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NEWSLETTER

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A partner in the Montreal School of
Theology and affiliated with the School of
Religious Studies, McGill University.

First Fruits: A Reflection on Gratitude

THE REV. DR. LUCILLE MARR, CHAPLAIN

This reflection is from a sermon that Dr. Marr preached in the college chapel in the 2024–2025 academic year.

Deuteronomy 26:1–11 is a Psalm of Thanksgiving that marks the significant Day of First Fruits. This text is unique in the Old Testament in its description of the simple yet moving ceremony where the Jewish people presented the “first fruits” of the harvest as a thank offering to God. This is a typical Psalm of Thanksgiving with a telling of the experience of difficulty, a calling out to God for help, and an offering of praise to God for his salvation.

The Psalmist highlights the brokenness of the Hebrew people's ancestor, Jacob, a wandering Aramean; a lost sheep who found himself living as an alien in Egypt. The Psalmist recalls how, as the Hebrew community grew, the Egyptians treated them harshly and imposed hard labour on them. They cried out for help—to the God of their

ancestors—and God heard them. The Psalm thanks God for bringing them out of Egypt with a mighty hand, a terrifying display of power, with signs and wonders.

Now they are in this place that they call home—this land flowing with milk and honey, a land where they have found stability and peace. In thanksgiving, the Hebrew community offers the first fruits of the harvest, those first tender stalks of barley, to God, and they worship him.

This text calls out the question: Where is God calling us to thanksgiving?

The relief and development agency of the Presbyterian Church in Canada (PWS&D) invites us to show our gratitude to God by our response to the harsh realities of poverty, hunger, and conflict in our global village.

Take the example of Abdul Razak Ayawin, a 23-year-old man from Bugri

community in Northern Ghana. Razak experienced a major accident that resulted in his left leg being amputated. His education stopped suddenly when he faced severe financial constraints and the challenges that people living with disabilities face. This young man didn't know where to turn, until the Presbyterian Church of Ghana's Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) program chose to provide him with support.

Razak enrolled in a dressmaking apprenticeship that gifted him with a sewing machine and a small income. A quick learner, he soon became self-employed and regained his confidence. Razak is saving money to fit himself with a prosthetic leg.

A first-fruit of God's creation, Razak is living his Psalm of thanksgiving with the aid of The Presbyterian World Service and Development Agency.

My nephew Eric has a similar story. Eric is full spectrum autistic. He is thirty-eight years old and has the intellectual and emotional development of an eight-year-old child. Eric is a big man, six feet



four, three hundred and fifty pounds, but requires constant attention and care.

Eric's parents, my brother and his wife, stopped attending church many years ago because they felt that there was no place for them as a family. This is a sad and too-common story for many in the church with disabilities, and their families.

But Eric knows God. He has a heart that is deeply compassionate, and he lives each day in gratitude. Eric has a really surprising and honestly wonderful way of expressing his gratitude.

He is constantly sketching and painting the stories of good and evil that spill forth from his imagination. As the

attached image makes clear (White Lion of God), he paints those stories in vivid colours. He has become quite well-known as an artist in his community. His social workers organize exhibitions, and he has cultivated a following of enthusiastic supporters and benefactors, some of whom purchase his work.

Eric's way of attending church is by watching World Vision on television on Sunday mornings. A couple of years ago when I was visiting, he confided in me: Aunt Lucille, he said, I promised God that for every piece of my art that sells, I'll give half of the money to help those children that I see on TV whose communities don't have wells. I promised God that I'll give half of my earnings so that they can dig wells.

Razak from Ghana and Eric from southern Ontario are among the first-fruits of God's creation. They are overcoming the difficult circumstances of wandering in the deserts of their lives by offering their gifts, their first-fruits to the God who created them. ■

Poetry of Faith and Creation

ROLAND DE VRIES, PRINCIPAL

During my sabbatical in Fall 2024, I had an opportunity for rest, renewal, and research. It represented a unique opportunity to read and write, in ways that are rarely possible within my usual work at the college. One part of my research engaged with the writings of Charles Taylor, and his most recent book, *Cosmic Connections: Poetry in the Age of Disenchantment*. This research and writing of mine was not only a critical engagement with Taylor's work, but also sought to be constructive through the writing of new poems. Here I'd like to share a few of those poems, all of which are intended to capture the link between faith, poetry, and the created/material world that we inhabit by God's grace. Each poem is in the form of a sonnet.



Billings Lake

Retreating glaciers carved the earth below,
To leave a quilt of lakes upon the land,
where winding threads of river shining flow,
and birch and elm and pine take up their stand.
Canoe, our passage in this antique world,
On bright-eyed morn, the water dark and glass,
Wood paddle stroke creates a gentle swirl,
The sunrise, pink orange blue, on surface cast.
The silence of this ancient world runs deep,
As drifting silently we still our souls,
Immersed and quiet now, to hold and keep
This moment, gift, and world alive and whole.
Tis prayer to sit here on this woven seat,
Hand dipped in water, touching coolness sweet.

Baptism

A dip of hand in silver, shining bowl
And feel of water's touch on fingers, skin,
As light refracts in lovely lustrous dance
Of clear and shadowed brightness there within.
From lifted palm a cleansing stream runs down
O'er head and brow, as neurons trace and share
Cool water's gentle course and mingling now
With salty tears of healing, soul's repair.
This river is a cataract of care
From riven side of living, ancient one,
Renewing through this water, touch and prayer,
Exchange of death for life in us begun.
The fragile, strong, and broken gather 'round,
That fullest life and mercy might abound.

Bird at Lachine Rapids

From charcoal feathered wing, a telltale flash
Of crimson bright with starkest yellow hem;
A red-winged blackbird flies both brave and brash,
Then glides and perches near on naked stem.
A better Ozimandius is he,
Who surveys now his territory wide,
Of sedge and grass and waving cattail reeds,
A marshy, royal realm on riverside.
Protector of the nest both fierce and bold,
On high alert to vanquish any threat,
To dive-bomb fox or crow with pecking scold,
In fighting flight bird's fearless beauty met.
Un-self-aware, gregarious it thrives
By antique instinct, more than just alive.

Eucharist

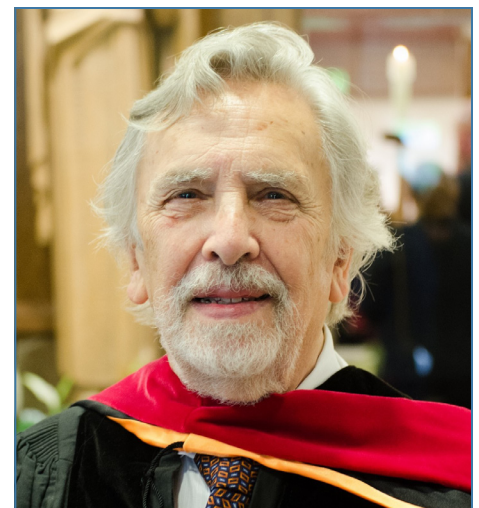
On kitchen counter sourdough at rest,
As flour, salt, and water meld and share,
Awaiting hands to fold and knead and stretch
That wild yeast may leaven bread with air.
The dusted loaf is scored and settled soft
In hot cast iron lodge to swell and rise
And split with sweetest smell and golden crust,
As beauty's daily labour is reprised.
Same loaf is lifted up and torn with prayer
That he who entered death's abode and rose
To life and light, escaping devil's snare,
Might be our life and hope and our repose.
By bread alone that's broken, tasted, held
The risen one is here with us to dwell.

Remembering Douglas John Hall: A Theologian of the Church, For the Church

THE REV. DR. HARRIS ATHANASIADIS, ARMOUR HEIGHTS PC, TORONTO, ONTARIO

I was a 22-year-old first-year PC M.Div. student at McGill. It was my first class in Theology. The professor was Douglas John Hall (DJH). He told us there would be time for questions after the lecture and that, rather than scramble to take down notes, he would give us

a detailed outline and summary of his lecture after the class. He told us he preferred us to listen so as not to miss anything. I sat there and within minutes I was captivated. I soaked in everything like a dry sponge, and I was changed forever. Even as I began ministry a few



years later, I continued my theological studies at the graduate level under Prof. Hall and I've never been the same now 35 years and am still immersed in full-time congregational ministry.

What was it about DJH that was so captivating? He made theology and the way it interpreted the scriptures come alive. He made us feel like we were engaging the most important questions in the world, that what the church could offer was earth-shattering, life-transforming, of ultimate significance for the world and for each of us. He taught us to think contextually—about the time and place we were living and within which we were to do ministry. What did it mean to be a Christian within Canada, within North America, and within a faith that had emerged out of western Christendom? What kinds of questions do we ask about a church in decline? Are we simply concerned to discover strategies to recover the glories of our past or are we seeking deeper answers as to whether the losses are an invitation to do church differently and more authentically than we did it before when deeper questioning was not so urgent? He gave us hope that in decline we could become

something better, closer to what the church and Christianity was before it became the official religion of empire/state.

The way into such questioning, seeking and listening for the Spirit DJH named: "Theology of the Cross." The actual phrase came from Martin Luther the Reformer, but it also pointed to a way of thinking theologically and living as church which had always been there, although hidden on the margins because it was critical of power and a kind of church courting power for status, security and wealth. DJH helped us rethink Christian doctrine and the purpose of the church through the lens of this theology and it has been my orienting approach to church ministry feeding me with hope despite the challenges of finding purpose as church in a time of decline.

Following the way of the theology of the cross, DJH also taught us to look beneath the surface to what is hidden. While throughout the world and in our cities and towns there is much despair that is overt—war, violence, poverty and various forms of oppression, in our

context as churches in Canada often the despair is covert—the inner struggles of persons who have achieved and succeeded on the outside but carry forms of despair within that undermine flourishing of spirit. There is no resurrection without the cross and without digging into the pain and struggle, offering it up to God who comes to be where we are at our worst. This coming to be with us and among us, DJH named a "being with" or an "ontology of communion." If redemption through the cross of Christ leading to authentic resurrection is to begin to happen for us it must be a "redemption from within." God is with us and only by being with us can we then begin to heal toward new life in the Spirit.

Even as DJH was in his 97th year when he died, he continued to think and write well into his 90s. From his more than one hundred articles and two-dozen books, I highlight his three-volume *Theology: Thinking, Professing and Confessing the Faith*, His one volume *The Cross in our Context*, and most recent books: *Waiting for Gospel: An Appeal to the Dispirited Remnants of Protestant Establishment*, and *What Christianity is Not: An Exercise in 'Negative' Theology*. ■



Convocation Day 2025

In a beautiful and moving Convocation Service held at the historic Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul, it was an honour to be with our students to mark a significant milestone in their academic journey.

During the ceremony, we were grateful to confer the Master of Divinity degrees on three students and Master of Theological Studies degrees on four

students. We also recognized those receiving degrees from affiliated institutions. Additionally, we awarded the Honorary Doctorate to the Rev. Dr. Christine O'Reilly.

Inspiring words, heartfelt prayers, and the joyous sounds of celebration were offered as graduates, faculty, family, and friends gathered to honor the hard work and dedication of the Class of 2025. ■

Honorary DD Awardee—Christine O'Reilly



Within today's culture and also within the church, we tend to privilege and value urban life and urban congregations—this goes hand in hand with a frequent neglect of rural life and ministry in rural and smaller congregations. The College is grateful to honour Christine O'Reilly, who has resisted this urban preoccupation. She has dedicated her life and ministry to serve in the rural context.

One beautiful portrait of her commitment and ministry happens yearly in her pastoral charge in the celebration of *Rural Life Sunday*. On that Sunday, as a pastor, Christine offers prayers of blessing on seeds, soil, water, produce,

tractors, and even cows—all on the front lawn of the church on a Sunday morning. Her rural ministry context is also evident in her prayers for farm families and the community, that all would be faithful caretakers of creation.

The Rev. Dr. Christine O'Reilly has been in congregational ministry for 40 years, with more than 35 of those years at Knox Presbyterian Church, in Thedford, Ontario. Thedford is a community of fewer than 1,000 people near Grand Bend, Ontario. Formerly a two-point charge, it has now been a single point charge for more than 15 years.

Rev. Christine's longevity in ministry is itself remarkable—her longevity in the rural context is also a gift and challenge to all of us. Together with the Rev. Peter Bush, Christine is co-author of *Where Twenty or Thirty are Gathered: Leading Worship in the Small Church*, published by the Alban Institute. She has developed workshops on key factors that support life and vitality in rural congregations. She has trained and supported lay people to lead worship and to preach, projects supported in part by grants

from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship.

Christine has a heart for youth. Supporting youth in her local community has been central to her ministry. This priority is reflected in a new addition to the congregational building that is centred on service to local youth—not only those of the church—mostly *not* those of the church.

The Rev. O'Reilly has mentored many pastors over the years. For a season she served as a Mentor in the Mentoring Program of The Presbyterian College. Chris has been an interim moderator more times than she can count and has chaired difficult commissions for the Presbytery in which she serves. She also served on the Committee on Church Doctrine of the Presbyterian church for a time.

For her service as a faithful, persistent, and creative servant of Jesus Christ, and of his gospel, the Doctor of Divinity (honoris causa) was conferred on Christine O'Reilly at Convocation 2025. ■



Congratulations to the Class of 2025!



Will Arledge—*Master of Divinity*

Thanks to a nurturing faith community in North Carolina and irreplaceable mentors in church ministry, becoming a pastor has been a calling that has always rested just under the surface of my life. In 2016 events transpired that would lead to the unearthing of that calling and the pursuit of congregational ministry at McGill University and The Presbyterian College. After many years of working in technology, a period of suffering revealed to my family the immeasurable difference that church community can make when life gets tough. I owe the renewal of my calling to ministry to the miracle of participation in the Body of Christ that is the Church. My hope is that through my ministry I can give back to the Church even a fraction of what it has given me.

Along with my partner Marian and son Liam I have been thoroughly delighted with Montreal and its people as well as the incredible academic and practical theology programs at the College—with McGill University and the Montreal School of Theology. As we re-settle back in North Carolina after three years in Canada, I will soon begin work in a vibrant congregation where my new-found talents and lessons learned “way up North” can find their expression. Thanks be to God!



Elise Bachand—*Master of Theological Studies (practical theology)*

Learning has always been a very important activity for me. After CEGEP, it was obvious to me that I should continue my studies at university, which I did by completing a bachelor's degree in secondary school French education. In the meantime, I met my husband at our church's youth group on the South Shore of Montreal. We have been married for almost 15 years now.

Nine years ago, we moved to the Charlevoix region where we joined a church. After teaching high school for a year in the region, I left the profession and began a part-time job that allowed me to study for the Bachelor of Theology degree at l'Institut de Théologie pour la Francophonie. During my training, God led me to ministry and placed in my heart a sensitivity for the full recognition of women in the Church, a cause I am proud to defend. While pursuing my master's degree at the College, my husband and I were co-pastors at Nouvelle Vie Charlevoix for three years. Over time, God confirmed my calling to theology and to teaching the Word.



Warren-Hervé Beaubrun—*Master of Theological Studies (practical theology)*

I am Warren-Hervé Beaubrun, a man shaped by God's grace and by a history of migration that predates my birth. My mother left Haiti for Canada in 1980, opening a path of hope and faith that I still walk today. It was on Good Friday in 2012 that I received the irresistible call from the Lord to follow Him and devote my life to proclaiming the Gospel. In 2016, I completed my Bachelor of Theology degree, a pivotal milestone that coincided with another blessing: my marriage to Sabrina, the woman who shares my vision, my struggles, and my joys. Together, we were sent to serve, nurture, and love the Church.

Today, I am a church planter in Montreal North, a neighborhood rich in challenges and beauty. God has placed me there to sow the Gospel and walk alongside a diverse and vibrant community. As a father of three treasures—Ayden King (5), Ayana Mia (4), and Ayvie Rose (1)—I was a parent alongside the work of completing my master’s degree in practical theology. I pursued the degree with a desire to become a practitioner even more grounded in listening, biblical wisdom, and cultural relevance. My ministry revolves around discipleship, prayer, and international mission. I live out my pastoral calling as a humble service, rooted in the Word of God and focused on transforming lives. My deepest desire is that Christ be known, loved, and followed in every home and every heart. Soli Deo Gloria.



George Berberian—*Master of Divinity*

Since my conversion in 2008, God has instilled in me a deep desire to serve Him. The journey of growth has been long and challenging, but I have consistently experienced His faithfulness in developing my skills and becoming more Christlike. I earned my Bachelor of Theology in Lebanon and then served as a missionary in Turkey for nearly four years, working with Muslim-background believers and witnessing their sincere desire for truth.

During this time, I enrolled in an online master’s program in biblical studies at Nyack College, New York. After completing that degree, I felt called to pursue practical training for pastoral ministry, leading me to consider the Master of Divinity while also wanting to start a family with my sweetheart, Nanor.

These goals guided me to The Presbyterian College in Montreal, where I became part of a nurturing, spiritual, and academic community. Over three years, my studies broadened my perspective on the world, the Church, and ministry, teaching me to view ministry as an act of love for the glory of God. I am deeply grateful for the PC community, where students find both an academic environment and a welcoming family that embodies God’s kindness and grace.



Fabien Calu—*Master of Theological Studies (practical theology)*

It was in 2017 that my wife Irène and I set foot in Quebec for the first time. Eager to study theology, I enrolled at the Institut de Théologie pour la Francophonie and obtained a bachelor’s degree in theology with a minor in biblical studies. Building on this experience and convinced that my theology should be practical and rooted in my own context, I pursued a master’s degree in theological studies (practical theology) at The Presbyterian College. My sensitivity to the concept of “living together” in our churches—especially regarding multiculturalism and engaging with others—sparked my interest in a topic that was previously unfamiliar to me: my church movement’s perspective on First Nation’s peoples. It is a delicate and difficult subject, but one that is so transformative if we dare to approach it with humility. It took me five years, a few theological shifts, moments of joy and difficult times, but I have no regrets, because I felt that God was with me on this journey.



Sylvie Mayer—*Master of Theology Studies (practical theology)*

At 19, I moved to Montreal to study physical therapy, then went on to study osteopathy, completing my studies and program in 2009. My passion for learning and finding balance to stay healthy pushed me to explore more. After accepting Jesus as my Savior on October 31, 2010, I enrolled at L'Institut de Théologie pour la Francophonie as an auditor for a course in theological leadership. I quickly realized how eager I was to learn, which led me to become a student, with a particular interest in counseling. This led me to obtain a certificate and aspire to a bachelor's degree.

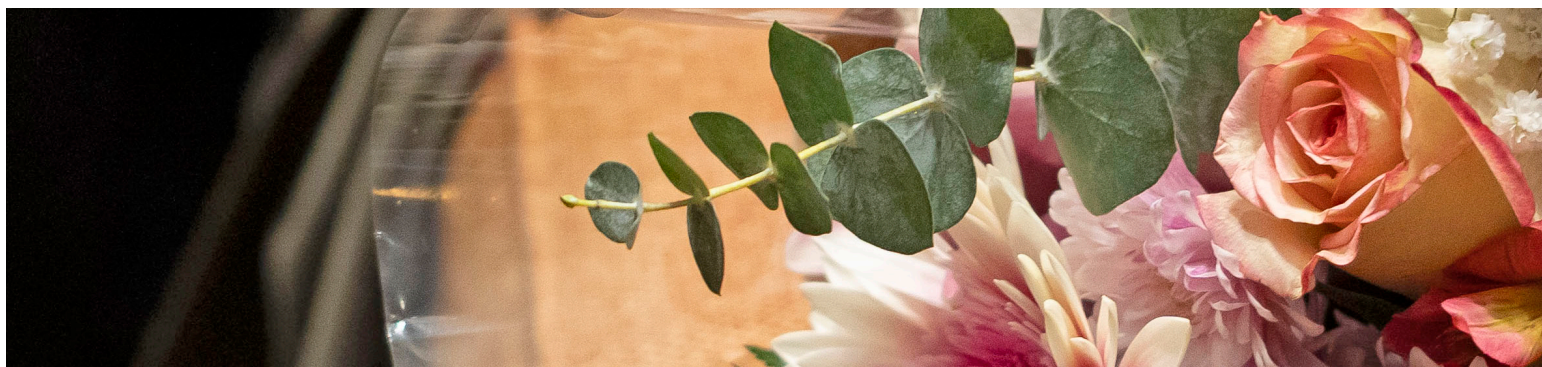
I completed my last undergraduate course in lockdown and graduated via Zoom due to the pandemic. I was touched by the solidarity that emerged from those times but noticed that volunteer engagement had been in decline since. My community in La Petite-Patrie (within Montreal) is known for its dynamism, which inspired me to study the impact of social engagement on church communities. I relied on the Lord throughout this process, knowing that He is my support. Despite the challenges of today's world, I choose to bring hope to transform society.



Dauda Anto Musa—*Master of Sacred Theology (McGill University)*

Dauda Anto Musa comes from Nigeria and is a devoted Christian who first learned about God and the Bible from his parents. He was convicted of his sins and the need for a savior through a revival program and accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior in 1992. After pursuing undergraduate studies at a seminary in Nigeria, he obtained a Bachelor of Theology in 2008, abandoning his career as a certified fitting machinist/welder. After graduating, he married his wife, Margaret, and was appointed a pastor with the United Church of Christ in Nigeria, a Reformed denomination in Nigeria. In 2013, he was ordained as minister of the Word and Sacrament.

Recognizing the need for ongoing growth as a pastor, in 2022 he sought admission to McGill University to pursue a Master of Sacred Theology. During his study at McGill, Musa was an affiliated student with The Presbyterian College and had this to say, "I found PC not just a home but a place to find hope and comfort—a place where I experienced agape love, caring, and support. The faculty members at The Presbyterian College are so amazing and concerned about students' success." Musa, on behalf of his wife Margaret and three children, Dunamis, Divine and Moses, are grateful to the generous donors of the College. With their support, he is graduating without financial debts today.





Kersaint Saint-Juste—*Master of Sacred Theology (McGill University)*

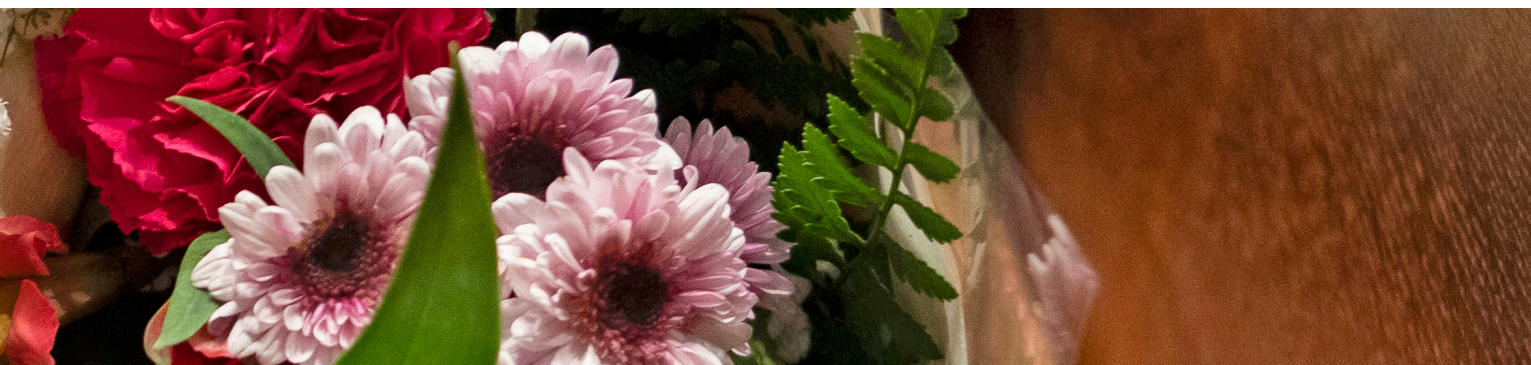
Seven years ago, I moved to Montreal from the nation's capital to pursue theological studies in the School of Religious Studies at McGill, in the Bachelor of Theology program. I did so as an eager 18-year-old. At the time, my desire was simply to dive into and learn the depth of the tradition in which I was raised and which I had made my own three years beforehand. At the time of my admission, I was blessed to receive an invitation from The Presbyterian College to join the community for my studies, an indispensable resource I have grown to deeply value and will sincerely miss.

Seven years later, I am graduating with my Master of Sacred Theology and sense the call toward pastoral ministry in my life. Having gotten married a year ago, my wife and I will be moving to Boston as she pursues her Ph.D. at Harvard, in Classics, and I pursue my M.Div. at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. This next season of 6–8 years in Boston, Lord willing, will be formative for us as I complete my formal theological education (granted, I may undertake a D.Min. down the line as a way to strengthen the effectiveness of my ministry as a reflective exercise) and my wife enters into the scholarly world with hopes of a future professorship. With everything that McGill and The Presbyterian College enabled me to learn about God's calling in my life this past near-decade, I hope to become a faithful local church pastor who also writes broadly for the Church in West, combining both my desire to shepherd God's flock closely in the local church and my ability to write persuasively.



Julielee Stitt—*Master of Divinity*

Julielee was raised on a farm in the Ottawa Valley and attended St. Andrew's Church in Fort Coulonge, Quebec, with her family. In 2018, she moved to Kingston, Ontario, and in 2022, she became an elder at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Kingston. That same year, she acknowledged a quiet and persistent call to ministry. With the support of her church family, she enrolled at The Presbyterian College in Montreal. Over the past year, Julielee has completed a placement with two rural congregations in the Kingston area—St. John's and Sand Hill Presbyterian churches. A passage that has brought her comfort and wonder in recent years comes from the prophet Isaiah: "Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." (Isaiah 43:19)



A Visit to Kenyan Universities

PROFESSOR GERBERN OEGEMA



The College is grateful to be in a long and historic relationship with McGill University (through its School of Religious Studies), and to have Professor Gerbern Oegema as Adjunct Faculty member of the College. Together with the School, we are committed to building a global community of learning and dialogue.

In May I had the privilege of visiting four universities in Nairobi, Kenya, to attend a conference, give lectures, and meet with many colleagues and students.

I visited the **Catholic University of East Africa**, where Prof. Albert Ngengi Mundeke, Professor of Old Testament, gave me a tour and introduced me to several of his colleagues and students. It included a visit of a site for a future research center around Biblical texts. Prof. Mundeke will be a visiting professor at the School of Religious Studies (McGill University) during the academic year 2025–2026 and also give a lecture for our students.

Afterwards I visited the *International Leadership University*, where Christian leaders of the future are prepared for different tasks in the church and more broadly in education. My host here was

Prof. Sarone Ole Sena. He had obtained his doctorate from McGill University with a PhD thesis on the “Maasai: Education & Social Change” under the supervision of Anthropology professor John Galaty, who has done many decades of research on the religion and rituals of the Maasai. Prof. Sarone Sena is a Maasai himself and started as the research assistant of Prof. Galaty before he became a professor himself.

I also met with the Dean of the Theological Faculty there, Prof. Mwaniki Karura, who gave an introduction into theological education in his faculty and organized a meeting with the Vice-Chancellor to discuss possible forms of cooperation, such as student exchange and a combined course. Prof. Karura had just published a book titled *Revelation: Final Exodus*, about how to approach this important book today.

I also visited the headquarters of the **Association of Evangelicals in Africa**, which represents the impressive number of 250 million protestant Christians in Africa and up to 1000 theological seminaries, figures we can only dream of in Canada, and which show the enormous potential of Christianity in Africa.

At the **University of Nairobi**, I visited both the Dean of the Theological Faculty and the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, as well as many professors and students, before I gave a lecture for an interested audience of professors and students on “Climate Change as Apocalypse.” My student Mathew Kipchumba had introduced me to them.

My final visit was of the **Naazarene University**, where the bi-annual conference of New Testament professors and doctoral students was taking place. This conference was organized by my colleague, Prof. Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole, a Philo and Septuagint specialist, who is also a translation consultant of the Bible Society. The university itself is located on a beautiful campus outside of Nairobi, next to the National Park. Here I gave a lecture on “Philo of Alexandria within the context of Second Temple Judaism”, and also spoke in my function of Assistant Secretary of International Initiatives of the Society of New Testament Studies, about the importance of research and developing one’s career as a graduate student and young professional. This is vitally important for young scholars since it will allow each, later in their careers, to have more influence in the church and in society, as well as an opportunity to change things for the better.

Over all, I very much enjoyed my stay and have met many new colleagues and students, with whom I had many valuable conversations about topics that interest all of us. This included Christian leadership in a time of crisis, the importance of education in a global context, and how much climate change affects all of us. ■

Library—New in Books

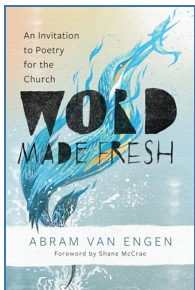
EDYTHE ARNOTT, LIBRARY COORDINATOR



In *The Mother Artist*, Catherine Ricketts explores the intersection between motherhood and the work of an artist; how being a mother who is also an artist has the potential to influence audiences to work for positive change in our world. The author's writing highlights the love she shows for her children and all vulnerable creatures.

Through her gentle descriptions of time spent with her newborn and active toddler the reader is welcomed into the sacred space of mothering. The author acknowledges the limitations motherhood puts on the artist in terms of time yet writes: "...whether an artist comes back to her art practice three weeks or thirty years after her child is born, her audience is better for her departure, and for her return" (188). Each chapter in Ricketts' book focuses on a different topic: pregnancy, labour, infancy, the loss of a child, persevering in art-making through the challenges of motherhood. She reflects on her own experiences and those of painters, sculptors, film directors, writers, and photographers, describing their lives and the challenges they face and have faced in being both mother and artist. The book includes full colour images of these artists' work. Ricketts writes: "The more mothers persevere in making art, the more we draw out the best in one another, thus inviting our audiences to imagine and work for a world humanized by the love of a mother for herself, her family, and her communities" (188).

—Catherine Ricketts, *The Mother Artist: Portraits of Ambition, Limitation, and Creativity* (Broadleaf Books, 2024).

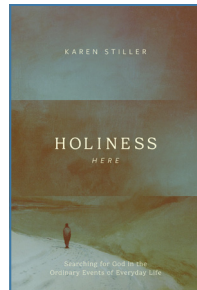


The author of *Word Made Fresh: An Invitation to Poetry for the Church*, Abram Van Engen, teaches and cohosts a podcast about poetry and wants everyone to experience the joy and challenge he himself finds when he delves into poetry: "...poetry is for us, for readers. It longs for us, reaches for us, opens itself to our experience. The

goal of poetry has always been to meet, mark, and make life new" (5). Van Engen shows the reader how poetry can help us look with fresh eyes at the world and gain a new appreciation for all of God's creation and God's gifts to us, while facing the complexities of life: "Becoming the body of Christ means dealing honestly, as Christians, with the difficulties that pieties do not resolve. Poetry renders us that service, particularly the

poetry of Christians...who do not give up on God but instead take their justified sorrow and anger straight to him, striking up the argument and refusing to be consoled by easy answers" (233). The book is divided into two parts: Part 1—How? with chapters such as "Read Personally", "Read for Pleasure", "Ask Questions", ... and Part 2: Why?, which includes chapters entitled "To Name Creation", "To Tell the Truth" ... "To Weep with Those Who Weep." Questions for discussion are included at the end of the book. If you are one of the 88 percent of people who don't regularly read poetry, Van Engen's book may send you running to find some good poetry anthologies for yourself. That's what it did for me!

—Abram Van Engen, *Word Made Fresh: An Invitation to Poetry for the Church* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2024).



The writing in Karen Stiller's *Holiness Here* is open and honest, often with a kind of quiet back-handed humour. For example, reflecting on the quality of humility: "Sometimes we learn humility because we seek it. More often, it finds us sitting around thinking we are a little bit fabulous" (78)—and speaking on how holiness can

be exhibited in seemingly small kindnesses in our everyday lives: "We can be faithful Labrador retrievers, even for just a little while, in the life of someone who needs a friend to bring them their slippers" (31). Stiller is open about her foibles, which many readers will probably find comforting as they recognize in her stories their own weaknesses. The author encourages us to ask for God's forgiveness and then keep going even when we feel 'we'll never get it right': "We can act holy because we are holy, and then we can ask God to forgive us and help us be better when we don't feel that way on the inside. This is not being a hypocrite. This is trying" (32). Stiller incorporates anecdotal stories from her own and her family's life in eastern Ontario into her reflections on various topics such as money, hospitality, and church. Discussion questions for each chapter are included at the end of the book. *Holiness Here* encourages us as Christians and reminds us that we can be holy in even the simplest of human interactions.

—Karen Stiller, *Holiness Here: Searching for God in the Ordinary Events of Everyday Life* (NavPress, 2024).

Leadership Centre Updates

DR. ADRIAN LANGDON

The Leadership Centre has continued its work in supporting pastors and lay leaders through its pastors' conference, and mentoring program, and we have just launched a new Certificate in Lay Leadership.

We hosted the annual *Equip and Encourage Conference* on May 13–15 in beautiful Montreal. It featured Dr. Tod Bolsinger, from Fuller Seminary and AE Sloan Consulting, who led two insightful and challenging sessions on the Tuesday. The conference also included workshops and talks on community engagement (Daria Nardoza), food and faith (Karla Falk), congregational change (Chris Barrigar), and rural ministry (Tyson Rosberg). Each day started with worship and we had a night of jazz with JUNO nominee, Elizabeth Shepherd, a night of contemporary worship with Morris Makafui, and an art workshop with Maria Ezcurra. Though this sounds

busy, there was plenty of time for retreat, reflection, and meeting with others.

The mentoring program also continues to grow. In January we added two French groups. Consisting mostly of graduates of our Master's in Practical Theology program, the first group focuses on transitioning into ministry while the second explores the arts and ministry. One of your longstanding groups led by Chuck Congram finished up this Spring, so we would like to thank Chuck for his many years of service to the program. We have open groups in leadership and healthcare chaplaincy and I continue to explore possibilities of expanding the program and working with other denominations in the Montreal School of Theology.

The LC has also launched a new Certificate in Lay Leadership which will come alongside lay leaders and

help equip them as they grow in ministry competencies. This past winter Principal De Vries led the first online study, *Leading in Prayer*. Program studies include discussions, lectures, small assignments, and responsive feedback. Other studies in the certificate will cover preaching and teaching, pastoral visitation, and missional leadership.

The Presbyterian College is currently developing its own learning management system (LMS) that will be used to host online studies, whether live or synchronous. The first asynchronous course, which is already filmed and edited, will be on faith and work and is entitled *Your Work and the Kingdom*.

If you have any questions or interest in these programs, please contact Adrian Langdon at alangdon@pcmtl.ca. ■

CERTIFICATE IN LAY LEADERSHIP

Be equipped to lead in prayer, to share the gospel, to give care, and to provide leadership for mission.



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