

The Anglican Church of Canada



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*"Singing a Song of Hope"*

Today, dear friends, we celebrate the naming of the Lord. Second only to the joy of the birth of a child is the delight of parents in naming their new born and announcing that name to the world. "A name," writes Curtis Almquist "is what uniquely distinguishes us from others and also unites us to others"—in a family, in a circle of friends, among classmates and with colleagues in the places where we work or play. A name endears us to others. It gives them access to our intellect, our feelings, our love, our generosity. By a name we are baptized and confirmed, married, ordained or commissioned for ministry, remembered in prayer, and at the end of our days, commended into the gracious keeping of God.

Like our name, Jesus' name distinguishes him from all others. He is the very Son of God and our Saviour.

"His is the name," writes St. Paul, "which is above every name, so that at his name every knee should bend, in heaven and on the earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess him Lord" (Philippians 2:9-11). Great is the music of the church that extols the glory of Jesus' name, none so beautiful as that penned for Christmas itself. One need only think of Handel's Messiah and the musical rendering of those magnificent words from Isaiah—"and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

In as much as all these names for the Christ child honour his glory, they also draw us to him in his mission of love, reconciliation, and peace in the world.

In this mission stands one whose life and labours I want to single out today. His name is Jean Vanier. Fifty years ago in 1964 he invited two men, Raphael and Philippe who were developmentally challenged to live with him in an old house in the tiny village of Trosly—Breuil in France. From that little household has grown a movement the world knows as L'Arche, a community shaped by the love, compassion, and peace of Jesus. 130 of these communities can be found in 30 countries on six continents.

*Living the Marks of Mission*

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In their houses life with all its physical, developmental and emotional challenges is celebrated. "To love someone," says Vanier, "is to show them their beauty, their worth, and their importance." Accordingly, birthdays are big celebrations! Times for work and play are balanced. And hallowed each evening is the time for prayer for each other and for the world. The quality of life lived there has much to teach us about life in our own homes and life in the household of faith.

In extraordinary ways L'Arche models such a straight forward living of the vows of our baptism:

- Celebrating and sharing God's love in Jesus.
- Saying we're sorry when we've hurt each other.
- Helping our brothers and sisters in need.
- Building a world that is kind and just for all.
- Taking delight in the wonders of God's creation.

Pictures of life in L'Arche represent such a sharp contrast to so many horrific others from the year 2014.

Here are but a few:

- Nigerian school girls kidnapped under the cover of darkness.,
- Innocent victims killed through the use of chemical weapons in Syria and thousands of Syrian refugees now facing starvation.
- Children of Gaza killed while playing at the beach.
- Men and women and children beheaded for refusing to denounce the name of Jesus.
- A soldier bleeding to death at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at our National War Memorial.
- Young men and women recruited and radicalized for the terrorist activities of ISIS.
- Thousands of young people mostly women being trafficked for the sex trade where they are used, abused and trashed.
- Hostages pressed against the windows of a café in Sydney, Australia.
- 132 children slaughtered by the Taliban in their classrooms in Peshawar Pakistan.

All these images, and so many more, reveal such a total disregard for the sanctity of human life. By contrast, a beautiful contrast, L'Arche represents a hallowing of the wonder and dignity of human life.

One need only read some of Jean Vanier's writings to know that at the very core of his labours of love for humanity is his intense love of Jesus. His life's work is shaped by the Jesus of John's Gospel. "There's a music behind the words and stories and flow of this gospel," he writes, "I have listened to that song which has warmed and stirred my heart and opened up my intelligence, and given hope, meaning and orientation to my life with all that is beautiful and broken in me and meaning to this world of pain in which we live." He goes on to say, "I want to sing this song even if my voice is weak and sometimes wavers, so that others may sing it and that together we may be in the world singing a song of hope, to bring joy where there is sadness and despair."

In this deep personal desire of Jean Vanier, I see the very vocation of the Church, to be in and for the world—Singing a song of hope in the name of Christ.

We are called to sing this song with heart and soul and voice in the sanctuary, in the streets, and amidst the masses of humanity who suffer so much at the hands of others.

On this New Year's Day as we enjoy this choral Eucharist in this lovely cathedral church, I am mindful of all who work behind the scenes in the preparation of liturgy. Knowing that worship is our first work as the People of God, let us be grateful for all whose life's work is to gather the church in song and sacrament, in preaching the Word, and in living that Word. Accordingly, I invite your prayers for all our bishops, priests, and deacons; all our lay readers and catechists; all our lectors and all who lead us in our prayers for the Church and the world; all our musicians and choristers; all acolytes and all who serve on our altar guilds: yes, those who polish brass, wash linens and arrange the flowers in their respective ways. All these people contribute to worship that is complete in the beauty of holiness. Each in their own way enables the Church to sing its song of hope in the grace of God revealed in the face of Jesus.

On this New Year's Day, let us also give thanks to God for all whose life's work is to call the church assembled into loving service among the poor. "Jesus," says Vanier, "is the starving, the parched, the prisoner, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the dying. To live with Jesus is to live with the poor. To live with the poor is to live with Jesus."

Here is a theology rooted in God's special regard for the poor and in the Psalmist's prayer that the hope of the poor not be forgotten (Psalm 9:18).

In partnering with places like The Well and Centre 454 here in Ottawa, the church is singing a song of hope in the midst of much sadness and despair. When we Christians provide a nutritious breakfast for kids before they go to school; when we

open the doors of our churches and welcome people in from out of the cold; when we set up for the Saturday night community supper; when we turn our parish halls into overnight shelters for the homeless, we are singing songs of whispering hope for the dawning of a better and brighter day and the peace of a quieter and safer night. Here's a form of evangelism as one of our retired bishops, Michael Ingham, has written that "shows forth the Lord Jesus in acts of love and compassion rather than winning souls we deem to be lost... It is designed for service not conquest."

Accordingly, let us pray that the church always be graced and challenged by those who call us out into the streets and neighbourhoods of our communities—those who remind us of our vocation in the world as the body of Christ—his eyes to see, his ears to hear, his hands to feed his heart to love.

On this New Year's Day, I am mindful that at the turn of the millennium, world leaders declared a number of Millennium Development Goals and set 2015 as an achievable time line. While there has been some significant measure of success in eradicating extreme poverty, it has been very uneven across regions and indeed within countries. There is much more to be done "Until all are fed," as the World Council of Churches Assembly sang in Busan, Korea in 2013:

"How long will we sing?  
How long will we pray?  
How long will we write and send?  
How long will we stay?  
How long will we make amends?  
Until all are fed  
Until all on earth have bread  
Like the one who loves us each and everyone  
we serve until all are fed."

From an assembly of churches that numbers some 345, this is a song of hope for the millions of people who live in poverty.

On the long road to improving maternal health and reducing child mortality, two other MDGs, I am delighted to say our own Church, through the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF), has been singing a song of hope for twenty-five years. Within the last few, that song has swelled to a chorus of great joy through substantial government funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Development (DFATD), enabling expanded work in Mozambique, Tanzania, and Burundi.

On the long road to ending gender-based violence in our world, the Anglican Communion has called on all its member churches to not remain silent, but to speak

out against such violence, to make sure our churches are promoting and modeling safe, equal and respectful relationships between women and men, boys and girls. Here in Canada, there are more than a few Highways of Tears, back alleys, and wooded paths where women are abused and dumped. Of particular concern is the trend of ever-escalating statistics regarding beaten and battered, missing, and murdered aboriginal women. The church's support of shelters for those who suffer domestic violence, and for second stage housing for those gaining the courage and counsel they need in leaving behind the vicious cycles of abuse in which they have been trapped, is a song of hope for many.

As this year marks the conclusion of the work of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, our church has already affirmed its continuing commitment to walk with Indigenous Peoples along paths of healing from their experiences in the residential schools. Deeply aware that this journey is a long and difficult one, "We are," as former primate Michael Peers said, "committed for the long haul." Thankfully, along the way we can cite together some very sacred moments of apology, reconciliation, community healing and self-determination. Each in its own way is a song of hope that has lifted the hearts of all and moved us forward in good ways.

In the world today, there are more than 50 million refugees. Our Church has a long standing commitment in accompanying those who live in camps for many years—indeed, for some, a lifetime. Our church has a strong record in settling refugees through diocesan sponsorship agreements. Our church speaks out in pressing our government for more open policies in welcoming new refugees to Canada. All these actions are songs of hope.

In the great festival of Christmas, the scriptures turn our thoughts to the land of the Holy One: the land of his birth, death, and resurrection. A land sadly caught in age-old conflict. As we strive to understand its complexities, and as we pray for a just and lasting peace for Palestine and Israel, we sing however "weak or wavering" a song of hope.

As we greet this new year, let us pray that Jean Vanier's deep desire to sing a song of hope in the world be the deep passion of our church. In the sanctuary, in the streets, and throughout the world may our ministries in the name of Jesus make known "the glories of his righteousness and the wonders of his love" (Hymn 154).