. Others find their lives reoriented by the death of a loved one or an illness that reframes all expectations about the future.

Jesus challenged the assumptions of a settled community through his teaching and actions in every encounter. He invited people to look at God's love and its demands in new ways. He reoriented living into the law of God through the lens of God's love and compassion. The disciples were invited to reframe their expectations. When they saw only the lack of enough food for the 5,000, Jesus invited them to see what they had as enough for all. When they wanted to send away children as inconvenient, Jesus gathered them and invited the disciples to see the world through their eyes. Religious leaders were invited to stop seeing the letter of the law regarding the Sabbath and open their hearts and minds to what gives life through healing. The woman at the well was invited to see beyond cultural limitations and find living water. And the resurrection was the disruption that radically altered everything.

We are in the maelstrom of a global reframing of assumptions right now as we re-evaluate our lives and expectations. Generations past have experienced similar upheavals that have changed the world. Now we are invited into a time of unsettling renegotiation of what is important and what needs to change. Will online worship continue? Will we pay attention to the cracks in our society opened up in these months—inequalities, racial injustice, continued effects of colonialism? Will we let go of assumptions that are no longer life-giving in our life as a church, especially those that are destructive of others and of creation? Will the voice of God be heard in our midst in new ways?

We may experience this time as frightening in its uncertainty. Or we can enter into it with a sense of excitement at the possibilities for something more life-giving than we have had in the past. We will need courage with open hearts, minds and wills trusting in God. Let the adventure begin in the name of Christ!

By Mark MacDonald
NATIONAL INDIGENOUS ANGLICAN ARCHBISHOP

CONSIDERING COMMUNION

A EUCHARIST THAT EMBRACES A PANDEMIC

The pandemic has delivered uncomfortable restraints on the central act of our faith: the ceremony Jesus gave so that we might live in faith, hope and love until he comes again. In the midst of our many conversations about this, I was startled to read Alexander Schmemann's prophetic words from 1964:

> The liturgy is still the centre of our church life, unquestioned, unchallenged, unopposed. But it is in fact a centre without periphery, a heart with no control on blood circulation, a fire with nothing to purify and to consume, because that life which had to be embraced by it, has been satisfied with itself and has chosen other lights to guide and shape it.

Fr. Schmemann, who died in 1983, taught many of us to place the Eucharist at the centre of the Christian life. What he says above pushes us beyond the true but uncompleted idea that the Eucharist is our centre. The Eucharist is not just the centre; it is to inform every aspect of existence, to energize every moment of our visit within God's Creation. It is not just the centre of life; it is to touch and fill all of life. In every way, it speaks as much to when it is not present, as it speaks to when it is present.

In my type of ministry, there are frequent encounters with Christians who go for long periods of time without Eucharist. This is especially true in Indigenous communities. This is not because of their choice, but because of the remoteness of the ministry of the church. In all cases, it is observed that the Eucharist is deeply cherished, but people must embrace its central message and values in other ways. It is present through moral and spiritual practice, rather than as a consistent or frequent ceremony.

Here I am not arguing for less communion. I long to see it more. What is important here is the way we let it abide in those times and places when we are apart from the liturgy. The Eucharist desires to become a living and converting presence outside of our Sunday worship. It would appear to be designed for that presence.

Considering this, I would gently suggest that the idea of a "Eucharistic fast" is not the best way to treat this unfamiliar time. Perhaps, we are called to new ways to live the Eucharist, to live in the Eucharist, to live out the Eucharist. There seem to be noble attempts to make this happen, as in Pope Francis's portrayal of the "Cross to Resurrection" message in his lonely Holy Week and Eastertide pilgrimages around Rome. We do need to find new safe protocols to have prayer and Eucharist present, especially at times of sickness and death. But at other times, we could find ways to live Eucharist in courage and compassion for the poor and vulnerable in this dangerous time.

May we please work together towards more ways to safely practice our central ceremony. In this way, may we work together for a broader experience of Eucharist. Jesus promised he would come with a New Heaven and a New Earth. The Eucharist is a first taste of that divine reality. It is a taste that radiates out in salvation, forgiveness, justice, reconciliation and hope. It is promised to be especially present at times of great distress for creation and humanity—times like now. ■

PHOTO: REMI WALL/UNSPLASH

For centuries, many Anglicans have taken authority in their church to rest on the "three-legged stool" of Scripture, tradition and reason, a concept whose origins are at least partly traceable to 16th century English theologian Richard Hooker.

PHOTO: MADY70/SHUTTERSTOCK

By Tali Folkins
STAFF WRITER

PREACH IT!

WHEN IT COMES TO SERMONIZING, CANADIAN ANGLICANS HOLD DIVERSE OPINIONS

> **Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath he taught the people. They were amazed at his teaching, because his words had authority.**
>
> *Luke 4:31-32*

It's clear from the gospels that preaching has played a central role in Christian life since the very beginning. In 2020, with the COVID-19 pandemic, preaching has taken on a new significance in many churches; arguably, it's more adaptable than other elements of worship to the internet. But what can we assume about Anglican preaching?

Perhaps not much. Even within the Anglican Church of Canada, diverse answers can be found to some of the most basic questions: Is there a distinctly Anglican style of preaching? How does preaching work—what is it that gives a preacher's words authority? Are Anglicans good at it? What is the importance of preaching in a service?

For centuries, many Anglicans have taken authority in their church to rest on the "three-legged stool" of Scripture, tradition and reason, a concept whose origins are at least partly traceable to 16th century English theologian Richard Hooker. This idea shapes Anglican preaching, says the Rev. Anna Greenwood-Lee, rector of St. Laurence Anglican Church in the diocese of Calgary and bishop-elect, since Sept. 26, of the diocese of British Columbia.

"We're given permission to use the Bible as a jumping-off point, but it always needs to be in conversation with the tradition, and with reason and with the modern world," she says. "Scripture is always supposed to be there, but it's not the only thing that's supposed to be there."

The Rev. Ken McClure, priest-in-charge at the Anglican Parish of Haliburton in the diocese of Toronto, says the three-legged stool gives reason, in particular, a more prominent role in Anglican sermons; the Anglican approach to Scripture means asking questions about it.

"We will always be wrestling with it, arguing with it, in a way that perhaps isn't as exemplified in other traditions, because reason is not so much of a

We are almost charged with the task of looking at the difficult with the inspiring, and seeing what comes of that intellectual journey of faith.

—The Rev. Ken McClure, priest-in-charge at the Anglican Parish of Haliburton in the diocese of Toronto,

theological virtue outside of the Anglican tradition," says McClure, whose sermons and songs, via Facebook, have attracted a following from countries around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We are almost charged with the task of looking at the difficult with the inspiring, and seeing what comes of that intellectual journey of faith."

The role reason plays in Anglican preaching is essential, McClure says, because it's through this process of asking questions about Scripture that we internalize it.

"That's what makes Scripture a living thing," he says. "If we don't engage with it that way, Scripture becomes just a relic.... Reason helps Scripture enter into our lives in ways that we can recognize."

The role that reason plays in Anglican preaching, McClure says, gives it a unique potential to bring people back to Scripture—including those who drifted away from the church because they were not able to find satisfactory answers to their questions about God.

"I think it has an ability to reach people who have been sitting on the periphery ... and have allowed their reason to open up questions for them about the traditional messages and proclamations and understandings of Scripture," he says. "For the last 40 years, there's been no small amount of those people who have been saying, 'OK, well I'm out—the dealer folds.' I think that the Anglican three-legged stool of theology, that approach, has the potential to be able to speak directly to a lot of their concerns, to give them the opportunity to have their questions validated."

It seems intellectual engagement is something Anglicans expect in their sermons. A 2009 survey of church members in New Zealand found that Anglicans "desired significant intellectual content and discussion of social issues" compared to their counterparts in the Elim Church, a Pentecostal denomination—though the same survey also reported finding that members of both churches responded to sermons in a mostly emotional, rather than cognitive way. (The paper also claimed that research from the previous three centuries had shown that sermons in any case have a "minimal" impact on their listeners!)

Ultimately the people want to know one thing, and they will know it as soon as you open your mouth: Does this woman, does this man know God?

—The Rev. Michael Knowles, Anglican professor of preaching at McMaster Divinity College, a Baptist and interdenominational seminary in Hamilton, Ont.

This understanding of Anglican sermons isn't universal, however. The Rev. Michael Knowles, an Anglican professor of preaching at McMaster Divinity College, a Baptist and interdenominational seminary in Hamilton, Ont., says he hasn't seen a more contemplative style in Anglican preaching. But the question is complicated, Knowles says, by the fact that Canadian Anglicanism is still struggling to articulate what sets it apart—and until it does this, it will be hard to generalize about Anglican preaching at all.

"I think there is still a debate going on about what is the nature of Anglican identity," he says. "And that being the case, we're not sure where preaching fits.

"The issue is less about 'What's preaching for?' than 'What is the church for?' Because only once we figure out what the church is doing and how the church functions—what it's meant to achieve—only then do we get, 'OK, so preaching can serve that aim.'"

The departure of some of the more evangelical-leaning Anglicans for the Anglican Network in Canada, he says, has left the Anglican Church of Canada relatively more focused on sacraments and social justice than preaching anyway. And churches that are heavy on sacraments and social justice, he says, "tend to de-emphasize preaching proportionately," because they see the sacraments and the life of the community as the focus of divine action, rather than the preaching of the word.

Meanwhile, theologians continue to debate some of the most basic questions about preaching—how it works and what it's for, Knowles says.

When preaching is taught in seminaries, the focus is on teaching homiletic techniques—how to structure a sermon, for example. But Knowles says he believes the essence of preaching—what makes the difference for the people in the pews—is the knowledge of God.

"Ultimately the people want to know one thing, and they will know it as soon as you open your mouth: Does this woman, does this man know God?" he says.

In the New Testament, Knowles says, one only either enters or receives the kingdom of God—one does not build it. What this means for preaching is that preachers should not see themselves as agents of God.

"The way most preaching, and most ways of construing church, function is that God needs us to do his work for him," Knowles says. "I think that the primary purpose of the church is to worship, and to know God,

PHOTO: FREEDOM STUDIO

"I see the pulpit as a place of weakness, where we in our foolish words and our simplicity simply bear witness to something greater than ourselves, and we literally let Jesus do the heavy lifting.... And to be honest, I think Anglicans have kind of lost sight of that. We think it's up to us."

—The Rev. Michael Knowles, Anglican professor of preaching at McMaster Divinity College

and to celebrate the reality of God in our midst and not to make God happen. I don't think we make God happen—God makes us happen."

Part of the Christian knowledge of God, he says, is a radical vulnerability, a radical receptivity, in the knower. It's the job of the preacher to invite people into this.

"I'm uncomfortable with us as persons of power exercising power over others," he says. "I see the pulpit as a place of weakness, where we in our foolish words and our simplicity simply bear witness to something greater than ourselves, and we literally let Jesus do the heavy lifting.... And to be honest, I think Anglicans have kind of lost sight of that. We think it's up to us."

A highly thought-out sermon is not necessarily a good one, Knowles says.

"We've all heard sermons that were terribly clever and they were just non-memorable in the end," he says. "We've also heard sermons that technically sucked, but were luminous because there was something going on here that was bigger than the person."

Knowles is not alone in believing that Anglicans have room for improvement when it comes to preaching. The

If I'm 15 years old, I ain't going to an Anglican church—I'll be straight up. I'll go to a non-denominational, I'll go to a Baptist or Pentecostal before I enter an Anglican church, just on perception, on how you engage with me.... I think we've missed that mark tremendously.

—The Rev. Steve Greene, rector at St. Luke's, Cambridge, and St. Thomas The Apostle, Cambridge

Rev. Steve Greene, rector at St. Luke's, Cambridge, and St. Thomas The Apostle, Cambridge, in the diocese of Huron, says the church suffers from complacency—especially if it wants to attract new people. There seems a prevalent notion in the church, he says, that people will automatically show up to an Anglican service.

"Unfortunately, we still have that old mindset," he says. "If I'm 15 years old, I ain't going to an Anglican church—I'll be straight up. I'll go to a non-denominational, I'll go to a Baptist or Pentecostal before I enter an Anglican church, just on perception, on how you engage with me.... I think we've missed that mark tremendously."

Part of the problem as Greene sees it is that Anglican sermons are too abstract, and they often fail to present the essentials of Christianity, like the presence of sin in the world, and the infinite grace of God.

"It's very disconnected from the world, in a sense," he says. "I'm thinking sometimes we've watered down the gospel.

"How many preachers have you heard speak about sin? ... How many of us actually take the word of God—whatever reading it is—and say 'OK, this is happening today, and we're not speaking on this. We're not fighting for this. We're not living in God's justice.'"

Powerful preaching, he says, then moves to grace.

"Then you say, 'You're redeemed, the shackles of death and sin have been broken by Jesus—now go run in this freedom, go and live this out,'" he says. "'Here's grace now, here's this ocean that you can never swim. And it's so deep the Mariana Trench has nothing on it.' Do we actually speak on this, to ease the minds of the people living in shame and guilt to say, 'We get it, and you can walk in freedom?'"

Part of the problem with Anglican services, Greene says, is that there's too much emphasis on the altar, and not enough on the word, so that sermons are too short.

"Romans 10:17 literally says faith comes by hearing, hearing the word of the good news of Jesus Christ," he says. "If I'm a 15-year old—or I'm an 85-year old—and I do not know Jesus, I'm not coming to a church because I see an altar. I have no idea what the dude is doing, I have no idea what the guy is wearing or what she's wearing, but as soon as you talk about reconciliation, you talk about repentance, you talk

PHOTO: JAMES COLEMAN/UNSPLASH

about unconditional love, you talk about grace, the person is engaged," he says. "The preacher speaks on these critical tenets of our faith; that engages them, and they say, 'OK, now I want to get to the next step.... Who is this Jesus?'"

Greene describes his own preaching style as a "hodgepodge"—a vital ingredient of which is a call-and-response format, in the African-Caribbean and African-North American tradition. It's essential, he says, for keeping people deeply engaged in the sermon.

Greene's congregation is not predominantly of African descent, and this interactive approach, he says, was initially startling and seemed overwhelming to some of the people in his pews.

"The first couple of weeks, people were going, 'What the heck is going on here?' And they're understanding, 'Wow—I'm drinking from the fire hydrant right now,'" he says. "Some people do enjoy it; they're like, 'Yeah, OK, I want to get questioned on this. Others are like, 'Please don't look at me during the sermon!'"

Greene doesn't have a script, and if he encounters moments when he's not moved to speak, he won't—because the spirit, he says, can enjoin a preacher to silence as much as to speech.

"Sometimes I'll stop. And they'll be like, 'What was that for?' I say, 'Why not? What's prayer? It's just a pause in God's glory.'"

Of course, many Anglicans love the church's emphasis on the table. Among them is Greenwood-Lee.

"One of the things I appreciate about Anglican worship is that the sermon is not the centrepiece," she says. "It's comforting to me that the sermon is not the last word but sacrament and symbol are," she says. "Ultimately we're speaking of the unspeakable, and so to have the sacrament after the sermon as the centrepiece puts our words in context.

"Preaching's important, but I don't think we should ever have so much hubris that we presume that we can capture the truth and beauty and grandeur of God with words," she says. "We can point in the direction of that with words, but ultimately we come closest to it with sacrament."

There's also a role for the church in providing a place for the sacred—and for silence.

...I don't think we should ever have so much hubris that we presume that we can capture the truth and beauty and grandeur of God with words. We can point in the direction of that with words, but ultimately we come closest to it with sacrament.

—Rev. Anna Greenwood-Lee, rector of St. Laurence Anglican Church in the diocese of Calgary and bishop-elect, since Sept. 26, of the diocese of British Columbia

"There's no shortage of noise and words in the world," she says. "I think we need to acknowledge that and I think there's probably a movement toward shorter [sermons]. People need more silence, more sacrament, more beauty; probably more music, more space, than they need to be talked at."

Like Greene, however, Greenwood-Lee also finds fault in the "one-wayness" of conventional Anglican preaching.

"One of its downfalls is the tendency to be talking at people instead of talking with people," she says. "The sermon, I think, at its best, should be a conversation starter instead of the last word."

Greenwood-Lee has attracted national news coverage for the two-minute sermons she has been posting on Twitter since last March. She began tweeting her mini-sermons after a friend suggested it, and was initially skeptical.

"I wasn't sure the wider population was interested in sermons," she says. "But I've been surprised by how many people on Twitter actually watch them."

Some of her tweeted homilies have drawn close to 10,000 views. The ones that touch on political issues, she says, tend to get the most.

The sermons, Greenwood-Lee says, are an important way for her to get the church's message to people—one she believes society still needs to hear.

"I think the church needs to rebuild its public voice and its social legitimacy," she says. "There are so many people who are just never going to walk into the door of a church—especially with COVID. But even before that, so many people had written us off as irrelevant. I think that there is a place for getting the voice of the church back out into the public sphere. And we do have something to say about the issues of our day, words of prophecy, and words of comfort and words of challenge."

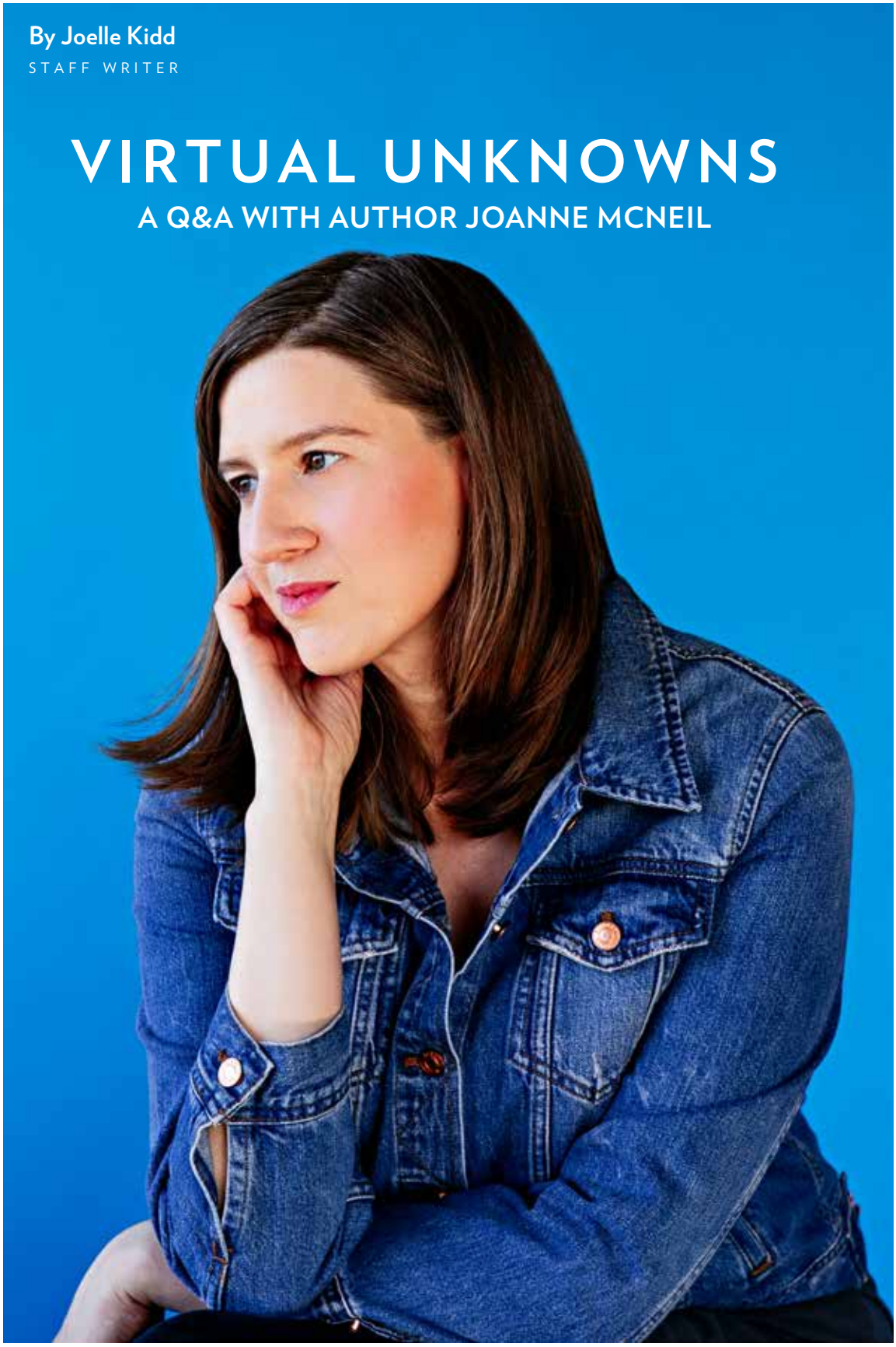
Greenwood-Lee says it's a misconception that good sermons will bring people to the church—especially if they're never heard outside it.

"There are some very fine preachers who have very small congregations!" she says. "We need to get our voice out in the public sphere.... It's our role to be a prophetic voice in the culture, and the society and the world."

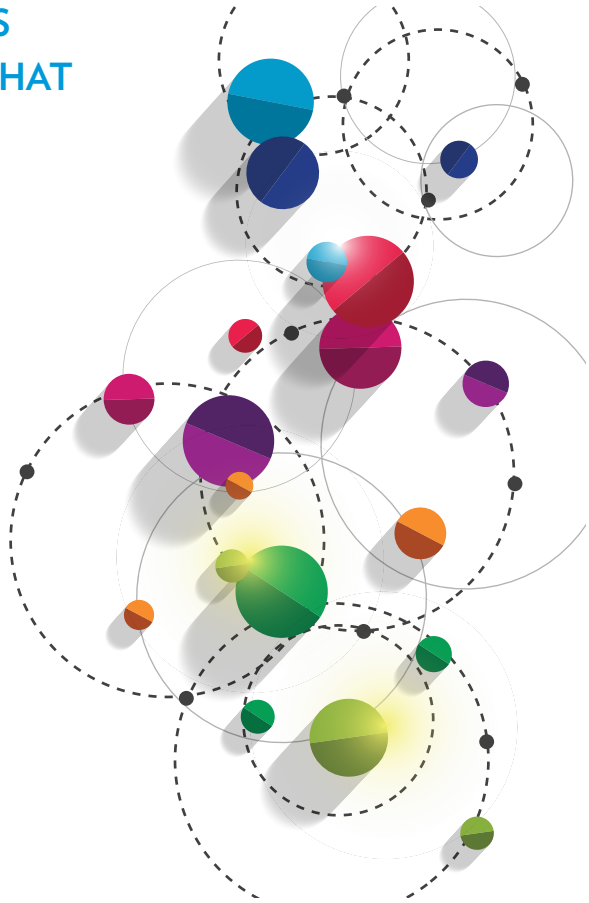
By Joelle Kidd
STAFF WRITER

VIRTUAL UNKNOWNS

A Q&A WITH AUTHOR JOANNE MCNEIL



AS THE CHURCH MOVES MANY OF ITS FUNCTIONS ONTO SOCIAL MEDIA, WHAT KINDS OF FEEDS MIGHT FEED US?



If you surveyed parishes in the Anglican Church of Canada in 2019, you would have seen a wide variety of social media involvement from church to church. Many parishes had Facebook pages, though many did not. Few would have been involved in regular livestreaming, and fewer still would have encouraged the community to gather solely in a digital arena.

But it's 2020 now, and the COVID-19 pandemic has unleashed explosive growth in digital ministry across the church. This new era, of course, is founded upon a number of long-held assumptions about how and whether to build an online community—what works, what doesn't, what pulls people in and what drives them away. How can church leaders know if their assumptions are right—and up to date?

To get a clearer picture of this complex landscape, *Epiphanies* spoke with Joanne McNeil, author of the book *Lurking: How a Person Became a User*. Part personal history, part sociological observation, *Lurking* digs into the early days of the internet and traces the trajectory of people's biggest concerns with online life: searching, safety, privacy, identity, community, anonymity and visibility.

McNeil talked with *Epiphanies* about anonymity on the internet, alternatives to platforms like Facebook, and how to create a healthy community online.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

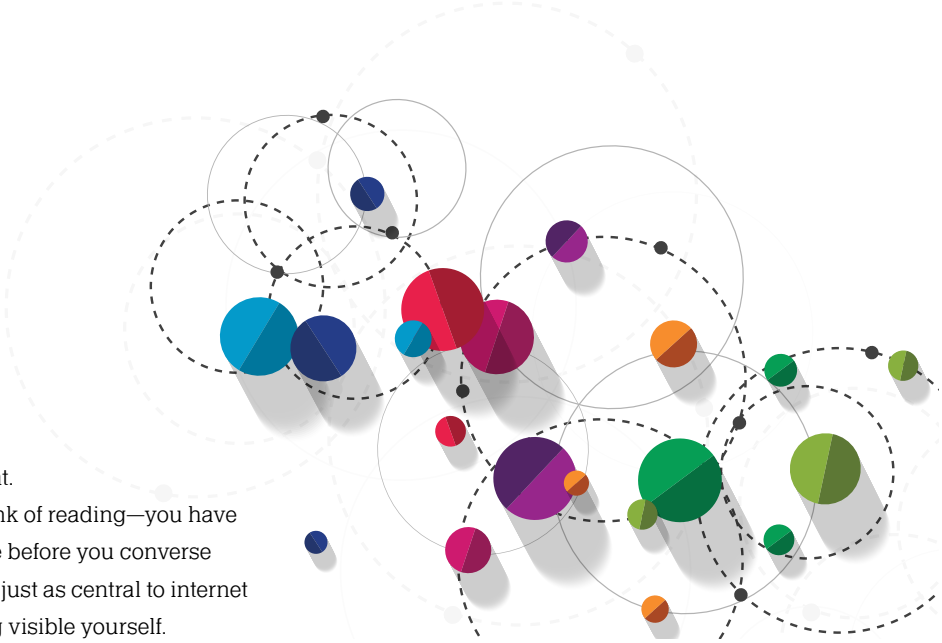
How did you get started writing about the internet and technology?

You know, it was a long process. There were a number of factors that went into it, but one of the immediate factors was that I had a blog, and I was really active on early social media. So a lot of my posting on message boards and even in chat rooms, that got me in the habit of writing. Somewhere along the line I realized, OK, these emails that I'm spending so much time on, or these posts on message boards, are not bad. So maybe I could try writing essays and things like that. And because I was already using technology to write, it made sense that I would write about technology.

I wasn't somebody who grew up thinking, *Oh, I'm going to be a writer.* I liked to write, but I just didn't think I'd have a chance to. But when I started getting attention for things I put on my blog, and how casual that was, that's where my ambition shaped.

I wanted to start by asking you about the concept of lurking, since that's the title of your book. It seems like in the book you don't label it as a positive or a negative thing—it's just a type of internet phenomenon.

I think of it as listening on the internet. Listening isn't always eavesdropping—listening can just be listening. But there is also a sense of the user's invisibility, too, where no one can see you lurking. But it's also not the same as surveilling someone, it's not the same as doing something improper—because we have words, like



surveillance or stalking, for that.

Lurking also makes me think of reading—you have this opportunity to read people before you converse with them. So I think of that as just as central to internet experience as posting or being visible yourself. Especially with all these platforms these days where people have a lot of public feeds, Twitter feeds, you can scroll down and get a sense of who someone is.

I wanted people to kind of embrace that habit. Especially since, even from the early days, people were really sweet about the concept of lurking. On early platforms, you'd see people joke about "the lurkers." They loved it because you've got an audience, you've got people who are paying attention because they care.

In the book, you talk a lot about the idea of anonymity—how things were more anonymous on the early internet, yet now on Facebook and other social media platforms, it's almost hard to be anonymous. Has that changed what it means to lurk or is it still a big part of the internet?

It has changed a little bit, [but] there are still places where you can be anonymous or semi-anonymous. I think of Reddit—basically, it's one of the largest platforms out there, but I would say that a substantial portion of their users are anonymous. Consequently, the material that's shared on Reddit tends to be a little bit more about private matters. It's not that the platform is above harassment, that's definitely not the case—I'm not saying go to Reddit and have this really warm experience. But one of the subreddits [an individual forum on Reddit] that's getting a lot of attention these days is the one about unemployment, because these days the United States' [system] is so difficult to navigate, and people don't necessarily want to share on Twitter that they're on unemployment, because it's kind of embarrassing.

And so you have all these anonymous users coming together, strategizing together, using various techniques and making sure—because they're in need and they don't know how else to, they can't get through to an operator necessarily. I mean, having spaces like that is—it's not necessarily the ideal. The ideal would be a fully functioning unemployment system. But in the absence of that, having something like this subreddit is really important and useful.

So there is a need for anonymous spaces, as well.

Yeah. Having the opportunity for communities, especially for the stuff that might be embarrassing or that you don't want to share with people like coworkers. That's what's still around, and the thing that I hope people realize who are maybe a little bit younger or newer to the internet, the online communities from the beginning had more of that element—you could show up and reinvent yourself, or, you know, just have a sense of sharing things and not changing people's image of who you are.

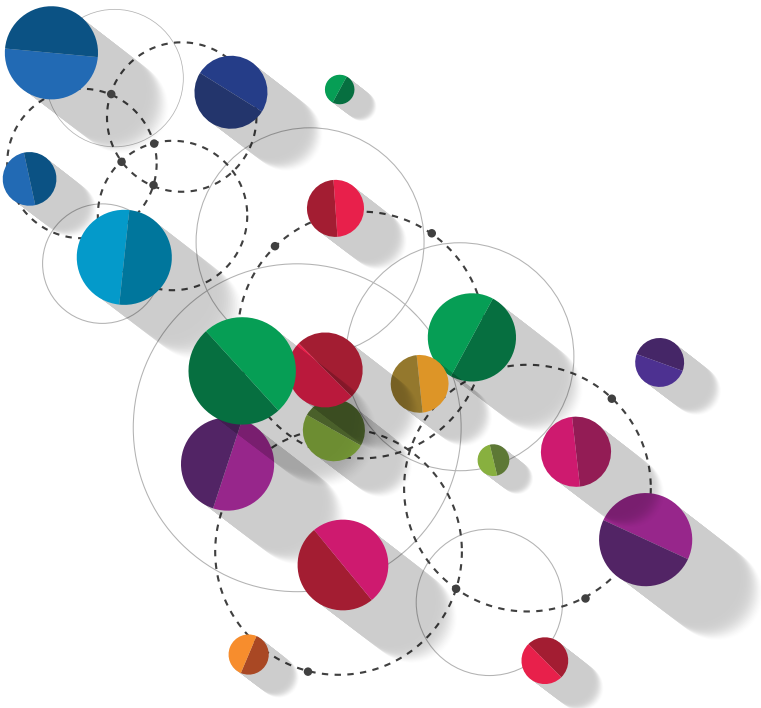
Again, there are people who did not use that [anonymity] for very friendly reasons; they did not use that for reasons like strategizing around getting help in need. But it offers a chance to experiment, and I hoped in the book that I could show the wide range of opportunities that are presented.

I think some platforms seem to take anonymity away as a way to try and curb harassment, but it seems to me with what you're saying that that doesn't necessarily help—or maybe just that there are useful things to being anonymous.

Basically around 2010 or so, Facebook would just reiterate, "We don't have harassment on our platform because people use real names." They didn't even go the extra step of creating real safe spaces, because they felt that they had this magic bullet in the real names.

Nowadays we can see that's how a lot of misinformation is spread. Certainly harassment happens there. The problem isn't necessarily that people are their real identity or not; it's a lot more complex than just how you reveal yourself online. Because certainly people are revealing themselves with their real names when they advocate conspiracies, for instance. So it's much more complicated than a matter of just anonymity or invisibility or being yourself online or having a fake identity.

That ties in with something else I wanted to ask you about. I think you mention in the book, the media coverage at the time when Facebook and other social media platforms were blowing up was sort of fawning. What changes do you think could have happened if there'd been more of a critical view?

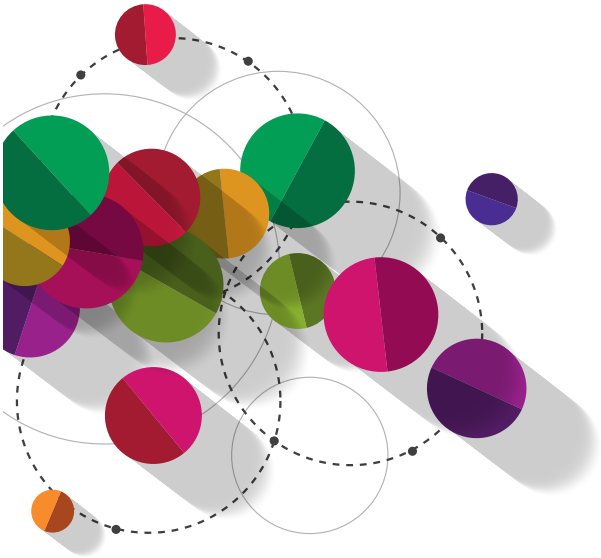


Yeah. Well, it was a little bit frustrating—if you look back at coverage just ten years ago, it would be one of two styles. There was either a lot of enthusiasm for the founders—because if you remember this moment in time, this was around the financial crisis of 2008. So you had Wall Street as the obvious bad guys. The media knew that Wall Street had created all these problems; real estate was not a safe bet at all in 2008, but here comes this new moment, a new movement out of Silicon Valley. They seem to be profitable, they seem to be politically liberal, so there was a lot of very soft coverage of the innovation happening there.

If it had just been enthusiasm for these products, that would be one thing. But hand in hand with that enthusiastic coverage was a lot of scrutinizing of the users themselves. A lot of the coverage that was not fawning over the platforms was really dismissive of the people who used them. So instead of saying, *hey, maybe it's a bad thing that Facebook is doing this thing, maybe that's a policy that is harmful to its users*—the problem would be with the users themselves. "Why are they sharing so much of their lives online?" As opposed to, "Why is Facebook targeting all these communities and encouraging [them] to move all their municipal services online so that they only way you can find out about school committee meetings is on Facebook?"

That structural critique wasn't really there. Now when you hear people say, "We have to hold onto Facebook, it's so essential to our lives," what they're usually saying is not that they love using Facebook, it's that, *if I log off, I'm not going to know when the school committees are, I'm not going to know if someone's going to plow my roads after it snows,* or something—a lot of that information is locked behind Facebook's platform.

There was something called Free Basics, which was where they offered free internet services in various countries who would consequently conflate the internet with Facebook, and members of the diaspora from those countries could only keep in touch with their families through Facebook, because Facebook was their internet. So when it got so entwined with people's everyday lives, that's where it reached the point where, *well, we can't*



just turn around and give up on it, because they've already occupied so many different spaces and functions of our lives.

That's very relevant for churches, especially now—churches can't meet in person, so they're dependent on some of these platforms to stream their services and to connect. But what do you think—is there a way to overcome that? How does one disentangle oneself from Facebook?

That is definitely one of those tricky questions, because there are so many costs and benefits—there were costs and benefits when people decided to move their schools and churches, their communities, onto Facebook, and there's a different set of costs and benefits now. Right now, you can kind of assume that most people in your community will have Facebook identities, so it's easy to kind of loop them all together. But there's also a strong possibility that everybody has an email address, which is not on Facebook, which is a decentralized way of connecting. So in certain cases you could just set up a community newsletter or mailing list. But to be realistic, sometimes people have [their email] conflated with their work life; it's not as easy, it's not as interactive, it's not as attention-grabbing as events on Facebook—I mean, everyone loves Facebook events.

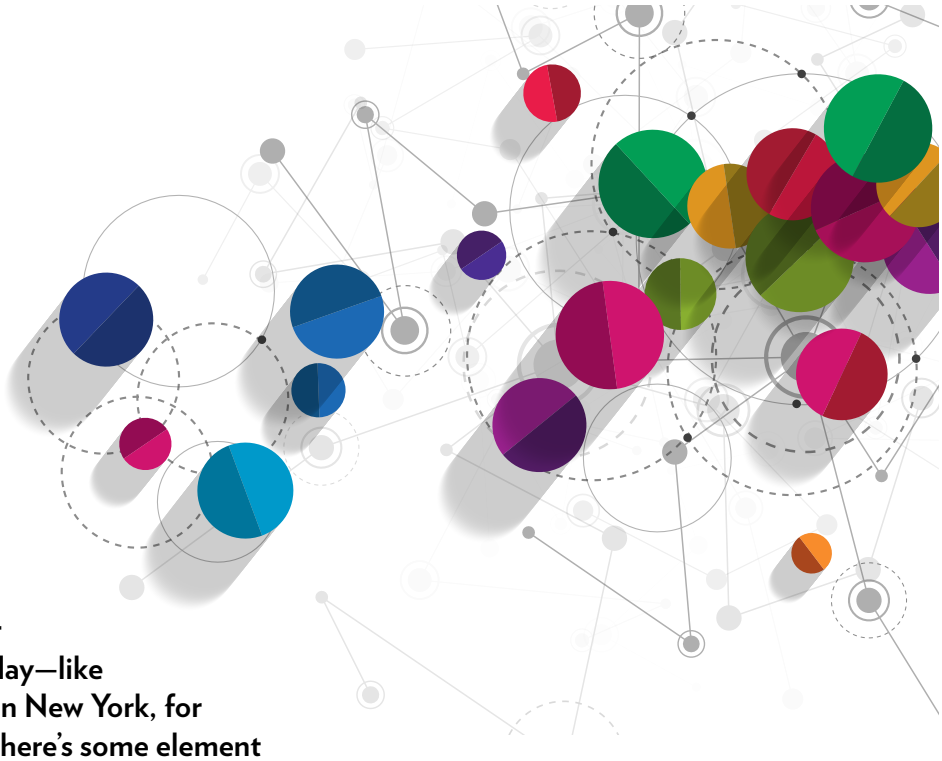
It is a really difficult question, and it matters what, ultimately, your community values. So perhaps if you could commit to the labour involved in setting up an [account] on Mastodon[1]—I mean, that sounds really high-tech at first, but when you look at it, here are the benefits: we know that we can moderate based on our values, we're not subjecting our community to the conspiracies or some of the hatred that might be manifesting on this platform, and it might be a nice respite from the spaces that Facebook kind of forces you into, or those cultures that are pretty unavoidable. You won't have a risk of your privacy exploited, or of [issues with] advertisements.

A story came out the other day that showed how there were ads [on Facebook] specifically targeting Black people in America not to vote in the last presidential election. So when we have all of those as part of the context of Facebook … the ease of convenience might actually not be worth it.

If anyone was interested in forming an online community elsewhere, the best place to look at is called Run Your Own Social. It's a website put together by Darius Kazemi, and he goes through all the contemporary costs and benefits of doing this yourself. Because the labour is certainly intensive—it's not as easy as just setting up a group on Facebook, it will take some time and you will have to be able to maintain it; it's not free, you'll have to pay hosting fees. But if you and your community have come together and figured out a way to organize your responsibilities in a way that feels sustainable, it's certainly worth looking into—and it's certainly worth having it as, *maybe this is our fallback plan. Maybe we'll stick it out on Facebook for the next year or two, but know that if there's another issue of exploitation that crosses the line, we can always regroup elsewhere.*

It's really nice to just know—even if you are still using these social networks—it's great to know that the option exists to escape them, if you really wanted to.

1 An open-source, decentralized microblogging platform (similar in look to Twitter)



Some of the communities online that you talk about in the book seem healthier than social networks today—like the ECHO community in New York, for example. Do you think there's some element that they had that we don't have now? What can make a good community online?

That's a really great question, because the thing that they had that we don't have is, they had an internet with an open future. They had an internet at a time when nobody knew what would come of it. The people that belonged to those communities were people who were excited by new things. They were excited by a new way of communicating, of entertainment—"let's see what we can make of it." There was no real sense of even what an online community was. So that was in their favour.

But everything about the functionality of ECHO is available today. [It was a] pretty ordinary way of communicating in a forum, sort of like a web forum. You just post a subject and people would respond to it—you can do that on Google groups or a lot of different kinds of forums that you don't even have to code yourself, you can just set them up online and use them.

So that element is not unusual or it's not difficult to return to. But the other elements of their community—for one, it was filtered by place, it was a local online community. Everyone was basically based in New York. So they had one thing in common, which was being in New York. Also typically they were interested in art, and then finally, they had in-person meetings regularly enough that there were enough face-to-face connections made that a real, a true sense of community formed.

With other, earlier, online spaces, because they were so anonymous, because they were without the in-person meet ups, however lovely they might have been at the time, the close-knit community did not form the same way. They did not have their real names, they couldn't send letters to one another, they couldn't stay in touch over the years. What I was saying earlier about real names—knowing each other's real-world identities does count in the depth of the connection you make with someone, the depth of the friendship. It's not as temporary if you know somebody's real identity. You're more likely to just form a longer-lasting friendship. And that they're still together today, that they're still closely in touch, you know, this is 30 years on, speaks well of just how natural the community was—but they were still smart about moderating, they were still smart about cancelling people's accounts if they caused trouble. All of that was present in the community. They did the work.

How do you feel about the role that social media plays in American politics now?

I don't know exactly how to say it. I feel very overwhelmed by that question right now. I feel very overwhelmed by it in general—because this is a very decisive year for [the U.S.]. I read as much as I can about these subjects, but I don't feel ready yet to state how much of a role technology plays. There is a lot of abuse on the level of the platforms, but then there's also a sense of, this technology is just taking off from where broadcast television and newspapers and propaganda over the years already have.

I have a lot of mixed feelings about the actual impact on the election verses the abuse—the abuses you can point out and remark on. I worry sometimes that when we blame these platforms we also give them a lot of credit. Because these technologies aren't perfect. The idea of surveillance capitalism[2] is great, but also the way that these platforms survey us is largely imperfect. A lot of the targeted ads that you receive probably have nothing to do with what you're interested in. The classic example—if you buy a mattress, for the next ten months you're going to get mattress ads, even though how many mattresses do people buy?

I feel like we're better off with just pointing to the actual issues of consent and surveillance and privacy, rather than influence, which is a little bit harder to read.

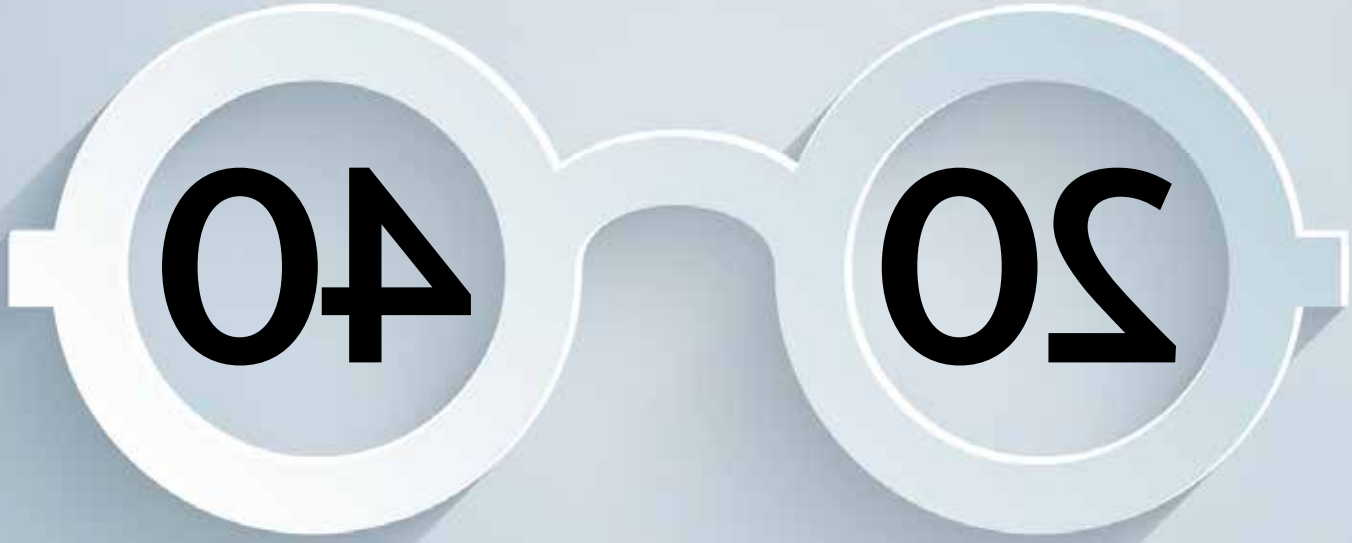
Is there anything you think is missing from conversations about the internet right now? In thinking about the way the media covered social media networks 10 years ago—what's the blind spot now?

The blind spot now, I really feel like, is the issue of the history of these platforms. The history is so recent, and it's something that I can't state enough: I'm not a historian. It's more that I've been writing about the subject for so long. But also, these platforms are new. Facebook is not even 20 years old, and when we talk about it like it's this legacy institution, as old as *The New York Times* or something, that's absolutely not the case. It's a new institution, and it's much more fragile due to its youth than it's sometimes talked about. And when you think about it as a new institution, the opportunities to regulate it, to make it more in the service of its users than in its current state, that feels less daunting. It feels more possible.

2 A term coined by Harvard professor Shoshana Zuboff to describe an economic system that collects and commodifies personal data, seen in the rise of targeted online advertising

By Matt Gardner
STAFF WRITER

HINDSIGHT IS 20-40



A COLUMN SERIES LAST JANUARY IN THE *ANGLICAN JOURNAL* INVITED YOUNG LEADERS IN THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA TO OFFER THEIR THOUGHTS ABOUT THE FUTURE. WE ASKED THEM TO REVISIT THEIR ASSUMPTIONS AFTER A TUMULTUOUS YEAR.

"Gone by 2040?" asked the *Anglican Journal* on the front page of its January 2020 edition. That provocative headline, and the issue as a whole, was a response to new data gathered by the Rev. Neil Elliot which painted a picture of ongoing church decline. In a presentation to the Council of General Synod at its November 2019 meeting, Elliot had warned that if current trends continued, there would be "no members, attenders or givers in the Anglican Church of Canada by approximately 2040."

These statistics—which Archbishop Linda Nicholls, primate of the church, called a "reality check"—prompted new concerns for the future of the church. For its January issue, the *Journal* included a column series, "20-40 vision," which provided Anglicans between the ages of 20 and 40 years old with an opportunity to envision what that future might look like.

Since the publication of this column series, the world has changed a great deal. The onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic, massive economic dislocation and resulting social turmoil have affected almost every aspect of our lives. Such seismic changes underscore the difficulty of predicting the future—and the need to continually re-examine past assumptions in light of new developments.

If a feeling of instability pervades the world today, it is one familiar to many Anglicans who have grown up with the church in an epoch of decline.

Case in point: Canon Martha Tatarnic, whose 20-40 vision column bore the title "The declining church formed me." In this piece, Tatarnic reflected on growing up in the struggling rural church of St. James Hanover, a two-point parish that could not sustain the salary of a full-time priest. She recalled her decision to enter seminary and spend much time and money studying a field where a job was by no means guaranteed.

Living in uncertain times is therefore nothing new for Tatarnic—nor, in her view, is it for the Anglican Church of Canada.

"I don't feel like I've ever grown up in or known a church that felt particularly stable," Tatarnic says. "So it's not like the rug has been pulled out from underneath me in some fundamental way. I would even say that beyond the church, too. I've grown up in a time when the environmental crisis has always felt very urgent and like a big shakeup is about to happen—and sure enough, a big shakeup is happening."

"I don't want to suggest that I haven't been stunned by the past seven months, because of course I have," she adds. "I wasn't paying attention to what scientists and I think economists have been saying for a long time about the possibility of a pandemic really shutting everything down. I wasn't expecting this. But at the same time, I haven't grown up expecting stability either in the church or in the world."

For that reason, Tatarnic believes much of the content of her article still stands. She wrote at the time that many other institutions besides the church had had to reinvent themselves—an observation that holds more true than ever as COVID-19 forces the closure of businesses such as restaurants, movie theatres and live music venues, and tanks entire sectors, like the travel and fashion industries.

Since the start of the pandemic, Tatarnic has witnessed "huge growth" in stewardship, with many people stepping up to offer financial aid to St. George's Anglican Church in St. Catharines, where she serves as rector. Outreach ministry has also grown.

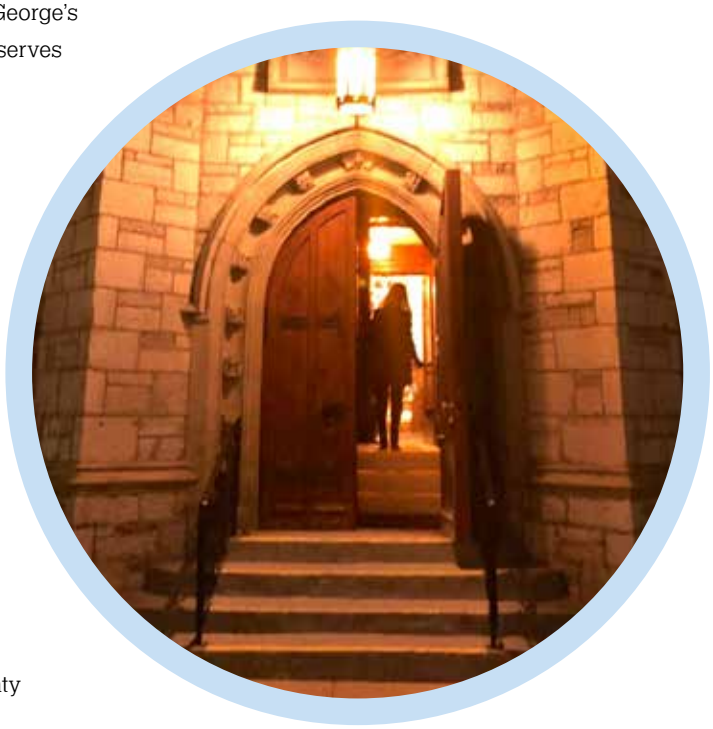
"I've seen our outreach ministries just flourish so quickly, in ways that it seems like, pre-COVID, would have taken oodles and zoodles of meetings and things to plan and figure out and finances to line up," Tatarnic says. "Instead it's just like, 'Well, we could do a Wednesday night takeout dinner,' and boom, next week it's happening."

In her column, Tatarnic wrote, "The thing about expecting God to act is that we can rarely anticipate what God's activity is going to look like." That theme has continued in much of her preaching since the start of the pandemic—suggesting that one must be willing to enter into uncertainty when looking expectantly to God.

She also points to the dangers of the Anglican Church of Canada focusing too much on its own structures.

"Those seeds of renewal that are definitely at work in our church right now, there's a really great way of suffocating those, and that is by giving in to the anxiety and the desire for self-preservation," Tatarnic says.

"The institution loves to protect the institution.... I think we're really being called to look expectantly for that promise of how God is doing a new thing, and we can trust that, and maybe let go of some of the fear, anxiety and self-preservation ruling the day."



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—Canon Martha Tatarnic, rector, St. George's Anglican Church, St. Catharines, Ont.

PHOTO: "LIVESTREAM IN ISOLATION." CONTRIBUTED

"I think the church will continue to suffer and to become weaker because God has allowed this, along with everything else, to fall upon it. I think there'll be a continual winnowing, and it'll be difficult for Christians."

—The Rev. Cole Hartin, rector, St. Luke's Anglican Church, Saint John, N.B.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

The Rev. Cole Hartin believed church statistics offered further evidence that "Anglicans in Canada are in exile," as he described it in his 20-40 vision column. Hartin compared the church's "exile in a culture we helped create" to that of the ancient Israelites, "few in number, being driven and scattered by the Lord."

Despite these discouraging signs, he saw a "purgative role" by God in the church's decline that would provide Anglicans with greater humility. But he also detected signs of growth—particularly in the North, but also in his own congregation of St. Luke's Anglican Church in Saint John, N.B. Along with the 20-40 vision columns, the *Anglican Journal* profiled St. Luke's in its January issue as an example of "green shoots" across the church: congregations and parishes that had managed to buck the trend of decline. Reflecting on his column in mid-October, Hartin says that the trends he wrote about in January had, for the most part, only accelerated.

"I think the pandemic has put more pressure on struggling congregations, and probably the ones that were in decline aren't going to recover from this—or if they are going to recover, it's going to be much weaker than before," Hartin says. "The ones that were growing I think will be knocked back a bit and have to retake some of that ground when the air clears a little more."

St. Luke's is one Anglican congregation that has been "knocked back a bit," despite the fact that Atlantic Canada is one of the least affected regions in the country by COVID-19. Even after St. Luke's began offering in-person worship services again in May, Hartin estimates that only 60-65% of congregants had returned.

"A handful of them have reached out and said they won't be coming back unless there's a vaccine," he says.

"It's been frustrating because we were steadily and increasingly growing as a congregation—financially, in terms of our Sunday attendance, and in the impact that we were making in the community—and then we've been bumped back to where we were four or five years ago."

While Hartin noticed an initial "flurry" of online activity after St. Luke's started holding worship and activities online, he finds that too has tapered off.

If a certain pessimism, now as before, pervades Hartin's thoughts, so too does his conviction that God remains present with the Anglican Church of Canada.

"I think the church will continue to suffer and to become weaker because God has allowed this, along with everything else, to fall upon it," Hartin says. "I think there'll be a continual winnowing, and it'll be difficult for Christians.

"But I think all of that has to be couched in the goodness of God, that God will not abandon us.... This has all happened already to the church in scripture, with Israel and its suffering and chastisement, and in the disciples in their scattering and denying their faith. But somehow, or maybe because of that weakness, God uses the church for his purposes and as a broken vessel to show forth his glory in the world."

PHOTO: RECTORY WINDOW / CONTRIBUTED

The crises and instability enveloping the world today, and the comparative lack of relevance of the church's own struggles, were encapsulated in the title of Canon Jeffrey Metcalfe's 20-40 vision column, "Living as footnotes to the story."

Focusing on the collapse of the natural environment, Metcalfe said that two church communities he has served are slowly falling into the ocean due to rising sea levels. The church's decline, he noted, was occurring against a backdrop of shifting rain patterns, ocean acidification and extreme weather events leading to global food and water shortages and mass extinctions. "In terms of statistically motivated survival stories," he wrote, "the Anglican Church of Canada's is neither the most interesting, nor the most important."

Ten months later, Metcalfe believes his main point—"that the institutional survival of the Anglican Church of Canada as we have known it" is "not the most important thing in our world right now"—might be a more widely held view among Anglicans.

"I'm not sure I could write that article again, because I think it's now just obvious to people," Metcalfe says. "I don't think people, if you ask them—even if you ask priests, [who] have maybe more of an economic interest in the survival of the institutional church—if you asked them, 'What do you think is the most important [issue], what were you talking today about in your home and with your colleagues?' I'm guessing the institutional survival [of the church] wouldn't be at the top of their minds."

"Whether we're dealing with the various iterations of white supremacy that are in our culture that have been more and more brought to the attention of folks who could previously be ignorant of that; whether it's climate change … all of these issues have just been overwhelming, I think, in the year of 2020."

For Metcalfe, national church governance structures and attendance statistics—while important—are "significantly less interesting and important than … finding a new way as Anglican Christians of belonging in this place in the landscapes that we're in," which he says will require a large dose of humility from Anglicans.

"In terms of statistically motivated survival stories, the Anglican Church of Canada's is neither the most interesting, nor the most important."

—Canon Jeffrey Metcalfe, canon theologian for the diocese of Quebec

PHOTO: ANDREY YURLOV / SHUTTERSTOCK

"Seeing the church be more involved in Indigenous issues makes me look at the church in more of a comforting light, as if I feel like I'd be supported by them as an individual."

—Shilo Clark, youth member of the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples

The relationship of the Anglican Church of Canada to Indigenous peoples is one that has required a large dose of humility in recent decades, as the church recognized its role in the history of colonialism and the residential school system. In perhaps the most prominent recent example, former primate Fred Hiltz offered an apology at General Synod 2019 on behalf of the church for spiritual harm caused to Indigenous peoples.

In his 20-40 vision column, "God truly works in mysterious ways," Shilo Clark noted that as a young Indigenous Anglican, the passing of legislation at that same General Synod for a self-determining Indigenous church was a "huge deal" for him. By showing that the traditions taken from Indigenous people were "no longer seen as evil" and "have a place in worship," this adaptation by the church gave him "the fuel to go forward and help educate my young peers—and in a world where Indigenous folks face racism in their lives, I hope the church can now feel like a safe place to belong to."

Shortly after the publication of Clark's column, the opposition of Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs to the construction of the Coastal GasLink pipeline on their traditional territory exploded into solidarity rallies and blockades across Canada. Leaders of the Anglican Church of Canada, including Primate Linda Nicholls and National Indigenous Archbishop Mark MacDonald, signed public statements of support of the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs.

Clark says this expression of "standing in solidarity with Wet'suwet'en" showed progress in terms of the church being a safe place for Indigenous people. He said that his grandmother is the only Indigenous member of her Anglican congregation, the vast majority of whom are white.

"My grandma would always go to church and I would kind of go with her, but it wasn't anything that I really was steadfast to.... It was just uncomfortable for the longest time," Clark says.

"Seeing the church be more involved in Indigenous issues makes me look at the church in more of a comforting light, as if I feel like I'd be supported by them as an individual—whereas before I didn't really feel that, because I didn't see any representation or necessarily any support for Indigenous folks, at that time anyhow."

Like other Anglican parishes across the country, the congregation that Clark and his grandmother attend has been hit hard by COVID-19. Most members are over 50 and therefore at higher risk.

"My grandma's not going to church," Clark says. "She's not gathering with the congregation because of COVID. She's very, very afraid to pretty much leave her house. That has created a huge effect on church numbers in terms of folks that are attending physically. But I have seen a rise in folks that are attending virtually."

Clark offered the example of a young friend who had not attended church in years, but recently began attending online services at his church—a development he says gives him hope.

In his column, Clark wrote, "Many times God has been with me, and due to the bleak nature of the times through which I was living, I failed to see him." He suggests that many others who are now enduring such trying times in the era of COVID-19 may be looking for a boost of faith.

"With the bleak times that we are going through right now, I feel like a lot more people, even more so than when I wrote that column, are in need of guidance, either from friends or family or the church," he says.

At the end of his column on church decline, Clark quoted Matthew 18:20, in which Jesus says: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in the midst of them." In the midst of a pandemic where Anglicans are unable to gather physically for worship, Clark describes this passage as even more relevant now.

"I think it holds a lot more weight now than it did when I wrote the column," he says.

> **For too long, both Catholic and Protestant churches were filled with nominalist Christians for whom church has been a mere social club to exercise power, influence and money, rather than a school by which one is saved—that is, reshaped and reformed by God.**
>
> *— The Rev. Leigh Silcox*

In his own 20-40 vision column "Looking towards God's own pruning," the Rev. Leigh Silcox challenged readers by suggesting that the decline of the Anglican Church of Canada may be a good thing, despite the accompanying pain.

"For too long," Silcox wrote, "both Catholic and Protestant churches were filled with nominalist Christians for whom church has been a mere social club to exercise power, influence and money, rather than a school by which one is saved—that is, reshaped and reformed by God."

He described church decline as a kind of "pruning" that gave renewed humility to those called to persevere in leadership, worship and service. Pragmatic questions such as whether or not to continue with full-time priests, whether to rent facilities or expand house churches, and so on are "irrelevant," he wrote, "if we do not first commit to remain where we are, despite the heartbreak of decline."

Since writing that column, the experience of 2020 made two things clear to Silcox: "Anglicanism obviously is still in decline" and "we're going to have to adapt far more quickly" to new realities.

Among these new realities, he says, is that likely for at least the next "couple of years, until we have a vaccine, numbers are going to be low, because the majority of our people in every congregation are actually in the vulnerable category just due to age."

Other members of congregations have family members in their households that may fall into the vulnerable category. Still more parishioners are health-care workers who may balk at the prospect of contracting the virus and inadvertently infecting their patients.

For that reason, Silcox says, the Anglican Church of Canada will have to adapt rapidly in terms of expanding worship and ministry online. That shift will in turn

lead to questions of logistics, of how the church will resource new ministries, of whether it might need to train parishioners in use of technology—and even to the meaning of Anglicanism itself.

"What we've been doing in the past in terms of how we've structured ourselves around a physical building, around a physical geographic location—that was on the way out anyway, simply for the matter of fact that people had cars and could travel much further distances, and would," Silcox says.

"Now that question is present again in some new ways, and so it's pushing us to ask the question again, but in a brand-new, accelerated context: What is Anglicanism? Who are we? How do we see ourselves as a church being able to do ministry?"

For some time, Silcox says, the Anglican Church of Canada has been "extremely self-focused, extremely inward-looking," which now puts it at a disadvantage compared to other churches that have been more "outwardly" focused.

"Most people were not just rolling through the doors of a church because it existed," he adds. "We had trouble adapting to a model where that was no longer particularly relevant or effective. So now where people can't even really walk into the doors of a church, how are we going to reach people?"

The answer to these questions, Silcox adds, could involve everything from changing the skill sets required by clergy, who will need to do more of their ministry online, to "a radical reorientation of our entire diocesan structure, and thereby what a parish is, what it means to be a parish, what it means to be a disciple of Christ, and what it means to actually minister to a community."

"Most people were not just rolling through the doors of a church because it existed. We had trouble adapting to a model where that was no longer particularly relevant or effective. So now where people can't even really walk into the doors of a church, how are we going to reach people?

— The Rev. Leigh Silcox

> **[Would the church] pour [new wine] into the old wineskins and lose everything when those wineskins burst? Or will we find new wineskins to pour the new wine into?**
>
> *— The Rev. Alison Hari-Singh*

PHOTO: CMMPHOTO/SHUTTERSTOCK

"New wineskins for new wine" was the call put forward by the Rev. Alison Hari-Singh in her 20-40 vision column, in which she outlined the changes wrought by theological shifts, new developments in scientific knowledge, and the damage to church reputations caused by sexual abuse scandals and the residential school system.

These new realities, she wrote, compelled the Anglican Church of Canada to "reimagine the entire edifice of our faith" and to "embrace a radical theology of risk, unhindered by suspicion and fear of the unknown." Faced with "new wine," Hari-Singh asked, would the church "pour it into the old wineskins and lose everything when those wineskins burst? Or will we find new wineskins to pour the new wine into?"

Reflecting on her column, Hari-Singh notes that Anglicans were shaken late last year by statistics that pointed to the possible disappearance of the church by 2040. In the wake of the pandemic, she says, "many are now wondering whether 2040 has become the present moment. Will the Anglican Church survive the pandemic and thrive beyond it?"

Hari-Singh suggests that COVID-19 is offering Anglicans the chance for "taste-tests" of the "new wine"—that is, new ways of following in the Way of Jesus. She offers three examples of such "taste-tests."

One is increased movement outdoors, which Hari-Singh says can provide spiritual discipline that "helps us tap into the calm of God's presence as we navigate the present crisis." Another is embracing solitude, helping Anglicans cultivate the disciplines of contemplative prayer, *lectio divina*, journaling and personal reflection. "This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to deepen our love of God with all our heart, soul and mind," Hari-

Singh says. “We need not wither on the vine.”

A third “taste-test,” she says, is finding the sacred in the ordinary. COVID-19 has forced Christians out of their churches and sacred spaces, obliging many to live without the sacraments or singing hymns—but also illustrating how “our whole lives are filled with God’s goodness, not just those sacred moments and places when God’s presence seems obviously palpable.”

These “taste-tests” in turn point to certain “new wineskins,” Hari-Singh says. These include the idea that “smaller is better”—that Anglicans can escape the “megachurch rat race” and develop more tight-knit communities that are genuinely able to care for one another. They include the need for a “theology of technology,” with the Anglican Church of Canada’s future possibly depending on its capacity to adapt theologically to technology.

Finally, she says, these new “wineskins” could include the retrieval of traditional forms of pastoral care. While clergy have always been present in people’s lives, such moments may become “more personal and more ordinary” in the future.

“We will visit parishioners in their homes, sharing a physically distanced Holy Communion,” Hari-Singh says. “We will baptize children with only the parents present. We will be more visible in our neighbourhoods where we live and where we shop. Neighbourhood ministry and priestly presence will transform the church, mobilizing us in new ways that allow us to see ourselves as church beyond the walls of our buildings.”

“I am cautiously hopeful,” she adds. “Perhaps in the middle of this struggle, something amazing might actually be happening.”

■ ■ ■

“We will be more visible in our neighbourhoods where we live and where we shop. Neighbourhood ministry and priestly presence will transform the church, mobilizing us in new ways that allow us to see ourselves as church beyond the walls of our building.”

— The Rev. Alison Hari-Singh

PHOTO: ALONAFOTO/SHUTTERSTOCK

> **We have paid inadequate regard for the vulnerable, the elderly and the underprivileged as further intensified by imposed and prolonged lockdowns.**
>
> *— The Rev. Orvin Lao*

PHOTO: SOLARISIS/SHUTTERSTOCK

The Rev. Orvin Lao shared many of the interpretations of his colleagues on church decline in his 20-40 vision column, "Recapturing our lost virtues—mission and evangelism."

Like Silcox, he described the cultural decline of the Anglican Church of Canada as "pruning" work of God to discipline and refine the church. Like Hartin, he described Anglicans as "exiles" in the world, who must embrace that identity as they labour to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

For Lao, the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic had laid bare the reality that existed in many structures of Western society beneath the gleaming façade.

Eight months of the "new normal," he says, have revealed—or confirmed—that "we have paid inadequate regard for the vulnerable, the elderly and the underprivileged, [which is] further intensified by imposed and prolonged lockdowns."

As a lockdown initially thought to last weeks stretched on indefinitely, Lao says, many gained a new appreciation for what he described as "our most vital need … our fundamental need to be together, not just relationally but spatially and temporally: to gather in our flesh and bones, to be in place and inhabit space, warmed by others' presence, and to feel the vector of time as we spend it with others through seasons, holidays and liturgies."

Despite the challenges faced by the church and

society, Lao says, God's dominion remains over the world so long as the Holy Spirit dwells within those who follow Jesus Christ.

"The embers of the Church seem to glow dimmer, but she can again be stoked ablaze by heavenly winds," he says. "In whatever crisis the church finds herself, her call remains to be faithful to God, see to her mission, look to Him who provides for and abides with her, and point to Him from whom our hope of rescue and renovation for an ill and shattered world is realised."

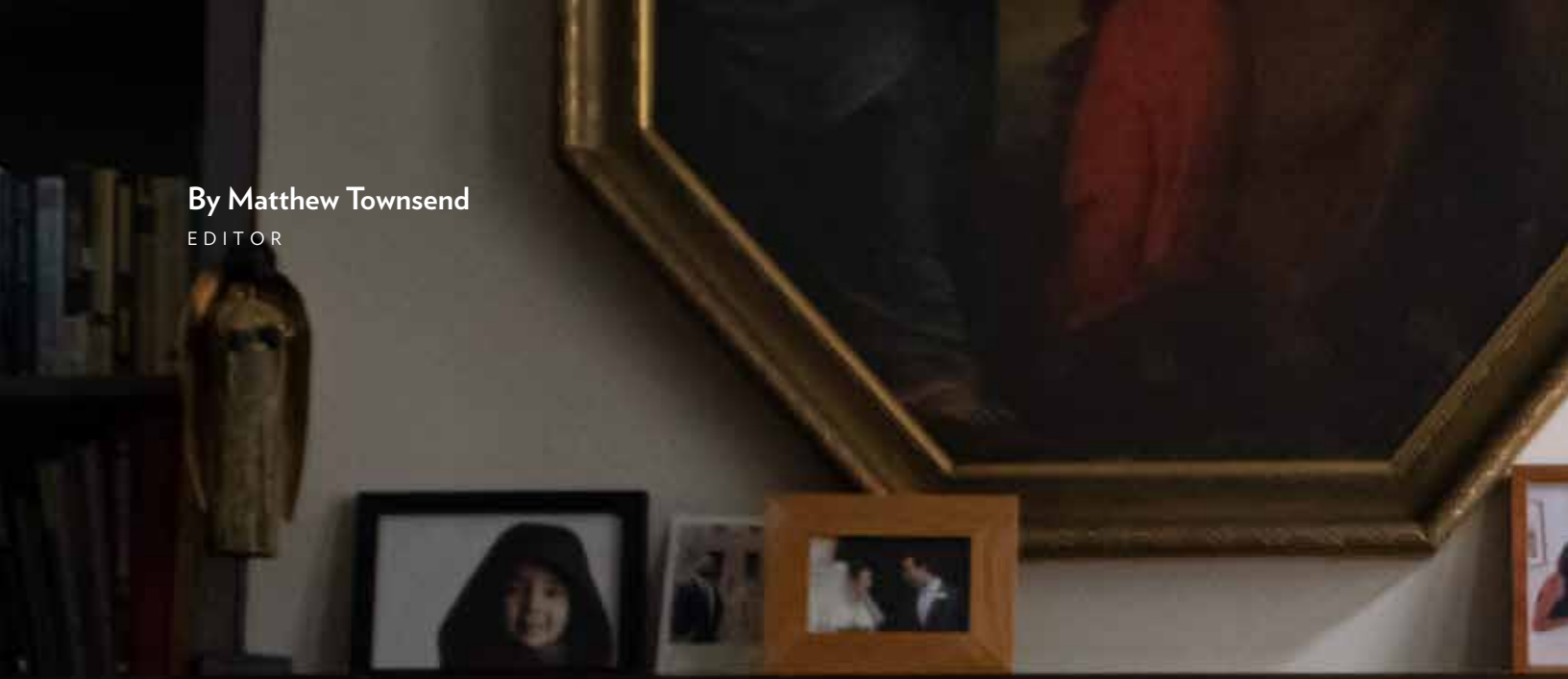
Lao believes that that call rings true especially in the present time—one characterized by "digitised disembodiment" and social displacement.

"Perhaps we are witnessing the swelling of a cultural and religious upheaval in liberal democratic societies, further aggravated by the pandemic, partisan politics, the frenzied circus of social media and the balkanising of civil discourse," he says. "And it is perhaps in every worldly upheaval that religious revivals may erupt.

"While our sovereign God permits time and place in this world for Western Anglicanism to persist, His will and command are for us in the Anglican Church to uphold and obey. We march ahead to twenty years, working and obeying Him who is our gracious and empowering Lord. Who knows, Jesus may entrust to us much longer than twenty years and so much more. Let us pray so. And let us be faithful with the little that we have and not be sparing with the little we have." ■

> **The embers of the Church seem to glow dimmer, but she can again be stoked ablaze by heavenly winds.**
>
> *— The Rev. Orvin Lao:*

PHOTO: NANCY BAUER/SHUTTERSTOCK



By Matthew Townsend
EDITOR

‘THE COLONIZING INSTINCT IS ALL OVER US’

Is colonialism in the past? The Rev. Graham Singh, priest at St. Jax in Montreal and executive director of the Trinity Centres Foundation—which helps “transform church properties for community impact”—doesn’t seem convinced. In this podcast conversation, Matthew Townsend, editor of the *Anglican Journal* and *Epiphanies*, talks with Singh about decolonization, the church and changes that may yoke those subjects together. This conversation has been edited for brevity and clarity.

LISTEN to podcast here

PHOTO: ESTEBAN CUEVAS


God is Back
HOLY BIBLE

Well, good morning, Graham. It's wonderful to talk with you. How are things in Montreal?

Good morning, Matthew. Well, we're trying to be very glum and sober about it all, but actually quietly, God is on the move. And there are many good things happening.

COVID is extremely difficult. You know, funerals—tiny funerals—and weddings happening, and gatherings changed forever. But at the same time, boy, there's some light at the end of the tunnel. I had two meetings last night, with two different parishes, and everybody was in the comfort of their own homes, you know, having a gin and tonic. And I realized there are some good things coming out of this, as hard as it is.

That does sound fundamentally Anglican. At home with the gin and tonic.

Yeah, you can definitely tell which churches we were talking to from that.

So we're talking today about a number of subjects, and central among them is colonialism. And you know when many people in the church think of Graham Singh, they think of St. Jax, they think of Trinity Centres, they think of the property questions that loom large within the church. But they may not think of you, at least initially, around the subject of colonialism. And so I was quite interested to find that you actually wrote your master's dissertation, at the London School of Economics, on the subject of colonialism. Say more about that.

Deep at the heart of Canadian Anglicanism, there's a heck of a lot of conversation around colonialism. Take your very traditional Jamaican church verger who is steeped in 16th-century English traditions, but grew up in the Caribbean, and you realize, "Oh, this is a colonial story. How does that happen?" Then you see people with names like "Graham Singh" and you realize, "OK, hold on. There's some Canadian and colonialism mixed into there! How did this happen?"

My mother's family left England; they were a Scottish family that lived in England, they left after the second World War and came to Canada. And then on my father's side they left India in the mid 1800s through the system of indentured labour, which was a response to the abolition of slavery in 1838. And they went to the Caribbean. If you see somebody with an Indian-looking name, you may find that they are from the Indian subcontinent—or you might find they're three or four generations from South Africa, East Africa or the Caribbean. And of course, that's the Indian diaspora. So that's how our family came to be. My parents met in Canada, both as medics, but there's a colonial story in my bones, to put it that way.

And so when I went to England to study, there was a fascination about what happened. My grandfather had actually been the minister of justice in my father's country of British Guiana, and he died before I was born. So there was a family fascination to investigate this ancestor of mine and something in my bones that said this is an important story for today.

How would you define decolonization in the context of the church?

Decolonization commonly refers to the European colonization of the New World. The Commonwealth, the different French overseas territories [are examples]. Each European nation had its own version of this kind of colonialism, starting from around 500 years ago. Moving out with ships, beginning to trade, beginning with military forces in cases like India, taking over through trade agreements in cases like Africa, a military extraction of slaves. This is the colonization we think of very often.

There are other forms of colonization, far more ancient forms. Through biblical times we see the different "-ites"—the Jebusites and Hittites, and they're all moving around, and often this is a colonizing move. So colonialism is something that's existed for a long time, but often we think about European colonization. We think of people like Jinnah and Nehru in India, decolonizing India, we think of the American Revolution, and we think

PHOTO: COURTESY OF ST. JAX

"Decolonizing in the case of the church would look like understanding what things were like before we came."

of the Caribbean. South Africa, East Africa, we think of the end of the British concept of slavery, the beginning of indentured labor. That's how all those Indians got over from the Indian subcontinent, and we look at these processes.

Let's talk about British [decolonization] for a minute, because it has a huge relationship to Canada. The general pattern was, you're a bright young person from that country. You train well, you probably came from a good family. And then you go to England and you become, generally, a lawyer. That was the best training, and then you went back to your country and you negotiated how the colonizing entity was going to leave. And that negotiation usually recognized what the colonizing entity—let's call it the British Empire—left in place. So in the case of India, we can talk about railroads and the English language and systems of accounting, systems of trade. And in many ways, there are many good aspects of that. But there's also recognition—the good, the bad and the ugly of what's been left over.

So decolonizing in the case of the church would look like understanding what things were like before we came. What did we contribute? So immediately in Canada, we have the First Nations narrative; you have to be very serious about that. Then, what did

we give? Well, we gave something of who Christ is. We're very happy about that. We also gave all kinds of legal and political assumptions around Anglicanism, for instance, and we can look at Methodism and Presbyterianism and Catholicism, their own political accoutrements.

So if we were to decolonize, we're then saying, "What are we happy about what we've left? What do we regret having left? And how do we leave that with the people who are there—who are, in a sense, local now?"

This is the question for the church. If we were to extract the parts of what it meant to be the colonial church that we're not happy about, what would it mean to step back?

And in a biblical sense, what would it mean to prune something that we might recognize is not being fruitful, such that the remaining branch could be more fruitful? So decolonization is a broad term used in many ways, but I think those are some of the ways in which you might apply it to the church today.

As you mentioned, we often address colonialism at the *Anglican Journal*, in the Anglican Church of Canada, in Canada itself. This is a topic that we come back to again and again around Indigenous issues in Canada, in the Indigenous church, but more broadly, as what it means to be Canada as a place that was started as a colonial interest. One of the things that I find any time we publish anything that touches on colonialism—and it can be a soft touch on colonialism—we tend to receive feedback, often criticism that suggests that, you know, "Colonialism, colonization, that's in the past." Quite recently we had a comment on the *Journal* website that pointed out, you know, "My ancestors came to Canada. This was many generations ago, anyway. I don't have anything to do with this." So, the comment said that we might be dwelling in the past. So let's start with—this is the $20,000 question—is colonialism over? Is colonialism in the past?

Well, I would say unequivocally no. Not only is it not in the past—it's in our bones. We're still doing it. We're still instigating colonialism all over the place. In some ways you could say this is the natural outcome of culture.

When we come to love part of our culture, we want to see it exported and to see it dominate. In the Bible these are known as powers and principalities, created things that come to control us. We're meant to shed them and find ourselves only in Christ, but of course we colonize the church all the time with our ideas and our assumptions. And often the reforming instinct in the church is to say, "Let's get back to who Jesus really was." And then we fight about what we meant by that. So colonialism, and the colonizing instinct, is all over us.

And it's hard to talk about, you know. If you say to somebody—and I get this all the time—somebody says, "Oh your name is Singh. So clearly you're Sikh." Then I think, "Hold on, you know, I'm a priest in an Anglican church. So how do you think I'm a Sikh?" And I want to say, "Well, you're maybe stepping a little bit too close into my identity, more than I might have invited you." I'm not very sensitive about that at all, but others might say to somebody, "Well, where'd you come from in China?" And they're actually Vietnamese. And they kind of want to say to you, "Know what? I didn't really open that level of conversation with you. I'm a Canadian and I'll [choose to] tell you about my family background if it's relevant." What I mean by that is we all come from these different places, but we don't always like to talk about it.

And when I go back to that same Jamaican verger who's very proud to be an Anglican and go through those old English traditions, there is a wonderful part of that. That's a real part of that person's culture, but we can't forget that a Black Jamaican [historically, likely] ended up in Jamaica through slavery, for the most part, where they were stripped of the religions that they came from; stripped of their names; they were forcibly converted to Christianity; given Christian names, Christian culture, Christian dancing, Christian music. And this now becomes the Jamaican Anglican culture. So yes, it's a proud part of that person's identity. And yes, it came into existence through colonial strife. So how do we end it? Well, we can make peace with it and say, "That's OK. That happened. And now we're

PHOTO: COURTESY OF RED BULL MUSIC AND ST. JAX

"For those of us who come from other minority racial cultures, we have a lot to learn from Black Lives Matter."

going to move on."

But it's still there. And this is a time when Black Lives Matter is a very specific story about the Black journey. And for those of us who come from other minority racial cultures, we have a lot to learn from Black Lives Matter. And the big answer, Matthew, I believe, is that the story of what happened is important, relevant and must not be swept under the rug.

As you say, it's not just something that's in our bones, but it is something happening now. And one of the things I appreciate in your dissertation is that we tend to think of colonialism as something that wears a tri-corner hat and a puffy shirt. But we get to see the colonialism of John F. Kennedy in the '60s, as he's relating to this British colony that is on the way to becoming an independent nation, that is on the path to decolonization. So that kind of colonialism wears a necktie and is a part of our modern story. So how do you see colonialism present now in Canada in the 21st century? Do you see it as something that is perhaps more familiar to us—that's not really archaic?

We have some wars going on around us. To start, we have a Sino-American trade war going on right now. We have a whole new discussion around oil and energy security. These are largely led by our friends from the United States, and we see the echoes of them with the idea of replacing political or economic partnerships with pure, pure economic protectionism, which has its own colonial impact—"I'll trade with you, but we're going to protect our own things first. And if you want to play ball by those rules, we will play ball with you."

And today, looking at what's going on with those aspects, now we have all kinds of justice to [consider]—you know, who gets to see the vaccines first? How do we talk about language and culture? During this time, what's going to happen with the American election? And of course I mentioned it before—I mentioned it probably several times on this podcast, Matthew—Black Lives Matter is a movement that's meant to shake us to the bones, where our initial understanding of what this means probably needs to be laid down. And we need to think about it again and again and again. How many Black bishops do we have in the Anglican Church or Canada? Of the First Nations bishops that we have, how many of them are the core leadership of the church? And how many are kind of ostracized as conservatives? You know, what is our presence in the senior leadership of the church?

If we go to there, these are issues that we're facing every single day.

You recently published a few op-eds on the subject of the church in this moment, in the COVID moment, as well as the Black Lives Matter moment. You had a piece in the *Montreal Gazette* and a similar version in *Municipal World*, albeit with a pointier headline, "Hand over Canada's white churches to the charities who need them." So where did this come from, and why do you think this is a racial issue? Because you mentioned white churches and white people in this op-ed.

I'm very proud to be published twice in *Municipal World*. How often as church leaders do we get a good hearing amongst Canadian urbanists?

The reason that I wrote about this is the original colonial problem.

We know who came here. We had no Chinese immigrants to Canada 150 years ago. So it makes sense that no Chinese churches or religious organizations got land at that time. The groups that came over at that time were English, Scottish, French, Irish, etc. So it's normal that they were given land as part of the whole story of building these cities. There is an immediate First Nations problem with what I just said, and that has to be dealt with separately; I have addressed it in some ways.

What then comes up, though is, what happens next? One hundred and fifty years ago these enormously valuable lands were given. There was no real contract around saying, "OK, guys, we understand you're here first [so you get this land for churches]. But over the next 150 years, Canada is probably going to change. And even though we give you these lands now, we want to make sure that you share them in the future."

That never happened, right? But now what's happening is we're not using those lands for the same purposes of culture, community, perhaps even religion and faith. We're selling them, and we're selling them not to redistribute that wealth for other organizations and activities that might need it, but we're selling the buildings to prop up the old ways that we know aren't working, for heaven's sake! We know that these models of church that we live under haven't been working since World War II—every one of our theological colleges, all of our scholarly literature talks about how the models of church we're using are not working. Yet we're selling these precious capital assets that we were given in a colonial settlement to keep funding the old ways!

That's my objection, and that's why, at the time, if we said, "Look, we could sell a church building for $10 million. We'll give $5 million to local charities and we'll give $5 million to prop up the rest of what we need to do as the church"—by the way, that's never the proportion. Usually it's $9 million goes to

PHOTO: COURTESY OF ST. JAX

"We know that these models of church that we live under haven't been working since World War II."

fund some black hole in church books somewhere, and a few hundred thousand goes to support the local charities. Well, a lot of those local charities, especially in urban areas, would say, "We don't want the money, we want that space. That building and that location is where we need to do our work from. Don't sell it, we need to use it. By the way, we can't run it ourselves. And we as charities don't really want to run your weird old buildings. But we'd really like *you* to run them well, so we can keep using them and maybe we should pay more fairly."

So it's really not so much where the land came from in the first place, but the divestment. The sale of the assets. And I believe, Matthew, that the average Anglican, the average Canadian is looking at us, the way we're selling church buildings, and they're asking, "What's going on? Is this right, what's happening?"

One of the things you're saying in the piece, and I quote here—"No recently deconsecrated church that I know of has been wholly dedicated to work amongst First Nations peoples. What few Black-majority

churches we have are closing at a far faster rate than white ones. This is not news. But what is news is the church's engagement with Black Lives Matter on the one hand, while on the other hand quietly continuing to divest of these assets, to the benefit of propping up the old colonial ways. And this, when Canada's non-religious charities are in such desperate need"—that really hit home to me. And I think of the criticism that we tend to hear when these kinds of statements are made—and that was a very bold headline—that, you know, "You are racializing this issue. Why are you dragging race into this?" Well, as you've sort of laid out in the article, and in what you just said, race is very much a part of this landscape already. The church has allowed itself to stay quiet while it benefits from a status quo—for example, in this case, rising urban land costs which have displaced many people. The church has been able to sit and wait in the hopes of cashing in on very lucrative properties, with the negative impacts of that affecting predominantly people of color.

If you want to test this out, think about your typical Canadian town where you have your beautiful big, stone, "tall-steeple-by-the-river church" that's, you know, the kind of "proper Anglican" church, right?

And then you might have your outlying, slightly suburban church, maybe 1950s-, 1960s-built "beaten-with-the-ugly-stick-of-church" kind of building with, perhaps, a more ethnic community. Perhaps they're a little bit more open to sharing their building. The building itself is not worth very much; the land isn't worth all that much.

And the socio-economic background of the congregation is such that the operating expense of the church may have failed earlier. Well that building, now, it's quietly sold. A condo tower goes up, of some modest variety. A few hundred thousand or a few million dollars are put back in.

In a sense, some of those have gone quietly.

What we're left with now: What do we do with the big old one by the river? Which we thought, "Well, that one will never die. There'll always be such-and-such family, plus such-and-such family will always leave their fortunes to this church."

What happens when the old granny dies and the grandson says, "Like hell is another dime of my family's fortune going to go down the drains of those awful churches"? And we've been told that. We were told that, Matthew, on a call we organized with bishops around Canada [with] philanthropic foundations who lead all of the major family foundations in Canada. They explained very clearly to the bishops on a call that we ran for Trinity Centres Foundation that granting foundations are sick and tired of the way the churches are managing, effectively, an impact investment portfolio that their families funded. This is evidenced by the plaques on the front pews, you know, the brass ones that explain this wing of the building was built by such-and-such industrial family.

Well, those families are pissed off. They haven't been in the church in ages. They feel no remaining compulsion to have their children baptized. They're out. And of course these grand old buildings were never funded by, you know, the ordinary churchgoer; they were always funded by the ordinary churchgoer plus those of extraordinary means. And those who have extraordinary means checked out a long time ago, and they're not going to come back until we significantly mend our ways. And they are dealing with justice issues in their enterprises and their companies and they're wondering, "Why is the church so slow on this?"

And I'll say another thing. We have spent a huge amount of time on two issues in the Anglican Church. One is the issue of human sexuality, and the other is our response to residential schools. On our response to human sexuality, I think there's a fairly good presence now, where many churches are known as being particularly queer inclusive, LGBTQ+ friendly. There are all kinds of ways in which this is expressed in Anglican churches. I think there's a reasonable position of integrity to say, "We spent time on this, and here's the presence. Now we're trying our best." (What we've not seen—we haven't seen tens of thousands of people who appreciate that position come back to the church, right? We haven't seen a *massive* uplift.)

PHOTO: CAROLINE THIBEAULT

St. Jax has received coverage from the *Anglican Journal* for its modernizations, including rental of its space for a circus.

But when it comes to First Nations issues? I really mean it! I mean, where is the First Nation centre that comes out of some deconsecrated church? Or, for heaven's sake, why would it need to be deconsecrated? Why doesn't every diocese in Canada hand over one of its buildings, or a certain proportion of its wealth, to actually engaging in physical places where our First Nations sisters and brothers can dwell within our cities? We haven't seen it, and I would say, in that sense, there's a lack of integrity in what we've been talking about versus what we've been doing.

I certainly read that in your piece. There's, I think, a call-out to that sort of hypocrisy. Of saying we support something.

I love how I've said "lack of integrity" and you've turned that to "hypocrisy," and you're right, that's where I'm going. I didn't quite use that phrase—I guess "hypocrisy" is actually aimed at one particular person, which is not my intention. But I think as an organization, we have to own some hypocrisy in this area. Let me say this, you cannot be, you know, a capitalism-bashing Anglican leader and say, "Well, why did the rich hoard all this money, you know,

these terrible capitalists?" when we as the church are far worse. We're hoarding as the church in Canada. We are hoarding over $30 billion worth of land, buildings [and cash].

And yet we're lamenting that we have no more money left. We don't know where to go, for heaven's sake. If God were to speak to us and say, "For heaven's sake, my children, you have everything you need to do everything that you feel called to do by me, but you need to share what I've given with you properly"—you know, we're not hearing that call.

I'm preaching this Sunday on reformation. Reformation—being reformed into the people that God wants us to be. But also understanding the big waves of the history of the church which come through reformation, we should be people known as plague specialists, an organization experienced in pandemics and global crises. We've been through it all. We are the oldest, largest organization in the world, the Christian church taken all together. We need to be speaking out about reformation, and this is a reformation moment. But reformation moments start with people nailing their complaint to the wall. And there are many of us out there doing that now. We've been doing it for years.

Now it's the time for reformation. For reformation! We are all part of the greatest reformation and revival of the church ever seen. I say reformation because we know how badly things have gone. It needs to change. Reformation because people are calling out for new ways, and it behooves us to listen and to talk about them as you've been doing. And as part of what this conversation is.

But also revival, if we really study the history. It's kind of you to bring up my studies at London School of Economics and decolonization, and yes, I do hold a master's degree in history. There are historians amongst us that we need to [help us] look back and realize the answer to reformation is not management consulting. It's revival. It's saying, "Holy Spirit, come. Come and have your way with your church. Holy Spirit, testify to all things of who Jesus is and how he needs his church to be shaped in these days. Let us let go of the ways that have become false idols." You know, the golden calf.

It can't just be revival, by the way. Right? It can't be just saying, "Lord, bring renewal to the church. Come on, just do it without repentance, without that part of reformation of saying, 'We went wrong here. We did wrong. We need to mend our ways.'" It's all in the Scriptures, I believe, and it's right in front of us.

Do you think that this mix of what's perhaps necessary right now in terms of repentance, reconciliation, reformation, decolonization—do you think that it's perhaps a tall order to tackle all of these at the same time?

Well, it would be if we're relying on our human power to do it, which is what marks us out as different from the rest of the world. It's what makes us people of faith. And if we're truly students of the Reformation, we realize the European Reformation of 500 years ago didn't happen because all of the different cities that went through the Reformation said, "You know, this is overwhelming, let us break this down and we'll deal with this over the next 20 years in an organized way. In fact, let's establish the synod schedule for the next 20 years of the Reformation."

That's not how it happened. It happened by the Spirit breathing through a complaint and causing it to happen in miraculous ways. In that case, there was a new technology, the printing press. In our case, today, we have a radical globalism that's been hyperextended because of COVID that's giving us, effectively, a new reality on which to work. So anything which says, "I believe gradual change…"—why?

We've immediately been introduced to universal basic income [through the Canada Emergency Response Benefit]. What a huge objective reached, what a huge issue of justice reached for better or for ill. We're going to deal with the inflationary pressures of it now for a long time, but it's there, it's changed our economy in one swoop.

You know, how dare we say to the rest of society—who are forced to receive radical, radical change—how dare we say, "Well, that's fine that you're dealing with radical change, folks, but the church is the same yesterday, today and forever." No, that's not true. *God* is the same yesterday, today and forever, and His church has changed significantly over these

PHOTO: CAROLINE THIBAULT

"I don't think this is the time for gradual change."

last 2,000 years. So I would say my response to that, Matthew, would be: I don't think this is the time for gradual change. I think it's a time for a *massive, massive* move of unity and honesty and repentance. And financial planning around the biblical concept of jubilee.

And that seems to be a consistent message that you offer when discussing the work of Trinity Centres, the life of St. Jax, your consultation with other churches across Canada—that this is not specifically a call to let go of the wheel, that you're asking parishes to engage in financial planning, which will have radical outcomes, I think. At least this is what I read in what you write, and what I hear in what you say—that you're asking people to do a great deal and to really transform how they think about the church, but you're not asking them to do it without a plan.

What I found is that there are very, very few stated diocesan plans about what to do about church property. And one of the first objections is, of course, a diocese doesn't have full control over what

happens, anyways, because the parishes like to hold on to their own control.

I think that's a big—not that it's really needed, but I'll just throw it in here—it's a big defense of our bishops and archdeacons who we might blame, saying, "Why aren't they doing more about this?" Well, we've inherited a system in which it's difficult—the bishops can't just, you know, snap their fingers and make some of these things happen. So we do need regulatory reform, especially where we have four parishes in one square kilometre. Which happens. Do you know Cambridge, Ontario, has four Anglican churches? And 150,000 people, max. It's very spread out. It's a very suburban kind of environment.

Well, they're all trying to figure out what they're doing. They've reached out—that's not a secret—to say, "How might we deal with this? Well guess what, we don't have a clear strategy."

With the Trinity Centres Foundation, we've set ourselves up to be ready for when an entire diocese wants to come up with a plan that they don't necessarily want to execute, but if they were to bring on a group that says, "We'd like to run this." And we're actually in conversations with a number of Roman Catholic dioceses, in particular, who are looking at this, and that's very exciting. The other way that may come is effectively through a bankruptcy trustee type of situation. And we've written a letter to CPA Canada, who runs the accounting standards for Canada, to say, "How are you auditing church organizations? What are the questions you're asking?

Normally if you were a company and you were selling capital assets, the way that we are selling capital assets, to cover operational losses, every one of your financial reports would have a massive red line over it saying, "Extreme warning from the auditors. This is it; this organization is in major trouble."

Right? But church organizations, for some reason, have a pass on this. And one of our questions to CPA Canada is, "Why is that the case? Why are you applying a different set of standards to this category of charity, than you would to other categories of charity?"

And the second is, we're saying, "Have you run any projections as to what would happen if the sale of church buildings were suddenly stopped or suddenly slowed down?"

And I don't mean that as a threat, but it is a policy issue that we're exploring. In Ontario, a school building cannot be immediately sold. You have to prove that you've tried to sell it to other schools first on a closed market for that category. And then you can sell it on the open market. Which makes sense, right, sense to most people who'd realize, *Well, that's school lands that were given. And maybe another school needs it.* And its neighborhoods have been built up around these buildings, assuming that there was a school there, etc.

We don't have any regulation like that in Canada for churches—for places of faith, as they're called in the urbanistic language—and I believe we should.

So I'm going back to the overall subject of this particular digital magazine to which this podcast will be attached—we're looking at assumptions that the church might benefit to re-examine before entering 2021. Everyone's talked about how 2020 is a challenging year; I'm sure you've seen all the memes float by on Facebook and Twitter. We all like to make fun of 2020. But there's no evidence that 2021 is going to be particularly easy. What do you think the church should really reconsider before entering the next year? And given all that we've talked about, what would be dangerous for us to move into 2021 and still be grasping onto?

I think one of the most dangerous things to miss when we're talking about organizational change is the conversation around money. There's no other organization that wouldn't talk about the impact of its activities on its budget. There's no family that wouldn't talk about the impact of its purchase of a house or somebody getting a new job without the impact on the family finances.

The most important thing the church needs to look at now is the impact of COVID on the finances of the church and realizing that that question, answered, well, can release mission in an incredible way.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF ST. JAX

"The most important thing the church needs to look at now is the impact of COVID on the finances of the church."

Let me say this another way: There's no point talking about mission whilst excluding the financial reality that underpins it. It's like the orchestra playing on the sinking *Titanic*; for heaven's sake, it's time to get on the lifeboat and then figure out life from there.

Given what we've been talking about in this conversation in terms of decolonization in the world, decolonization in the church—the move towards opening up conversations as well as opening churches to different uses—what should we be doing in 2021? And what perhaps should we be pruning?

The end of John's Gospel gives us the best answer to this question. Jesus prays that we are to be one, just as he and the Father are one for a particular purpose, that the whole world would know that God is one.

This is a call by Jesus to church unity, and I believe the most important thing we need to prune is the subtle assumption that we as Anglicans are better than other types or other parts of the church. I'm not even going to get into multifaith questions—I think our respect for other faiths in the Anglican church is pretty good. I think it's a lot harder with our respect for other churches. If we were to understand that the Pentecostals have so much to offer, Baptists

have so much to offer. The house churches, the Chinese-, Spanish-, Arabic- and Farsi-speaking house churches, have so much to offer.

Yet when they come across our radar, they often come, as you know, as the renters in the afternoon, who we don't really see even though their congregations are kind of five times larger than most of the Anglican ones. So to me it's a John 17 correction to our assumptions of church unity, which if we really deeply got would actually answer all of these property questions; we wouldn't dare sell a building without seeing if another church needed to use it.

To me church unity is a vital piece. The other piece is understanding the difference between instructional worship and participative worship.

Instructional worship of: *You stand, you sit in the place where I tell you, and you stand and sit when I when I tell you to do that as the priest. Do what you're told. Be part of this religion.* Yeah, this ended a long time ago. And what we've seen that's bearing fruit in the church is a participative form of worship. We see this in other forms of learning—much shorter presentations, the podcast inviting into a conversation of equals. Our styles of worship need to deeply reflect the call to participative forms of worship that we're seeing working. So those would be the two things I point to: church unity and a truly, truly participative, re-formed style of worship.

And a far more transparent governance—and I'm not talking about abuse issues. I'm talking about the everyday big priorities. What are the big, big priorities? And let's really, really talk about them, and for heaven's sake, stop talking about them mostly as clergy. But rather, as the people of God, leading the church of God.

So what's ahead for you in 2021?

Looking ahead for me, life at St. Jax is a joy. We have a wonderful community. We're very multicultural. We continue to grow in healthy ways. And I think we're learning how to do the truly mixed mode of online and in-person worship. I think that'll be a continued learning through 2021.

I'm also excited with Trinity Centres Foundation. I think we're getting clear. We've been trying to turn the combination dial on the safe of trying to figure out, how do we unlock a new type of finance for churches that are trying to change for a new day? We have a number of granting foundations in Canada that are helping us establish a fund, which will be available for churches that need to do this pre-development work properly.

Often they get, you know, Uncle John the architect and their friend Joe, who was a real estate broker 10 years ago, to come together and come up with a new idea. This is insufficient, and it ends up leading to the kind of panic decisions that happen with insufficient planning.

And so what I'm excited about with Trinity Centres is what I think will be the establishment of a fund from which churches can borrow to pay for that work to be done. And we're spending more and more time on that. You know, we've helped the United Church in Toronto sell to the Boys and Girls Club of Toronto, and then we created a deal where they were able to rent back the space from the building they'd sold and they actually took the money they got from the sale, and we [helped create] a vendor take-back mortgage to help them do that. We've got another building in Toronto that's being bought, an old Catholic building being bought by another congregation. Very excited to see that happen. We've got a church in Calgary that's developing a four-acre piece of land.

These are the fun stories that make up what Trinity Centres Foundation is, and I think in 2021 we're going to see those stories really blossom. I'm looking forward to seeing that.

By Ray Aldred

ANGLICAN VOICES

'ALL MY RELATIVES'

IN CANADA, JUST WHICH NATIONS ARE TREATY NATIONS?

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

As the calendar year 2020 slowly winds down, closing a year that some of my younger relatives are calling "the worst year of our lives," I thought I would reflect on the challenges that we have faced and continue to face as Indigenous Christians in Canada. My friend Cheryl Bear (Nadleh Whut'en First Nation) used to give a talk on the myths that broader Canadian society held about Indigenous people. Her goal, which I am adopting for this little diatribe, aimed at greater understanding leading to better relationships.

Better relationships I define as proper relatedness. It is a term that I think Lesslie Newbigin used when talking about what the call of the gospel was seeking. Our modern liberal, democratic state prizes equality and freedom. Yet in a society that still contains systemic elevation of some based upon monetary means, the rich seem more free, and they gain more by equating equality with what we call fairness—increasing access to systems of elevation instead of deepening our sense of relatedness. Newbigin thought, and I agree, that proper relatedness would seem to hold more promise of greater freedom and equality for everyone. Here is an assumption about life in Canada that I hold: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit make progress when we aim at proper relatedness. Let's deconstruct that.

The historic treaty process in Canada is full of hypocrisy on the part of the Crown and of Canada, yet when understood as an Indigenous quest for proper relatedness offers some elements of hope. This quest—which exists not on paper in dusty archives but continues in our flesh to this day—questions or destroys a common assumption we see in Canada: that only First Nations are treaty nations. Canada, and thus newcomer churches in Canada, exist because of the goodwill of Indigenous people. Indigenous treaty was a way forward for First Nations to begin to heal the relationship with the land and the newcomers; this healing became necessary as the coming of Europeans to the Americas introduced very different practices of land stewardship, as well as pandemics that devastated Indigenous populations. Treaty made the newcomers part of the family, with everyone responsible for the well-being of all of Creation, the land. Treaty sought proper relatedness by affirming four basic human privileges: the privilege of a peaceful existence in the land; the privilege of access to the land; the privilege of being fed by Mother Earth; and the privilege of access to the bounty of the land. I would add one more: the privilege to be who the creator made us to be. In turn these simple privileges form the basis of proper relatedness with the earth, with all creatures—including other humans. These basic treaty acknowledgements of privileges, flowing from a good creation provided by a good creator, also provide a foundation for a society of relatives who enjoy equality expressed as "all my relatives." It offers freedom that I may use to understand how my actions impact all other relationships, so that I might use my freedom to care for my relatives.

The Indigenous church seeks to be who the creator made us to be, so that we might be agents of a proper relatedness that produces healing of the land—land where we have been placed by the creator, a world that God saw and called good. ■

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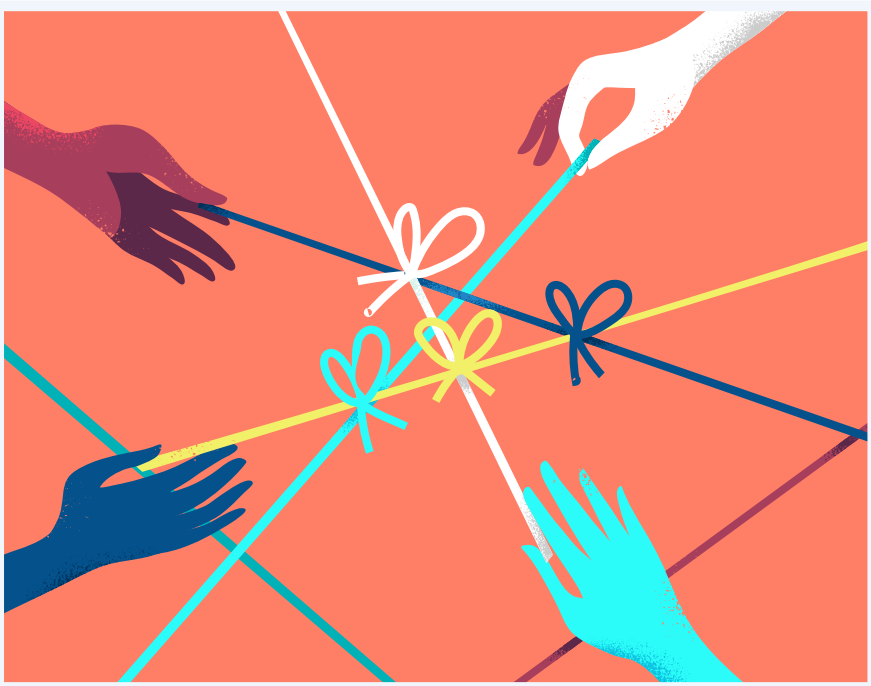

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