



Contact

A Newsletter for the Council of the North

Fall 2021

Responding to God's Call to mission and ministry in the northern regions of Canada

'Worship on the land is the fundamental experience of Arctic Christians'

By Matt Gardner

The Northwest Territories saw an explosion of COVID-19 cases this fall. By Oct. 7, health authorities reported the territory had the highest infection rate per capita in Canada, with an average of 50 new cases per day—a reminder that the pandemic is far from over and reaching into the farthest corners of the north.

As Yellowknife imposes new limits on indoor gatherings, those organizing worship services are looking for alternatives. Speaking from Iqaluit in the Anglican diocese of the Arctic—which encompasses the Northwest Territories, Nunavut and northern Quebec—Bishop Joey Royal says that while worship on the radio and Internet has become more common during the pandemic, many parishes have taken worship outdoors.

"There are instances of parishes gathering outside for sure ... There was certainly worship moving out of the church building, because for the longest time ... there were serious limitations on gathering indoors and the limitations were less when you gathered outdoors," Royal says.

Worship on the land, the bishop suggests, has a particular resonance in the Arctic. Royal describes



PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

Campers enjoyed music, prayer and worship outdoors, including an observation of the Eucharist.



outdoor worship as "baked into Arctic Christianity, because the people in this land up until the last century



or so were nomadic and lived in family groups on the land."

He highlights the role of

Inuit catechists, and later Inuit deacons and priests, in travelling long distances to spread Christianity through the Arctic.

"Although missionaries brought [the gospel] here, missionaries often functioned as people who trained local people, who then spread it to their own people across the land," Royal says.

"That obviously involved worship [outdoors], because there were no church buildings ... This was long before there was an Anglican church building or any church building in the Arctic. So worship on the land is the fundamental experience of Arctic Christians, at least when you go back generations."

Historian Kenn Harper has written extensively about the Arctic. He notes that the spiritual practices of Inuit shamans in pre-Christian culture often took place outdoors.

"The initiation ceremonies or practices initiating someone into shamanism—that was definitely outdoors in nature and often in extreme privation, like fasting for a number of days out on the land away from other people," Harper says.

Some of these Inuit traditions of outdoor spiritual

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Outdoor spiritual practices part of northern tradition

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practice may have continued after the introduction of Christianity, he suggests. When camping away from established communities, Harper says, “Inuit maintained the Sabbath even when they were not in the communities under the watchful eye of the missionary. I think it’s safe to assume many of those observations were outside if the weather was nice, or in their tents if the weather wasn’t.”

The cover of Harper’s book *In Those Days: Shamans, Spirits, and Faith in the Inuit North* depicts a photo of pioneering Anglican missionary Edmund Peck—who founded the church’s first permanent mission on Baffin Island and developed Inuktitut syllabics—presiding over what the historian describes as an “outdoor prayer meeting.”

The presence of a young man and woman holding hands in front of Peck indicates to Harper that the gathering was likely an outdoor marriage ceremony.

“This would be an Anglican ceremony held out of doors, and the reason would probably be that indoors was too crowded, quite frankly, because Peck’s premises at Blacklead Island were pretty small,” Harper says. “I know during the wintertime, he crammed people indoors for worship services. But I’m thinking that outdoors would have been



PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

Campers partake in the Holy Communion service.



PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

Members of the congregation at St. Jude’s Cathedral hold worship outdoors during their 2018 parish camping trip.

much more comfortable.”

More recently, Anglican worship outdoors has taken on a more intentional character. In July 2018, an estimated 25 members of the congregation at St. Jude’s

Cathedral in Iqaluit took an hour boat ride outside the city for a three-day parish camping trip.

Between boating, fishing and hiking, parishioners held morning and evening prayer,

Bible study and the Eucharist outdoors. Bishop Royal, who preached at the Sunday Holy Communion service on the idea of the sea in the Bible, says gathering outside the congregation’s usual context helped build relationships within the parish across generations.

The idea for the trip came from Methuselah Kunuk, then dean of St. Jude’s and currently a candidate for Aggu MLA in the 2021 Nunavut territorial election. Worship outdoors was nothing new for Kunuk, who has served as co-chair of Iqaluit’s Amarok Hunters and Trappers Coalition and the Baffin Fisheries Coalition.

“When I was growing up ... when the weather’s good in the summer and spring, we used to do our services outside,” Kunuk says.

While Nunavut had zero cases of COVID-19 at the time this article was written, St. Jude’s has not organized a formal camping trip since 2018 due in large part to the pandemic. In the Northwest Territories, current health guidelines restrict even outdoor gatherings to a maximum of 50 people.

Yet whether worship takes place indoors and outdoors, Kunuk says, the presence of God can be felt equally in both.

“I think it’s the same, because we believe that the Holy Spirit is with us all the time,” Kunuk says. “It doesn’t matter where we are.” Ω



THE COUNCIL OF THE NORTH is a grouping of financially assisted dioceses, supported through grants by General Synod, that serve sparsely populated areas in the Arctic, Yukon, Northern and Central Interior British Columbia, Alberta, northern Saskatchewan, Manitoba; and northern Ontario.

Specifically:

Diocese of the Arctic • Diocese of Athabasca • Diocese of Brandon • Diocese of Caledonia • Indigenous Spiritual Ministry of Mishamikoweesh • Diocese of Moosonee • Diocese of Saskatchewan • Territory of the People • Diocese of Yukon

Gathering observes search for unmarked graves of residential school children

By Diana Swift

From the Anglican Journal

Despite its pristine location in Saskatchewan's boreal forest on the edge of the Canadian Shield, the town of La Ronge, Sask. (population: ca 5,700) has had its share of pain—experiencing, since 2015, a suicide crisis and evacuation for wildfires.

Recently this town, about 250 km north of Prince Albert, has been facing a new cause for grief: the discovery of unmarked graves of Indigenous pupils who died at a local former residential school—this one operated by the Anglican Church of Canada.

The Lac La Ronge Indian Residential School opened in 1907. It burned down in 1920 and was thereafter replaced with a new school, All Saints. According to Indian Affairs records cited in a University of Regina profile of the school, a 1937 government inspector expressed concern

at how poorly the children were being fed. The inspector also described overcrowding of classrooms and dormitories, in which students with tuberculosis slept alongside their classmates. All Saints burned to the ground in 1947 after two boys set it on fire, and its students were then transferred to another school.

On Oct. 1, a day after Canada's first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, the diocese of Saskatchewan's bishop, Michael Hawkins, and diocesan Indigenous bishop Adam Halkett attended a survivors' gathering in the old cemetery across from All Saints Anglican Church, the town's oldest building. They joined school survivors and



PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

Hawkins (right) with Cook-Searson (centre) and LLRIB councillor Devin Bernatchez at the site in La Ronge.

members of the Woodland Cree Lac La Ronge Indian Band (LLRIB) to observe a search for unmarked graves at the site, an initiative which began in July.

Some grave markers for these deceased children (as well as other community members) still exist, but LLRIB chief Tammy Cook-Searson confirmed that a substantial number of unmarked graves had been found.

"We did have to do a lot of cleanup on the site. It was very overgrown," she said. "The band used to have an elder, an archdeacon, who looked after the site but except for the front part, the cemetery hasn't been kept up in recent years." Aiding in the search is a ground-penetrating radar machine supplied by engineering firm SNC Lavalin.

The fourth volume of the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, released in 2016, deals with missing residential school children and unmarked graves. According to

the report, government regulations around cemeteries were "non-existent or undeveloped" when many residential schools were founded, so that "most residential school cemeteries were established informally," with, frequently, a lack of thought given to their continuing care once the schools closed. The commission attempted to document former residential school cemeteries but found that most were "abandoned, disused, and vulnerable to accidental disturbance." The report also mentions that in some cases graves were marked by simple wooden crosses that have rotted to pieces over time.

Halkett says his first instinct, on being invited to the gathering at La Ronge, was "to step back and not attend because I thought there would be a lot of anger.... But when Chief Tammy Cook-Searson invited me and the mayor and the town council, it felt welcoming." The survivors indeed welcomed them

without anger and seemed ready to start the healing process, he said.

And despite several threats, Halkett added, no Anglican churches in the area have been closed or burned down, in contrast with the situation in British Columbia over the summer and fall.

Cook-Searson, a third-generation survivor of the residential school system, said the presence of the two bishops at the gathering was significant.

"It is very important for them to be part of these events, to be there to reconcile, support and apologize," she said. And the Indigenous community, she added, is still loyal to the church. "Many of our weddings, funerals, and baptisms are still presided over by Anglican clergy."

As part of his itinerary, Halkett holds services at All Saints, and the congregation includes LLRIB members.

Cook-Searson said the search within the overgrown cemetery was about 97 per cent complete. A report will be issued in the new year but specific numbers on unmarked remains will not be released, she said.

With regard to the way ahead for the church, Bishop Halkett said, "As I told the House of Bishops, reconciliation is a strong word but also a meaningful one. I said I'm willing to work with them, and that I hope the whole of the Canadian church is willing to work with us.

"We can get through this," he said. "We've experienced other hurts but we still want to move forward together and worship in the Anglican Church of Canada." Ω

—with files by Tali Folkins



PHOTO: RUBEN M. RAMOS

A glacier in Fitzroy Fjord, Devon Island, Nunavut

CoN receives game-changing \$400,000 anonymous gift on eve of annual meeting

By Matt Gardner

Shortly before its first in-person meeting since the start of the pandemic, held Oct. 4-6 at a hotel near Toronto's Pearson Airport, the Council of the North was given an early Christmas present.

The council, a grouping of nine jurisdictions (dioceses or diocesan equivalents) that receive financial assistance from the national church, received a \$400,000 gift from an anonymous donor in the diocese of Toronto, said David Lehmann, bishop of the diocese of Caledonia and council chair.

The donor, Lehmann said, had initially contacted a local parish priest who said the Council of the North needed it more than his Toronto parish.

The priest, a former seminary colleague of Lehmann's, "got some stories from me and asked what would I put it towards if

"One of the things the whole church is realizing is that we need to train the next generation of clergy desperately, and that the old model of going away to a three-year residential program isn't possible."

—David Lehmann,
bishop of the diocese of
Caledonia and council
chair

I had a choice," Lehmann recalled.

"I said our training in ministry fund, because as we're coming out of COVID and we're wanting to gather or do things, it is the fund that will be most important to bring us together for

meetings and gatherings."

The council maintains a training fund established through a previous donation, spending a portion of the principal and interest each year.

Lehmann described the \$400,000 gift as "game-changing, and just exceedingly generous and kind and thoughtful of both the parish priest and the donor."

The gift effectively extends the life of the council's training fund for another decade, he said.

The Indigenous Spiritual Ministry of Mishamikoweesh and diocese of Yukon both have training sessions planned, while the diocese of the Arctic plans to use some of the training funds for translation work.

Strictly speaking, the gathering was both in-person and online. Six of the jurisdictions that make up the Council of the

North were represented by someone physically present in the room, three by someone attending online via Zoom.

From donations it had received, the council set aside \$60,000 and awarded a total of \$6,000 in grants to six jurisdictions to allow them to continue developing online worship and ministries.

Lehmann said that while some areas in the North have limited streaming capabilities and rely on radio, for others the internet has become an increasingly significant tool in ministry. He also expressed gratitude to Anglicans for continuing to support the Council of the North.

"We are so thankful for the generosity of the Anglican Church of Canada that empowers and enables the ministry across the North and remote communities," he said. 

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