The Bulletin

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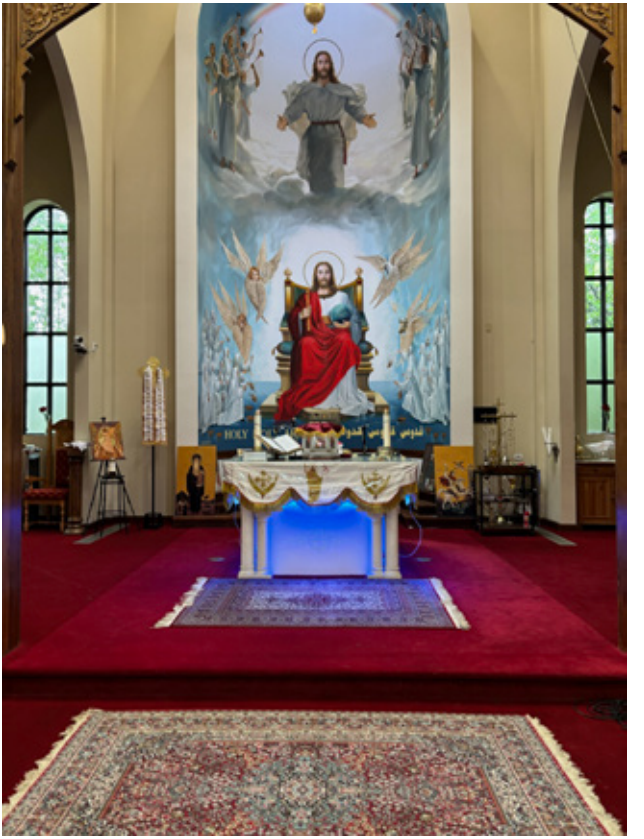

Fall 2025

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COVER: Altar of St. George and St. Anthony Coptic Orthodox Church, Ottawa.

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Editorial

BY SCOTT KINDRED-BARNES

¶ In the fall of 2019 Roger Prentice asked me if I would consider stepping in as the editor of the CABF *Bulletin*. That was pre-pandemic, and I had no idea how the world would change within the coming months. I have enjoyed the challenge of this role very much indeed, but after five years as *Bulletin* Editor, I have decided to step back. Many thanks to those who contributed articles during my tenure and offered kind and encouraging comments along the way.

With so much instability and polarization south of the border it has been challenging to find themes that bring people together rather than divide. However, this edition contains articles that challenge, confront and console, while also bringing diverse people together. Thanks be to God.

The Rev. Dr. Scott Kindred-Barnes is the Senior Minister of Wolfville Baptist Church in Nova Scotia. Before moving back to Wolfville in 2018, Scott served as the Minister of First Baptist Church, Ottawa for seven years. Scott recently accepted a call to Port Williams United Baptist Church in Nova Scotia, starting in January 2026.

Reflections on Attendance at the CCC Meeting

BY HUGH KIRKEGAARD

¶ In late May I took a road trip to Ottawa to attend a meeting of the Governing Board of the Canadian Council of Churches as a representative from our Association. The meeting was held at St. George and St. Anthony Coptic Church as part of a strategy to hold one meeting of the two Governing Board meetings each year in Toronto and the other in another area of the country when possible. The last time we gathered outside of Toronto was in Quebec City in 2023 and in 2026 the hope is to convene in Winnipeg in May.

Among the many concerns which we considered during the three days we gathered in Ottawa were:

- A membership application from the African Methodist Episcopal Church and a presentation by Rev. Dr. Jennifer Leath, an AME Pastor and academic at Queen's University in Kingston. Her reflection at a breakfast for local faith leaders and CCC participants on Christians not losing our saltiness was meaningful. She also provided an introduction to the AME church in Canada, an historic Black denomination with local churches across the country, including one in Amherst, Nova Scotia which is no longer active.

- Over three days of meetings there were presentations on the ongoing peace work and challenges of Project Ploughshares, an organization under the umbrella of the CCC; a presentation by the working Group on Ending Sexual Exploitation in Canada; and one by the Corrections and Restorative Justice Working Group on re-engaging with the work of Restorative Justice and the annual national RJ Symposium.

- The evening events planned for the gathering included a visit to another Orthodox Church in the city where we met with a number of young adults from the Ottawa area and engaged in an intergenerational dialogue together. On the second evening we travelled across the river to Quebec to meet at the Diocesan Centre of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Gatineau for dialogue about the unfolding impact of the Quebec provincial legislation on secularism or "laicite". This latter meeting was a continuation of the dialogue which we began at the Quebec City meeting two years ago as we considered the impact of the provincial law on faith practice and on non-christian faith groups in Quebec.

- A highlight of the last morning we shared together was an opportunity to hear from Father Anthony Mourad, a Coptic Orthodox priest from Montreal who is one of the current vice presidents of the Council. Fr. Anthony spoke about the history of the Coptic Orthodox Church and their presence in Canada. He spoke of the church where we were meeting and the history of the art in the sanctuary which is not typical of Coptic Orthodox Churches. In place of the more traditional iconography found in most Orthodox settings are paintings rendered in a European Baroque style which the founding priest thought would be more engaging in the new church when it was constructed. This more European style was in sharp contrast to the traditional iconography in the other church where we met with youth from the Ottawa area, many of whom were from Orthodox backgrounds.

These twice-yearly meetings continue to be a rich opportunity for dialogue with christians from across the theological spectrum and across our country. In these troubling times such opportunities for dialogue are rare and precious. We are fortunate in the CABF to not only be in these conversations but to have an investment in this significant work of the CCC as a member church. I feel truly blessed to represent us at these meetings and I hope that there are others in our fellowship who may find a place on the Working Groups and Commissions of the Council. The next meeting of the Governing Board will be in Mississauga in late November and I look forward to representing us at this gathering as well.

The Rev. Hugh Kirkegaard represents the CABF on the Governing Board of the Canadian Council of Churches. He served as a prison chaplain in Dorchester, Springhill, Atlantic and Westmorland Institutions; and worked with the development of Community Chaplaincy in Moncton and Saint John. While working as Toronto Community Chaplain in the 1990s, Hugh co-founded Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) for high-risk offenders. From 2000 he worked with the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) as Regional Chaplain for Ontario and Nunavut and taught in the Restorative Justice Program at Queen's Theological College in Kingston, Ontario and in Durban, South Africa. Since 2008 he has served as Regional Chaplain in the Atlantic Region for CSC. Hugh is based in Halifax and attends First Baptist Church.

The Uncomfortable Pew

a sermon preached by REV. JOHN C. PERKIN
at First Baptist Church Ottawa on Epiphany 3
Sunday January 26, 2025

BASED ON LUKE 4:14-21

¶ *We live in an increasingly dualistic world, in which everything is seen as good or bad, right or wrong, of God or of the devil.* The reality, of course, is that the world is much more nuanced, ambiguous; as Russian novelist and mystic Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote in his study on the Soviet prison system, *The Gulag Archipelago* (building on a comment made by Russian Fyodor Dostoyevsky a century earlier): *"The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart—and through all human hearts."* But we are not comfortable with nuance, with ambiguity and uncertainty, with grey areas and moral dilemmas. So we make things simple and straightforward, as a way of dealing with things by not dealing with them. Our evolutionary past has determined that when we face things that

make us uncomfortable, anxious or afraid, we typically respond with fight or flight, by dehumanizing people we don't understand or running from them. But as complex human beings, we have more than options than a lizard-sized brain would allow. We can creatively, imaginatively and even compassionately respond by neither condemning nor clearing out, neither fighting nor fleeing.

Compassion, then, is a sign of intelligence—not the kind that is learned in schools or universities, but the kind that is learned through meaningful relationships with others, through living in a community of caring and love, through an intentional grounding in faith and an awareness of one's relationship with the holy. Jesus called people into relationships with God, the church nurtured relationships with others, in part so that we would grow in love and compassion, and seek a third way in life. It is the meaningful and developed faith that nurtures love, and it is perfect love that casts out fear, allowing us to seek that third way forward, neither demonizing others nor being dominated by them. As followers of Jesus, we are called neither to conform to the world around us, nor to abandon it.

This dualism I have described is increasing in our contemporary world, giving rise to those who would claim power not to serve the nation or its people, but to feed their own egos. It is the culmination of a process that began a decade earlier as a loss of trust—what one researcher called the decline of deference—in major institutions, such as government, education, media, business and of course church. With that loss of trust in religious organizations came a massive decline in church attendance through the 1990s, and as Acadia University sociologist Kurt Bowen noted in his 2005 book *Christians in a Secular World*, the decline in church attendance also translated into a significant decline in charitable givings, volunteer work, engagement in the public sphere and more. When people stop going to church, it is clear that it is not only the church that suffers, it is the society that surrounds it. Indeed, over the last several years, we have seen a further erosion of investment in and involvement with others in what is being referred to by academics and in the media as a deficit of compassion.

When compassion is lost, when people are excluded, it allows for them not to be dehumanized, and they can be talked about as

statistics or challenges or problems, or made even more marginal and even expendable in the name of economic recovery or making a nation great again or other grand scheme that empowers the plutocracy but does not serve the commoner. In this context Jesus spoke truth to power, calling for justice, that process of working to ensure the safeguarding of the inherent value of all human beings, regardless of their income level, social position, ethnicity, culture, sexual identity or their potential for productivity. The prophets before him had argued for the care of the most marginalized, those whose lives were most at risk: the widows, the orphans and those displaced by war—in our world we call them refugees. And the need is still there, and the context in which we live is different from that of Jesus, and yet the essence is the same: gross inequality, lack of justice for the marginal, an absence of compassion for those who live in fear.

We see this loss of compassion at the highest levels of government; when Episcopal Bishop Mariann Budde spoke at President Trump's inauguration prayer service in the Washington National Cathedral on Tuesday morning (January 21), she reminded him of the Christian way: the call to hold love for others made real in extending mercy to them, particularly the marginal. And in response, the President used his position as a bully pulpit to demean her, writing in a tweet that "she brought her church into the world of politics in a very ungracious way; she was nasty in tone, and not compelling or smart," ultimately accusing her of being bad at her job. This, because she preached the gospel that calls us to extend love and mercy to the marginal and fearful.

But this is precisely the role of the church and the people in it: to stand in opposition to the world when the world loses its compassion, to speak truth to power when the powers demean, threaten, vilify and express hatred of others, to extend compassion and love and mercy to those the world would dismiss, ignore, reject or victimize. Our role is to be the presence of Christ in the world. The church has not always done this, or done it well. In the early years of the twentieth century, the social gospel was proclaimed, going back to the words and actions of Jesus and finding there a model for engaging the world to call it away from a vision of progress that destroyed people in the name of profit, that victimized people in

the name of power, that ground people down in the name of advancement. The champion of that movement was Baptist theologian of the social gospel Walter Rauschenbusch, heralded in later years by none other than Martin Luther King. King wrote. *"It has been my conviction ever since reading Rauschenbusch that any religion which professes itself to be concerned with the souls of people and is not concerned with the social and economic conditions that scar the soul, is a spiritually moribund religion only waiting for the day to be buried."*

Such was the indictment of Canadian churches by journalist Pierre Berton. Writing just over sixty years ago, he laid a charge against the Canadian church in a scathing attack, saying when we take the message of the gospel to the streets it tends to be more "attend the church of your choice rather than love one another." The church had created, he wrote, a comfortable pew, which made few demands of its people. So when Bishop Budde gave a call to the President to offer mercy to people living in fear, she was simply proclaiming the gospel, speaking the truth of the good news of Jesus Christ to the powers that be.

This is exactly where Jesus began his ministry. Having been baptized, having agonized over his call during a forty-day sojourn in the wilderness, having stood up to a time of testing and temptation, he was ready to begin his messianic work of announcing the Kingdom of God, a kingdom that welcomes in all people and is open to all people. Returning to his home town of Nazareth, he went to the synagogue, and read scripture.

We Baptists know the importance of reading scripture, and not just reading it but understanding it. There is a long tradition here. It goes back to the days when Jerusalem was being rebuilt after the exile in Babylon. The Jews had returned, Nehemiah had been called of God to supervise the task of building up the city and gathering the people back together, and as part of this process Ezra, the scribe and priest, read the book of the law to the people. In a largely non-literate culture, it was important that things be read aloud so that people would hear and learn and know. And what they were hearing and learning and remembering was their identity as God's people, and the way they were to live that identity out as people of God was in obedience to the law. It set them apart from other nations, and held them accountable. It is the same

for us—when we read scripture, we hear the stories that shape our identity, and we hear the stories that model the way we are to live, we see the way we are to call our world to the standards that God wants for the Kingdom: justice, inclusion, mercy, grace and love.

When Jesus read scripture in Nazareth, he turned to the prophet Isaiah. We don't know if this was the reading appointed for that day, if it was a passage suggested by someone else, or whether Jesus chose it himself. I think it likely that Jesus might have made the selection, because it informs what he says next, and what he spends the next three years doing. He stood, and likely the people stood to hear the text, and he read these words: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed."* Then he sat down. He was not preaching so much as teaching, as rabbis did, and rabbis sat to teach. And Jesus began to teach the people about this text, saying first, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

In other words, Jesus says, I am here to make this happen. I am going to bring religion into the world of politics, I am going to call for a world that is human and humane, that is filled with mercy and grace, that casts out fear and creates peace, that cares for the people who are rejected, despised and hated by the world. Jesus did the unexpected, and opened a third way beyond hating people or abandoning them. And he calls us to do the same. We are bid to welcome in the marginal, the captive, the oppressed. We are called to see beyond the labels the world gives, and see people not as refugees or immigrants, not as gay or trans, not as male or female, not as black or white, not as rich or poor, but as children of God. We are called to look beyond the dualities of the world, and see a third way. We are called to be political, in the sense that Oscar Romero spelled out: we are political when we point out political, economic and social sins, for this is making the word of God incarnate in our reality, bring the living Christ to bear in our world, bearing hope and love to those who despair and are lost. We are called to step into the world of politics, because if we stand back we leave a void for extremists to fill. We are called to stand up and be counted, to stand up and be heard, to stand up and call for mercy and for justice for all people, Gazans and Ukrainians,

migrant workers and those whose gender identity is non-binary, for the poor and the homeless, the lost and the lonely.

And that is a challenging way, a hard way, but it a fulfilling and redemptive way, and it is the only way to the Kingdom.

So, each Sunday, as we sit and hear the gospel again, we are reminded to seek that third way, the way of mercy and compassion, the way of love and growth, the way that transforms the world one life and one institution at a time. We are invited to listen, sitting in an uncomfortable pew, for this is where the gospel calls us to be, and this is where real ministry in the name of Jesus Christ begins. And this, and only this, will truly bring hope and change to the world.

The Rev. John Perkin is the Minister of First Baptist Church, Ottawa. Before moving to Ottawa in 2020, John served as Chaplain and Adjunct Professor at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick for 27 years.

On Consolation

Michael Ignatieff, *On Consolation: Finding Solace in Dark Times,* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2021), 283 pages.
ISBN 9780805055214

REVIEWED BY ED COLQUHOUN

¶ How does one endure the suffering of the human condition, made worse when the times seem out of joint, of a stressful life moving towards its inevitable end, and of the sorrow of bereavement that no one with any sensitivity can escape? Is it possible that Ignatieff—a self-described nonbeliever, an academic who for a time was leader of one of Canada's national political parties—could reflect usefully on these questions?

In fact, beginning with the Old Testament figure of Job and end-

ing with the great Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz, in exile from Soviet tyranny, Ignatieff the historian takes us through the response to suffering of a score of fellow human beings whom we thought we knew—people as diverse as Karl Marx, Abraham Lincoln, and the Apostle Paul. Surprisingly, Ignatieff credits Paul with much that he admires: "Paul created a language of consolation that was the first and most powerful language of human equality ever created, the one that, mostly unacknowledged, underpins the secular, revolutionary, socialist, humanist, and liberal languages of equality that came afterwards." Occasionally, this biographical cornucopia reveals a lesser-known figure like Doctor Cicely Saunders, founder of the hospice movement, which has provided consolation to so many.

Can this book be helpful to those living through the trials of contemporary life? As well as a window on the inner lives of many notable people*, On Consolation* can help one gain perspective on what seems to be particularly difficult times. It is possible that if the tragedy of Alexei Navalny, martyred by Putin's Russia, had occurred prior to Ignatieff writing *On Consolation*, it would have found its place in the fourteenth chapter of this book (The Consolation of Witness) as a Christian witness to one of the monstrous tyrannies of this century. It has helped this reviewer to understand why Navalny did return willingly to Russia to almost certain death.

Ed Colquhoun is a retired educator who has served as editor of this Bulletin and twice as president of the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship, the predecessor organization of the CABF.

My First Interfaith Prayer Service

BY ROB HANKINSON

¶ My first Interfaith Prayer service was on March 21st, 1990, in Edmonton Alberta. For 28 years thereafter, every March 21st, either at Edmonton's City Hall or McEwan University, I joined others in praying for the elimination of racial discrimination. The common agreement was that the prayers took the form of the pray-ers choosing, and "that they be as short as reasonable" given that our service took place over the lunch hour.

March 21st is the United Nations' International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (IDERD), a day commemorating the March 21st, 1960, Sharpeville South Africa massacre. On that day police fired on a crowd of some 20, 000 people organized by the Pan-Africanist Congress in a countrywide demonstration for the abolition of South Africa's pass laws. As a result, 69 protestors were killed, more than 180 were wounded, 50 women and children were among the victims. Reports of this incident helped focus international criticism on South Africa's apartheid policy. I remember my Grade 6 Civics teacher telling her class that "apartheid was a sin!". Following the dismantling of apartheid, President Nelson Mandela chose Sharpeville as the site at which he, on Dec. 10th, 1996, signed into law South Africa's new Constitution.

The United Nations in 1966 declared March 21st as IDERD. In 1989 Canada became one of the first nations to observe this date, and in 1990 the Edmonton Interfaith Network joined with Canadians for Interfaith Awareness and Harmony, and World Interfaith Education Association in inaugurating the Edmonton IDERD Interfaith Prayer Service. I attended this first service.

Six years later this prayer service would become the signature event for the newly established Edmonton Interfaith Centre for Education and Action (1996-present). From the outset support

for this multicultural, multifaith prayer service was overwhelming from both the City and the University. The mayor would bring his grandchildren and assist their candle lighting. Also, during the 1990's McEwan University was exploring creating a multifaith Chapel and Chaplaincy and this service served to highlight their efforts to address the spiritual needs of their diverse community of scholars and teachers.

Who were the pray-ers? As we frequently said, "our pray-ers were from A to Z", i.e., from Aboriginal to Zoroastrian, with everyone else, from Abrahamic faiths to Bahais to Jains to Sikhs to Taoists, in between. And after a couple of years there was a new and positive development. At the conclusion of each prayer the attendees would respond in unison: "We affirm this prayer!" This liturgical addition continues, both symbolizing and advancing the growing interfaith community the world so needs.

What did we learn? First, that the scourge of racism remains a systemic and structural reality; that we are all susceptible to this virus; that as a praying people of faith we hold more in common than we know or occasionally acknowledge; that in terms of prayers for peace, justice, compassion, and the sustainability of creation, we are one; and finally, and always we must pray and work for the elimination of racial discrimination.

I leave with you an interfaith prayer you may wish to use in your own community. It is taken from Joel Beverluis' classic *A Source-Book for Earth's Community of Religions* (1995):

❧ PRAYER FOR THE SACRED COMMUNITY

O Blessed Source,
eternal Lord of creation,
sustainer of all worlds,
you embrace the whole cosmos within yourself,
for everything exists in you.
Let your winds come and breathe your everlasting Spirit in us.
Let us inhale your divine Spirit and be inspired.
Enlighten us in your truth.
Pour your grace into our hearts.
Wipe away our sin and all negativity.

Transform us into your Love,
and let us radiate that Love to all others.
Inflame us with your unending life.
Dissolve our limited way of being.
Elevate us into your divine life.
Give us your capacity to share that life with everyone.
Shape us in your wisdom.
Grant us your joy and laughter.
Let us become that divine wisdom, sensitivity,
laughter enjoy for all beings.
Let us realize fully that we are members of that Sacred Community
with all humankind, with other species,
with nature and the entire cosmos.
Grant us a heart that can embrace them all in you.
Let us be in communion with you forever in the bliss of that Love:
the love that sustains all
and transforms all into your Divine Radiance.

— *Brother Wayne Teasdale*

The Rev. Dr. Robert Hankinson is a retired United Church Minister who now lives in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. In 2025, Rob received the King Charles III Coronation Medal for his many years of Interfaith work.

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