

CONTACT



Council
of the North

Winter
2015

a newsletter for the Council of the North

A message from the Chair

Greetings in the name of Jesus—the One who invites us to take up our cross and follow Him. We in the Council of the North invite you to include us on your parish's journey through Lent. A set of weekly resources has been developed, resources that explore Lenten themes like baptism, justice, discipleship, healing and servanthood through the lens of stories of northern ministry. These bulletin inserts may be used for quiet reflection during worship or as Bible study or devotional resources. In this way, we hope to draw closer to you, over the many miles, inviting you to pray with us and for us. To access these resources, you can subscribe to weekly emails by writing to cnc@national.anglican.ca or through our Council of the North Facebook page: [Facebook.com/CounciloftheNorth](https://www.facebook.com/CounciloftheNorth).



May God bless you richly in this holy season,

The Rt. Rev. Michael Hawkins
Chair, Council of the North

FaithLift

*Stepping out in
faith in the Diocese
of Athabasca*

On a warm Sept. evening in Grande Prairie, AB, a group of about 20 Anglicans listen intently as Bishop Fraser Lawton (Athabasca) reads the story of Peter stepping out to walk on water in response to his Lord's call. Their weekend together at Christ Church Anglican will include delicious meals, contemporary praise music, Bible teaching and deep prayer—all part of a weekend mission event called FaithLift.

The development of FaithLift has been a priority for the diocese following discussions at a recent synod. There was a desire to "make the boundaries between parishes more permeable in order to make better use of the gifts of both clergy and lay people, especially those gifts that are 'transportable,'" explains Bishop Lawton. The FaithLift teams fit the bill. Neither the weekend events nor the teams themselves are "one size fits all"; rather the various teams, drawn from parishes across the diocese, design the theme and program to meet the specific needs of the local parish.

St. Mark's in High Prairie is another parish that recently hosted a FaithLift weekend. Warden Peter Clarke describes the event: "One had a sense that a momentum was gathering, especially as we came back after the meal to continue hearing the word of God, and learning what that could



Bishop Fraser Lawton and the team lead worship during a FaithLift weekend. Photo - contributed.

mean in each of our lives." The weekends usually include a time of prayer and laying on of hands—and it's not just the clergy doing the praying. Clarke describes the "time to step out and make a step forward." Bishop Lawton asked the Holy Spirit to surround the group and gave instructions to those gathered on how to pray for each other. Clarke says this time of prayer was "very intimate...with lots of caring and compassion evident."

For Karen Kovacs, the FaithLift weekend at her Grand Prairie parish had a special significance. On the Saturday evening, she was recalling events from her past: "I didn't realize how heavily it had been weighing on my mind, but it had been 20 years since I attempted suicide and ended up living, by God's grace." Karen was praying with a FaithLift team member when another friend came alongside them. "Someone came up beside me and slipped her hand in mine and it was like a real strength—I

Walking Together

Nova Scotia priest finds partners in the Gospel in the Diocese of Saskatchewan

The Rev. Dr. Mike Foley is a priest in the Diocese of Nova Scotia and PEI. This past fall, he spent a month in the Diocese of Saskatchewan.

CNC: How did this visit come about?

MF: I was reading a copy of CONTACT and in that Bishop Michael talked about ministry in remote communities in northern SK. It came to mind that I was pretty familiar with where I could bump into God in my daily travels in my ministry. But I wasn't at all sure where I would find God in a culture with which I had no familiarity at all. And it was in that initial conversation with Bp. Michael that we began to talk and it became an invitation.

CNC: So what kinds of things did you do while you were there?

MF: I did everything...I was with Rev. Beryl Whitecap, the Priest-in-charge of Weyakwin, Hall Lake, La Ronge and Sucker River. I assisted her in baptisms, in preaching, and also in funerals. And this was a new experience for me—but every week there was a funeral. Counsellor Sam Roberts in Lac La Ronge is also a great supporter of the church; and my friend, Tom Sanderson (a layreader), made me feel so much a part of the communities. Elder Henry Roberts from La Ronge—he took me under his wing. I walked with him in different locations and learned to find God in those places of despair where you could still hope. I also spent time in Stanley Mission: Eugene Merasty and his wife, Alice, invited me into their home and Eugene personally escorted me

- please see WALKING on page 3



The Rev Dr. Mike Foley and The Rev Eugene Merasty on the way to Holy Trinity, Stanley Mission. Photo - Alice Merasty.



Setting up for the healing service in Old Crow. Photo - contributed.

In the Yukon community of Old Crow, Bishop Larry Robertson hears the snow crunch under his boots as he walks to the community hall. On this -43° C evening, there is a fog in the air that you can almost cut with a knife. Following several days of intense pastoral visitation, Bishop Larry is on his way to another service, part of a triad of weekend events—a Saturday funeral, Holy Communion on Sunday morning and now this special community healing service.

Old Crow has seen little of the sun on this day—sunrise was at 12:29 pm and sunset at 2:20 pm. But when he enters the community hall, the warmth and light of Bishop Larry's surroundings dispel the cold and darkness outside. He describes the hall: "All around the room are picture of elders

who have died." This reminds Bishop Larry of the description in Hebrews 11 of "a great crowd of witnesses surrounding us." In a few minutes, the prayers and praises of the community will join with those of the elders and saints that have gone before.

Old Crow is a community that has suffered greatly over the past year, with several untimely and tragic deaths. But it is also a community with a strong heritage of faith—and it is a community that knows where to turn in the face of death and grief. Bishop Larry says, "This is a community with a strong spiritual past that they can call upon."

The Rev. Laurie Munro knows this community well. She has been the Rector of St. Paul's Anglican in Dawson and St.

A Crowd of Witnesses in Old Crow

Prayer, healing and community in the Diocese of the Yukon

Luke's, Old Crow since September, 2011, and visits Old Crow monthly. She is thankful for St. Luke's ministry team, led by Deacon Marion Schafer, that leads weekly Sunday services and provides ongoing pastoral care. Rev. Munro says that along with looking to family and friends for support during difficult times, Old Crow residents do look to God and to the Church. She describes a recent funeral she performed for a young man, after which "many house blessings were requested and many people asked for personal prayer in their homes and on the telephone." She says these prayers were very powerful as "people opened their hearts to God and asked for his power to fill and heal them."

- please see OLD CROW on page 3
2

FAITHLIFT

- continued from page 2

didn't know who it was because I had my eyes closed....But I had a sense after that that there was a real piece of me inside, somewhere in the centre of me, that sort of expanded and I could be filled with the Spirit." At coffee after the service, Karen realized who had been holding her hand. Her friend explained, "Well I was standing beside you and I thought 'Well I should just take her hand.' And then 'No, that's silly, why would I do that?' ...But I had a real sense that I needed to." Kovacs reflects, "So when you have something like that happen, you really understand how God is with you at all times—if you listen for him."

Parishioners from across the diocese have been listening—and signing on to the sacrificial work of the FaithLift teams. And inspired by these mission weekends, Anglicans are deepening their walk of faith and reaching out to the needy and hurting in their northern Alberta parishes and communities.


Sharon Dewey Hetke
Council of the North Communications

Journey through Lent with the Council of the North

Explore Lenten themes of healing, justice and servanthood through dynamic stories about the Church's mission and ministry in the north.

These bulletin inserts, which include prayers and stories, can be used for silent reflection or for weekly Bible studies or devotionals.

Email cnc@national.anglican.ca to subscribe to the Council of the North's weekly Lenten Resources.



OLD CROW

- continued from page 2

This growing openness to the ministries of prayer and healing was encouraged by a service held this past summer on the Sunday before Old Crow hosted a Gwich'in gathering. Rev. Munro says, "Gary Simple from Alaska played guitar and led the singing. I officiated and prayed with the people. Both Gary and I spoke about God's healing work," she says. Since then, the people of Old Crow have wanted to have more services like it and, in early January, "God's timing brought things together," says Rev. Munro. Both she and Bishop Larry saw the event as a breakthrough moment.

The service began quietly with several gospel songs and a teaching time on forgiveness and the path to hope. Those gathered then shared in Holy Communion and were invited forward for personal prayer and anointing with oil for healing. As many lingered for individual prayer time with the clergy, the congregation continued to sing Gospel songs and traditional hymns in the Gwich'in language. Rev. Munro says, "It is hard to describe the wonderful feeling one gets when standing and praying and being privileged to see God at work in a person's life. Tears and laughter, pain and joy mingled as our Lord moved in people's lives."

Bishop Larry describes moments when "anger and fear" were displaced by a "heathy grief and a determination to make change happen with God's help."

And Old Crow's spiritual leaders have the wisdom to know that this event is really just the beginning of the change that needs to come. "As we move ahead, the Church will be taking an active role, working alongside other agencies, in helping the people deal with their grief. Pastoral counselling, personal prayer and healing services will all be part of the community's healing journey."

But the service on January 4th was, in Bishop Larry's mind, a "turning point" in this journey and, he says, "Healing has begun. God is good."

Sharon Dewey Hetke
Council of the North Communications

WALKING

- continued from page 2

to Holy Trinity across the river.

CNC: How were you received by the rest of the community?

MF: Whether or not I had my collar on, I was always treated with the utmost care. You know, it's like bumping into grace in a way...And I can remember my conversation with Bp. Michael at the very beginning. We prayed before I was setting off and he said a beautiful prayer and then he left that pause, which was my invitation to pray—and my prayer was simply to pray for this broken world. And Bp. Michael proceeded to take me to a bulletin board that's located in the diocesan office in Prince Albert. He showed me the faces of young people who had committed suicide over the past year. And he said "This is our broken world—the broken world you'll experience." It's an invitation into that world.

CNC: Can you tell me a bit more about Eugene Merasty's ministry?

MF: Yes, he's been a lay minister in Stanley Mission for a number of years. He's been very actively involved with the church... and again, he's not paid to do this. And you know, people are in the community and they're at his home and he is out and about and some of that is counseling people out of suicidal ideology. And I'm thinking, you know, this is his life. And regardless of how disruptive it must be at times, there was no disruption that I could detect in his voice. It's who he was....I'm afraid that sometimes church becomes so bureaucratized, and we become so concerned about financial considerations, that I think that we can lose a sense of our true mission.

CNC: Was it hard to leave?

MF: It was hard to leave, and I get quite emotional about it....My spirit has never been so stirred.

To read the full interview, go to www.anglican.ca/cn/stories-from-the-council-of-the-north/

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Council of the North Communications

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