

Contact

A Newsletter for the Council of the North

Summer 2020

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

Calmness and security

A conversation with Bishop Lesley Wheeler-Dame of the diocese of Yukon

By Matt Gardner for Contact

Lesley Wheeler-Dame was elected on the first ballot as coadjutor bishop of the diocese of Yukon on May 4, 2019. She succeeded the Rt. Rev. Larry Robertson as bishop upon his retirement and was consecrated as bishop of Yukon on August 26.

Born in Windsor, Ont., Bishop Wheeler-Dame began her career as a social worker and moved to Yukon in 1996 to work for the provincial government. In 1997, she began serving as a lay minister-in-charge, followed by her ordination as a deacon and then priest. She has a bachelor's degree in theology and served as an incumbent and regional dean in Alberta and archdeacon in Yukon before her election as bishop.

Contact spoke with Bishop Wheeler-Dame on May 13, 2020, to learn of developments in her diocese and her plans going forward. This interview has been edited for brevity.

Q. What has been the main focus of your episcopal ministry since August?

A. Before COVID-19 hit, the chief focus was looking at our communities that are without clergy and without ministry of presence. I want to strengthen the ministry of presence program—so seeking funding, speaking to different bishops and having conversations with communities. We want to do more training with laity to be able to ensure that we have ministry happening in these communities.



PHOTO: COURTESY LESLEY WHEELER-DAME

Bishop Lesley Wheeler-Dame with family on the occasion of her consecration as Bishop of the Yukon.

[I was also] spending time out in the community of Whitehorse as well, just getting to know the people here more. In order for me to travel out to a community, the closest one is four hours' drive, so I don't get out to the community as often as I would have liked. But at the same time, just being a part of the cathedral community has been a benefit to me and to, I believe, the cathedral.

Q. How has COVID-19 affected ministry and mission in the diocese of Yukon?

A. It's interesting because we're not travelling out to the communities, we're not having services, and yet I'm exhausted. I can't specifically say what I'm doing, and yet it's non-stop.

For example, I spent a great amount of time yesterday trying to liaison with public health and to find out on behalf of the community of Old Crow what they actually need to do in the case of a death and a funeral. Even though there are standard directions being put out, that doesn't always fit with a community

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like Old Crow. So there's a lot more interaction in that way happening, I think trying to find a balance to be that space of calmness and security.

And I've had so many Zoom meetings! But I'm also finding a great deal of joy within it, if that makes sense, because I believe that the church is being forced to take a look at how we do things and how we are the church. I believe that we're going to have to make some changes, and that's a good thing.

One of the examples of that is we are doing, from the cathedral on Sunday mornings, morning prayer. It's myself and the dean and the executive archdeacon who are doing it and maintaining physical distancing. We also have the organist from the cathedral coming in to do a song or two. Our people watching it [totals] way more than we get in the church building on Sunday mornings across the diocese.

I think when we look at statistics, we need to look at why are we seeing such an increase, because it's a big increase. I think we're being forced to look at those kind of things as a church, and to maybe stop wasting money on travel...and look at actually doing the work of what we're called to do.

Q. In an interview with the *Anglican Journal* following your election as coadjutor bishop, you said major concerns going forward would be finances and lifting up gifted people who haven't been ordained yet. How are those two areas going?

A. It's interesting because I was just talking with the executive archdeacon about the finances, and it's a little hard to tell right now—of course, we're in the middle of audits and all that kind of stuff—and there's definitely a little bit of difference. We don't have as many donations coming in as we normally do, so we are noticing it in the diocese. The parishes are not noticing it quite so much because the individual people are still mailing in their donations.



PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA / WKNIGHT94

Saint Saviour's Anglican Church in Carcross, Yukon


"I think what I want people to know is that we are definitely not in a position where we're about to go under or anything because of COVID-19. If anything, I believe that we're growing because of it."

—Bishop Lesley Wheeler-Dame

So finances are still an issue. However, through Council of the North, we were approved for funding to hold an event [on reconciliation] in October. But it's likely that we'll have to cancel that event. On the one hand, the finances are staying the same and are still a little bit of an issue, because we don't have as much money as we'd like to have. However, at the same time, what would we use it for realistically right now? We have an executive [meeting] coming up and that's exactly one of the things that we're going to be looking at, [on the subject of] what changes do we need to be making in how we spend.

In terms of raising up local ministry, again, everything's on hold as we figure out how do we do this in a different way. We're having Zoom meetings with the clergy and the leadership in each community. We need to be very careful because first off, we don't have the [internet] bandwidth in Yukon. Second off, the amount that you're allowed to have is very low, and even though for residences right now, the provider is giving a bit of a break and not charging for overages, that's not the same for business. So we pay extra every month right now for the amount of Internet that we're using to host all of these Zoom meetings.

Q. Anything else you'd like people across church to know about developments in the diocese of Yukon?

A. I think what I want people to know is that we are definitely not in a position where we're about to go under or anything because of COVID-19. If anything, I believe that we're growing because of it. 

Contact is produced by the Council of the North

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The Anglican Church of Canada

Holding together

A conversation with Bishop David Greenwood of the diocese of Athabasca

By Matt Gardner for *Contact*

Elected bishop of the diocese of Athabasca last November, Bishop David Greenwood was consecrated on Feb. 21. He is currently working from his home in Fort McMurray until the end of June, when his wife Benita—who works as a teacher—finishes the school year. The couple then plan to move to Peace River.

Greenwood was raised in Alberta and has lived in the diocese since 1988, when he moved to Fort McMurray with his young family. For 30 years, he worked for Syncrude Canada Ltd. as a computer programmer, systems designer and architect, reporting architect and designer, and supervisor. Sensing a call to serve the church, he was ordained as a vocational deacon in 2004 and as a priest in 2015. He served as an honorary assistant at All Saints Fort McMurray and as an interim priest in the parishes of Northern Lights and Athabasca before his election as bishop.

Contact spoke with Bishop Greenwood on May 5 to learn of developments in his diocese and his plans going forward. This interview has been edited for brevity.

Q. How are you handling your episcopal ministry in the time of COVID-19?

A. Where do I start? It's been COVID-19, it's been floods, it's been break-ins, it's been all sorts of interesting things.

I'm working remotely. We do a lot of Zoom meetings, a lot of phone calls, a lot of emails. My office is basically the computer right now, hardly any face-



PHOTO: DIOCESE OF ATHABASCA FACEBOOK PAGE / HEATHER MUXLOW

Bishop David Greenwood was consecrated bishop for the diocese of Athabasca on February 21, 2019.

to-face interactions at all. It's very busy reacting to everything going on.

How am I doing it liturgically? We're doing a lot of recorded services and Zoom services throughout the diocese. A whole bunch of the priests have really stepped in there, and we have a number of services going on. In addition to that, I am winding my way through the diocese virtually. Last week I celebrated with Beaver Lodge. We had a Zoom service. Beaver Lodge is about 950 km away from Fort McMurray, so it's interesting how this is all possible now.

How am I doing emotionally/physically? It's a stressful time, as I imagine it is for everybody. It's definitely

out of our norm. But it's encouraging too, by the number of positive reinforcements we've received, especially the clergy as they reach out to people through email and services, and they find out that they have a much wider audience than they had in their typical Sunday services beforehand.

Q. Are there any major events coming up in Athabasca?

A. The next major thing will totally depend on COVID-19, because we've suspended services as well—whether we can gradually reintroduce that. I have

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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 •

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a meeting actually this Thursday with the bishops of Calgary and Edmonton looking at [how] maybe we can do it in conjunction with them from a provincial point of view, since the province is setting out the rules for that.

It's a synod year for us, but how effective of a synod we can hold will also depend on COVID-19 and how that works.

Q. What are your current priorities for the diocese?

A. [Aside from] COVID-19 and everything else, we'll be looking at how can we stabilize and grow the diocese. As with many churches and parishes across the country, most of our parishes are quite senior in age. If we don't do something so that families and young people come in, in the next 10 or so years, we'll be looking at closing other parishes. I don't really want to be a bishop closing parishes if I can avoid it, so that's a critical concern for us.

I think it's critical that clergy know they're supported. We are a very sparse diocese in that we are geographically very large, but numerically small. As a result of that, clergy are often on their own, [with] not a lot of interactions. The support of the clergy I think is very important for me, that they know they're engaged with and that they are visibly supported.

Those are two broad areas I can say. It's an emphasis on trying to get parishes healthy so then the diocese will be healthy.



PHOTO: MCMURRAY AVIATION

An aerial photo of Fort McMurray taken April 28 shows the city centre overwhelmed by floodwaters.

Q. What happened with the break-in at the synod office?

A. I guess as break-ins go, it was very minor. They broke a window, they threw some stuff around, they stole a computer and some keys. It's more of a nuisance than anything. But in the midst of everything else happening, it was just one more thing.

Q. What kind of an impact have floods been having on life in the diocese?

A. Quite large. At the diocesan level, the synod office was flooded and the cathedral basement was flooded. Quite a number of parishioners have been

affected by the flooding. That's going to be a hardship, because being on a flood plain, the flood insurance is often not there or it's underinsured for the damage that does happen.

Q. Is there anything else you'd like rest of the church to know about the direction of diocese of Athabasca?

We're trying to become self-sufficient. We are trying to live the kingdom of God and be filled with Christ, be filled with the Spirit, and we are dealing with all that nature throws at us a day at a time and coming through it. We're praying, we're holding together, and we're moving on. Ω

Diocese of Huron connects to improve clergy housing in the Council of the North

By Rt. Rev. William Cliff, Bishop of Brandon

Late in 2018, a process began which has benefitted the Council of the North in wonderful ways. I was handed a letter in which the Diocese of Huron had detailed a process by which they had found trust funds in their portfolio whose terms and conditions could not easily be met. Bishop Nicholls got in touch with the Council of the North and asked if we might be able to fulfil the terms of the trust

which had long been held, but not disbursed.

Every diocese has a series of trusts which are gifts that have built up over time. The purposes for each gift are duly recorded and kept on file so that the diocese can faithfully meet the terms of the trust. In this case, the trust was to see to the housing needs of retired missionary clergy or for housing needs for missionaries in general. After many years

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Navigating uncharted waters

A conversation with Bishop-elect Lincoln McKoen of the Territory of the People

By Matt Gardner for *Contact*

On Jan. 25, Lincoln McKoen was elected the first bishop of the Territory of the People on the fourth ballot. Though he has not yet been consecrated due to social distancing measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the bishop-elect has been appointed administrator of the territory and began serving in this position on May 1. A consecration date will be determined based on social distancing guidelines from the provincial government and in consultation with Archbishop and Metropolitan Melissa Skelton.

Born and raised in Ontario, McKoen studied political science at Dalhousie University, where he was baptized into the Anglican Church. He received his master of divinity from Trinity College in 2002 and subsequently served as a catechist. In 2003 McKoen was ordained as a deacon in the diocese of Niagara. The same year he was ordained as a priest and began serving at various Ontario congregations. In 2010, he moved to British Columbia and served as an incumbent in Alert Bay. From 2018 until his election as bishop, he served as incumbent at St. Peter, Campbell River, and archdeacon of Nimpkish Deanery.

Contact spoke with Bishop-elect McKoen on May 12 to learn of developments in his diocese and his plans going forward. This interview has been edited for brevity.

Q. What is your current status as bishop-elect?

A. I've been appointed administrator of the territory. What that means essentially is that I have all administrative powers like I would if I was consecrated. The only things I cannot do are any liturgical episcopal functions, like ordinations or confirmations. Otherwise, I have the full legal authority [of bishop].

Q. What's been occupying your attention since the episcopal election?

A. Basically I had to finish up my



PHOTO: TERRITORY OF THE PEOPLE

Bishop-elect McKoen was appointed administrator of the Territory of the People while he awaits consecration which is delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

parish ministry, because I still had to give my three-month notice to the diocese of British Columbia. I started as administrator on May 1, so for the past 12 days, I have been basically bringing myself up to speed and getting involved with different administrative functions of the territory. I've been participating in different Zoom calls, online worship, coffee hours, these sort of things, in various parishes within the territory.

Q. What are your current priorities?

A. The immediate priority to help the territory navigate through all the different things with COVID-19. That's in conjunction [with] waiting for the province to say what we can do when, [and] helping parishes and clergy navigate all of this as well. They're doing a beautiful and phenomenal job. Bishop Barbara Andrews, my predecessor, had done a lot of that work ahead of time before I arrived. So I'm just continuing what she had set up, helping the territory and the parishes navigate the financial

concerns that every diocese is going through in Canada.

Because the province of British Columbia has released a very rough reopening plan for the next four to six months, [we're] planning ahead on what that may look like, providing numbers [of infection] continue to stay stable or go down. Of course, that's all in conjunction with the province. Nobody knows from day to day what's going to happen next.

Q. How are you handling episcopal ministry in the time of COVID-19?

A. It's a very unique challenge. Thankfully, we're blessed with the technology that we [have]. Would I love to be able to get out and visit parishes? Of course I would. But I'm able to use the technology at hand to at least get to know the clergy. It's no substitute for one-on-one personal conversations and meetings, but it is getting there.

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Q. What are your plans for the near future in the territory?

A. We have our bi-annual EQUIP conference in the fall, which is a ministry conference for the whole territory. We've actually just finished that planning session today.

Q. Your past ministry has included work in reconciliation and catechesis. Is there a plan to take any action in those areas as bishop?

A. Yes, there is. For any reconciliation ministry, I would have to get to know the nations within the territory. That's personal, one-on-one trust building and relationship building. Reconciliation is not imposed. Reconciliation is built from the ground up. That involves getting to know the people, the territories, their lands, their customs, their culture, their languages, their traditions—what makes the nations who they are.

Once that happens, which takes many years of work, then we can talk about what reconciliation looks like to the nations—not what it looks like to the church, but what it means to them and how we continue that process. It's a process that'll continue long after I am dead and buried. It's a multi-generational



PHOTO: TERRITORY OF THE PEOPLE

St. Peter's Anglican Church in Williams Lake, B.C.

process, and that depends on how the nations work and what the nations are looking for and seeking in a relationship with the church.

Education and catechesis: a lot of that comes with the church reclaiming its mission as who it is as the church. That's a unique, organic process to each parish. The church's mission, of

course, is to share the love of Jesus Christ. But for us as the church, [it is] to reclaim that for ourselves internally in how we live and work and deal with each other—including learning from the history of the church, both good and bad, to help us all be better followers of Jesus Christ in our individual walks. Ω



Cooperation improving lives in the North

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the Diocese of Huron did not have a situation that could meet the terms of that trust, so the money sat and grew.

Naturally the Council of the North said "Yes! We can help you with that!" and decided to divide the \$100,000 gift between the nine supported dioceses in order to make improvements to housing for the clergy who are serving in the north. Each Diocese will use these funds to make changes and improvements to the mission houses and rectories in the isolated communities we serve. New laundry

machines, repaired roofs, siding repairs and all manner of projects will proceed and these will make a profound difference both to the parishes and the Dioceses that have been given this gift. Simple improvements to buildings can cost much more than in populated areas and anything we can do to improve the lives of our clergy and lay leaders in the north is gratefully accepted.

Since the beginning of this process, the Diocese of Huron has seen some significant change. Bishop Todd Townshend of Huron, when asked about this gift, said "I was delighted

to learn that this resource would be so well used and we are grateful for the opportunity to support those who are responding to God's mission in the north. May their homes be places of health and strength."

The Council of the North is grateful for the vision and generosity of the Diocese of Huron and their confidence in the Council of the North to put this money to work in a way that honours the wishes of the donor so long ago.

Perhaps your Diocese has a trust set aside for purposes that can no longer be honoured within an individual diocese, but could still be put to work in line with the wishes of visionary donor. The Council of the North is extremely grateful for the resources which we steward on your behalf. Our hope is that we can continue the witness of the Lord Jesus Christ all through this country, and especially in our case, in the north. Ω