

# Hope and Surprise

## Reflections for the Season of Advent

by The Very Rev. Ken Gray



**PWRDF**

The Primate's World Relief  
and Development Fund

*The Anglican Church of Canada*

Advent 2024

# Table of Contents

|                                |    |
|--------------------------------|----|
| Introduction.....              | 3  |
| About the Author.....          | 3  |
| How to Use this Resource ..... | 3  |
| <b>Week 1: Advent 1: Hope</b>  |    |
| Sunday, December 1 .....       | 4  |
| Monday, December 2 .....       | 6  |
| Tuesday, December 3.....       | 8  |
| Wednesday, December 4 .....    | 10 |
| Thursday, December 5 .....     | 12 |
| Friday, December 6.....        | 14 |
| <b>Week 2: Advent 2: Peace</b> |    |
| Sunday, December 8.....        | 16 |
| Monday, December 9.....        | 18 |
| Tuesday, December 10.....      | 20 |
| Wednesday, December 11.....    | 22 |
| Thursday, December 12.....     | 24 |
| Friday, December 13.....       | 26 |
| <b>Week 3: Advent 3: Joy</b>   |    |
| Sunday, December 15 .....      | 28 |
| Monday, December 16 .....      | 30 |
| Tuesday, December 17.....      | 32 |
| Wednesday, December 18.....    | 34 |
| Thursday, December 19.....     | 36 |
| Friday, December 20.....       | 38 |
| <b>Week 4: Advent 4: Love</b>  |    |
| Sunday, December 22 .....      | 40 |
| Monday, December 23 .....      | 42 |
| Tuesday, December 24.....      | 44 |



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# Introduction

In 1955, writer C.S. Lewis published, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*. He borrowed the title from William Wordsworth's 1815 poem *Surprised by Joy*; a poem that holds in tension both joy and grief; a joy that wants to be shared and a grief for a loved one who is no more. Lewis wrote that joy is like a "signpost" to those who are lost, pointing the way forward.

As we begin the Advent season this year, it is a challenge to identify the signposts of hope and joy in a world that seems evermore polarized and in conflict; where grief is a daily reality for so many. And yet... that is what the Very Rev. Ken Gray invites us to do in this year's PWRDF Advent resource. Through scripture, reflections, photos, prayers and song lyrics, he invites us to find hope in the small everyday wonders of our lives and the lives and work of our PWRDF partners. And he invites us into the anticipation and surprise and joy that is the Advent journey.

"Advent," he writes, "is that exciting season of the church year when we look to the future from our place in the present. Advent invites us and prods us to pay

attention to what is going on, locally, globally, all around us, and within us. As the children's song goes: 'God is a surprise.' So be ready, to be surprised. Prepare for what is unpredictable."

In the weeks ahead, you are invited to hold in prayer all that brings you hope and surprise. For a child is about to be born, and that is reason for joy.

In Advent Hope,  
*Suzanne Rumsey*  
Public Engagement Program Coordinator

P.S. The "signpost" that is the name, The Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF) is changing to Alongside Hope. Who we are and what we do, however, is not changing. This is reflected in the tag line for the new name: Anglicans and partners working for change in Canada and around the world. The transition to our new name is a process. Thus, as with this resource, you will see that we will continue to reference PWRDF for a time.



## About the author

Now in retirement from over 35 years of lay and ordained ministry throughout the Anglican Church of Canada, the Very Rev. Ken Gray devotes much of his time to environmental advocacy, teaching and writing, blogging, and photography. You can follow his blog at <https://take-note.ca/>. His images may be viewed at <https://grayintheforest.smugmug.com/>. He recently co-edited and published *Partnership as Mission: Essays in Memory of Ellie Johnson* (November 2023) available from Wipf and Stock Publishing, Eugene. He lives with his partner, Kathie, and dog-blogger Labradoodle Juno, in Summerland BC.

## How to use this resource

### ON PAPER

Print the PDF. "PWRDF Stories" are included in full where possible, with the URLs beneath them to read the entire story online.

### ON A SCREEN

PWRDF Story links are also embedded within the text of the digital PDF and will take you directly to our website.

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Hope: A Promise is a Promise

Sunday, December 1

## READ

### **Jeremiah 33:14-16**

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfil the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: “The Lord is our righteousness.

## REFLECT

Some days, I find it hard to find hope in these words: Given events familiar to us all during 2024—in the Middle East, in Jerusalem and Gaza, in Ukraine, in South Sudan, and in Haiti—conflicts continue, lives are still lost, and safety, security, and stability remain elusive for so many. To me, it seems that a massive promise remains if not fulfilled, then at least ignored. Yet a promise is a promise, isn't it?

We all make promises—partners in relationships, siblings within families, politicians to constituents, leaders and followers reciprocally in faith communities. A promise is a declaration or assurance that one will do something, or make something happen in a timely fashion. A promise expresses a commitment to honour what is spoken; it is a verbal tool that will strengthen relationships; a promise sincerely delivered is a vehicle for hope.

So where I ask is hope for those stranded in conflict zones? I am an amateur photographer. The old rule is “f8 and show up”; choose a focus point, and snap the picture. Through an ecojustice lens, someone needs to show up where the need is evident, to be an agent of change, not through the reckless administration of more violence, but with a commitment to peace.

Truth be told: God shows up, through us, with us, as a source of strength, resilience, and healing, as an embodiment of love.

In faithful obedience to God's call, PWRDF promises to support those who trust in God's promise: “The Lord is our righteousness,” and our hope. Promise.

## PRAY

*The days are coming  
and still come  
where the righteous cry for justice  
over and over and over;  
May our voice never waver  
as we wait for the One  
who comes daily  
for all, and in all. Amen.*

—KJG



## Fight for Right bring warmth to Ukrainians with disabilities

Amidst the devastation of the war in Ukraine, Mikhailo is fighting for a decent life in Kherson, a city damaged by Russian troops for the third consecutive year. Despite his challenges of living with a disability, he remains determined to survive and thrive.

Mikhailo's journey has been marked by hardship and resilience. After two complicated surgeries following a hip fracture, his condition failed to improve, and he now relies on a walker to move around. His attempts to qualify for more assistance were thwarted by the occupation forces, leaving him without adequate support.

Winter brings additional challenges for Mikhailo, as he has to plan every detail of his day to survive. With limited job opportunities in the war-torn city, it's nearly impossible for an elderly person with a disability to earn extra income. His pension barely covers his needs, making meeting basic needs an everyday struggle.

In 2022, PWRDF began partnering with Fight for Right to address the critical needs of people with disabilities in Ukraine, who were disproportionately affected by the conflict. Through PWRDF's \$64,000 grant,

Fight for Right's efforts to provide evacuation assistance, medical and psychological support, accommodations, and financial aid to those in need were supported. Specifically, PWRDF's funding helped establish a 24-hour hotline, which enabled Fight for Right to respond to requests for safe evacuation, medical supplies, and assistive technologies such as wheelchairs and hearing devices. As a result, Fight for Right was able to evacuate or assist over 645 people with disabilities.

In 2023, PWRDF supported Fight for Right's TEPLO project to provide essential items to people so they could survive the cold winter. Mikhailo received a heater, thermos, and solar-powered lantern to help him navigate power outages.

The project offers essential supplies like warm clothing, power banks, and heating units to internally displaced people with disabilities, helping them survive the harsh winter conditions. With the support of partners and donors, the TEPLO project has made a significant impact in the lives of 750 families of PWDs, providing them with the necessary resources to face the challenges of war and displacement.

Read the whole story at <https://pwrdf.org/pwrdf-and-fight-for-right-bring-warmth-to-ukrainians-with-disabilities/>



Hope: People Get Ready

Monday, December 2

## READ

**Matthew 24:42-44**

Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

## REFLECT

My wife and I have very different perspectives on time management. Call it family upbringing, differing personalities, or conflicting organizational habits; whatever. When we need to be somewhere at a particular time I will say something like “we need to be there ready to function by X o’clock.” She however is more relaxed about timing and schedules; admittedly, I may be a bit obsessive; she, however, might benefit from a more disciplined punctuality. I still maintain that showing up on time is good; early is OK too.

Advent is that exciting season of the church year when we look to the future from our place in the present. Advent invites us, and prods us to pay attention to what is going on, locally, globally, all around us, and within us. As the children’s song goes: “God is a surprise.” So be ready, to be

surprised. Prepare for what is unpredictable.

Living the Christian life in places as varied as Parksville, Port Au Prince, Portland, and Paris shapes *what* we see and *how we look*. It is not that Truth is merely contextual; context however influences what and how we see, *what simply is*. PWRDF creates a golden opportunity for us, to look and to see, unpredictably, to discover ecojustice realities in the lives of partner churches, communities, and persons nationally and globally.

There’s an old 1965 single recorded by The Impressions, *People Get Ready* that has become for me an Advent anthem. Advent calls us, all people, to get ready, to open the doors and get on board, together, for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. Perhaps this song can be your prayer for today, and every day:

## PRAY

*People get ready for the train to Jordan  
It’s picking up passengers from coast to coast  
Faith is the key, open the doors and board ‘em  
There’s hope for all among those loved the most.*

—Curtis Mayfield



## Planting seeds of change at Tanzania's Nyarugusu Refugee Camp

In the heart of Tanzania's Kigoma Region, the Nyarugusu Refugee Camp is home to more than 137,000 refugees, mostly from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi. Despite the challenges they face, hope has emerged through a sustainable harvest project, implemented by Church World Service (CWS) with support from PWRDF. This project has not only improved nutrition and food security but has empowered refugees to become change-makers in their own communities.

Asumani Ibocwa's story is a true testament to the project's impact. Since joining the project in 2022, he has received training in sustainable vegetable farming practices, including how to make compost, pest management, and seed production. Inspired by gender training, Ibocwa and his wife, Nadia Faida, have worked together to increase productivity, farming vegetables for both household consumption and sale. Their dedication has paid off, with harvests of 10-15 kg of leafy vegetables, and a plot set aside for growing vegetables. Ibocwa says the project has restored stability and brought newfound happiness to his family, which includes four children. They have also increased their monthly household income to USD\$103 (150,000 Tanzanian Shillings).

Nadia Faida processes harvested seeds, ensuring quality and viability. Seeds are

replanted for their garden's sustenance, while surplus seeds are sold for income.

In addition to increasing food security, the project is addressing the need for gender equality in Tanzania. Faida ensures the quality of the gathered seeds by processing them as well. Their family has found joy in their dedication to sustainable agriculture and the ability to be self-reliant. Asumani and Nadia's story is an inspiration for their community, showing the value of cooperation and support among each other.

The project's success extends beyond the Ibocwa family. Five multi-purpose greenhouses were built, providing farmers a place to learn and share knowledge. Farmers like Ibocwa, have emerged as leaders who guide their peers and promote best practices. The project has also introduced perennial vegetables like chaya and moringa, which have become popular at the settlement camp.

In addition to vegetable production, the project has promoted tree planting, with 16,582 tree seedlings planted this year. The survival rate of these trees ranges from 60% to 80%, with some already benefiting the community. This initiative has not only improved the environment but also provided shade, fruit, and other essential resources.

Read the whole story at <https://pwrdf.org/planting-seeds-of-change-at-tanzanias-nyarugusu-refugee-camp/>



*Hope: Choose Life*

**Tuesday, December 3**

## READ

### ***Deuteronomy 30:19-20***

This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

## REFLECT

The chief benefit of privilege is choice. Middle-class Canadians can choose what to eat, how to dress, where to live, how to work, play, and pray. We are amongst the most fortunate in the world. In almost every situation, we have choices and options. Even in situations such as serious or even terminal illness, most of us enjoy the privilege of choice. Elsewhere, others are less fortunate.

There is no point feeling guilty about this disparity. However it's crucial to acknowledge how the gap is real, and when it becomes too large, tension, violence, and injustice appear. Choices become restricted, and hope dims. The question then remains what to do? How should people of faith react to injustice? What are the best choices in such situations? Some turn to pity; others to revenge; others to violence; others to withdrawal.

For myself, I know that when I feel hemmed in by circumstances, relationships, or confusions, I become nervous and stressed. What I need in those moments is community, someone with whom to speak and strategize. I can face most things as long as I don't feel alone.

I love the stories shared on the PWRDF website, stories of community and hope, stories like that of people like Mercy Gwegweni who survived cyclone Idai in a remote village in Zimbabwe. Mercy Gwegweni and her community can now make good choices, in part through gifts from the PWRDF. She can now choose life. May her story be told, from generation to generation.

## PRAY

*Choose life that you might live,  
Choose life that you might see a tomorrow;  
Let justice roll; flow like a river;  
Flow like a river down*

—Colleen Fulmer





## PWRDF partner TSURO Trust restores hope in Zimbabwe

The scars are visible.

Deep gullies. Deforested hills. Washed out roads. Five years after Cyclone Idai, the scars are still visible. It hit Chimanimani, Zimbabwe with unprecedented force. From March 14 to 17 the cyclone's heavy winds and sustained rainfall triggered landslides and flash floods.

But the scars go beyond the landscape.

The storm claimed 300 lives, displaced thousands and impacted the livelihoods of over half the population of Chimanimani District.

Livelihoods of people like Mercy Gwegweni. Gwegweni has lived in Zandonyi village since marrying her husband 29 years ago. Together they raised their three children in the village. Though it is remote, it was well connected to nearby centres with good access to schools and health care. But Idai's flash floods washed out bridges and left many road impassible. The nearest clinic is now a 15 km walk. And Gwegweni is unable to get her tomatoes, once a valuable cash-crop, to market.

COVID worsened the situation. Tourism, already badly affected by the cyclone, all but disappeared in 2020. To make money to buy household essentials some people turned to gold mining. The destruction caused by Idai opened up land to artisanal mining. While mining policies are in place enforcement was limited. Many miners used chemicals such as mercury and cyanide to separate gold

from the ore and soil. This contaminated by-product was freely released into rivers and water catchments creating highly toxic water for those living downstream. This has led to a sharp increase in cyanide poisoning.

Driving through the winding roads of hilly Chimanimani it is easy to understand why tourists would be attracted to the beautiful landscapes. The terrain is marked with tall eucalypts trees and waterfalls. This unique biosphere represents 30% of Zimbabwe's biodiversity and is home to 74 species of plants and birds that are only found here. The events of the last five years have demonstrated the fragility of this landscape and the livelihoods that depend on it.

PWRDF's partner, TRUSO Trust, has been working in Chimanimani for more than 20 years. Founded by farmers coming together to form cooperatives and learn new, sustainable agricultural techniques, TSURO Trust has long been a champion for preserving the unique eco-system of Chimanimani.

A new three-year project has begun to renew and preserve this unique landscape. Working in partnership with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank and with support from Global Affairs Canada, the project introduces nature-based solutions (NBS) that aim to protect, manage and restore ecosystems as well as address societal challenges, such as food security.

Read the whole story at <https://pwrdf.org/pwrdf-partner-tsuru-trust-restores-hope-in-zimbabwe/>



## Hope: On Waiting

# Wednesday, December 4

### READ

#### 2 Peter 3:11-12

Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and destroyed and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

### REFLECT

I live in the beautiful Okanagan Valley in British Columbia, a little bit of paradise, home to all ages of residents, many in the riper years of life. Many call our home “God’s waiting room.” Many of us wait through the circumstances and queries of our later lives. Questions such as “waiting for whom,” and “how must I wait,” and “how long O Lord,” are apt in our context.

Full disclosure: I hate waiting as much as anyone. Whether picking the wrong line at the grocery store, or waiting for the bus, or waiting for business to conclude, waiting for me feels like a waste of time. In many instances however, I have no choice.

Now in my sixties I am trying to figure out what my *body* is up to. More times than not, I wonder what my *community* is up to. And yes, I do wonder

sometimes what *God* is up to. Surely, Creator, you could do more? You could act demonstratively, and now!

Truth be told, I, and we, must wait. What does such waiting look like? What is the difference, if any, between active waiting and passivity? The late Henri Nouwen developed a “spirituality of waiting,” a practice especially suited for Advent. Nouwen writes, “the life of Jesus tells us that not being in control is part of the human condition.”

American theologian and founder of the Sojourner’s Community in Washington D.C., Jim Wallis first introduced me to the phrase “waiting for *and hastening* the coming of the day of God.” No matter how we understand the practice of waiting, especially in Advent, we learn to wait.

### PRAY

*Wait for the Lord, whose day is near;  
Wait for the Lord: Be strong, take heart*

—Iona Community



## Healing and peace building continue in South Sudan

In 2022, PWRDF began supporting a project with the Episcopal Church of South Sudan (ECSS) to help people returning home after the civil war to rebuild their lives. Based on its success and continued need, the project was renewed in 2024.

The work is being done in Northern Bahr el Ghazal Internal Province (NBGIP), one of the eight ECSS internal provinces. The province is located in northwestern South Sudan and includes three states, Western Bahr el Ghazal (capital city Wau), Northern Bahr el Ghazal (Aweil) and Warrap (Kuajok). It includes the ECSS Dioceses of Wau, Aweil, Abyei, Gogrial, Tonj, Nyamlel and Wanyjok, most of border on Sudan to the north.

NBGIP is addressing high trauma, which impedes peace-building efforts and affects human behaviour and negative thinking. NBGIP Internal Provincial Secretary/JPR Officer is bringing peace building and providing trauma healing to many people. However, NBGIP covers a large area and much more is needed. NBGIP will engage with community leaders and armed youth in peace conferences so voluntary peace prevails in their communities and they live in a peaceful co-existence.

The objectives in the second year of the project include:

- To enable NBGIP to maintain and expand its justice, peace and reconciliation work and its trauma awareness over a period of one year.
- To build the capacity of community and religious leaders, youth and women to enable them to undertake peace building activities in the region.
- To promote women participation in peace building processes.
- To enhance the skills and knowledge in key peace building concepts of local authorities, chiefs, religious leaders, women and youth.

To achieve the objectives, NBGIP will organize four five-day peace conferences/ workshops and consultations for 40 men and women from the community, including people from religious background and youth leaders. These workshops will include tracing the source of hatred/ethnic animosity, causes of the conflict (land grabbing, seasonal cattle movement, discrimination, tribalism/ ethnicity, interethnic cooperation, small arms and light weapons in the hands of civilians, unknown gunmen, unemployment), possible ways of addressing them (such as reporting land grabbing to chiefs and land commission, forging agreements between cattle keepers and farmers, good governance, service provision and reduction in bride price, lessons learned and recommendations) and trauma awareness and response. These include defining types, causes and symptoms of trauma, and learning to heal the wounds of the heart.

Read the whole story at <https://pwrdf.org/healing-and-peace-building-continue-in-south-sudan/>



## Hope: Signs and Potholes

# Thursday, December 5

### READ

#### **Luke 21:25-28**

There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.

### REFLECT

Driving in Newfoundland and Labrador as a visitor is an adventure. It’s a big island, so plan accordingly. You either go high speed straight up the middle on the Trans-Canada highway, or you can meander along beautiful coastlines proceeding at a calmer pace. Either way, watch out for potholes (some the size of volcanoes) and carefully read the signs! It must be said however, signs on The Rock vary in effectiveness.

My wife and I attended a kitchen party where our host described one particular junction just south of Deer Lake where the sign advises drivers to go either left or right. Huh? Locals knew that both ways take you to the same place—but visitors might remain perplexed.

Life is like this. Some things we see clearly; in

other matters, with Paul, we see only dimly (1 Corinthians 13:12). It seems everyone these days has an interpretation of the “signs of the times.” Some look at the climate crisis and say that the end-times are near. Some point to artificial intelligence or polarized politics as examples of disasters in waiting.

PWRDF reads the signs of the times responsively and compassionately. With Canadian Jesuit philosopher Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984) we look into the “known unknown.” We observe what is happening globally, nationally, and locally. We discern what is required to bring support and justice to creation and all its inhabitants. We hope to turn potholes into rainbows. To this end, we act and pray:

### PRAY

*Blessed are you, loving God, giver of all gifts.  
We thank you for your gift of life to us,  
to the human and non-human world,  
and to all of creation.*

*We entrust to you that which we can ask but only dimly imagine,  
that which is beyond our power to change.*

*We pray to you for strength, hope, and resilience,  
to bring about what is in our power to change.  
Through Jesus, the Human One, for whom we wait. Amen.*

—Maylanne Maybee (adapt. Kjg)



## Celebrating Indigenous History Month: Honouring the past, embracing the future

June marks Indigenous History Month in Canada, a time to honour the rich cultures, histories and contributions of Indigenous peoples. As we reflect on the past, we also celebrate the resilience, strength and vibrant traditions that have endured through centuries.

At PWRDF, we are committed to supporting and promoting Indigenous-led initiatives that foster community growth and well-being. From educational programs to healthcare innovations, Indigenous communities are leading the way in creating a brighter future for all.

Since its inception almost 30 years ago, the PWRDF Indigenous Development Program has been supporting projects aimed at strengthening, restoring and preserving Indigenous languages, culture and traditional knowledge. Programs focusing on healing and health for women and youth have also been supported, including the provision of appropriate counselling to youth on suicide prevention. Recently, PWRDF has committed support to water and climate change initiatives, as well as the Indigenous midwifery program. Additionally, our partners have promoted inter-Indigenous partnerships with similar counterparts in Latin America, focusing on traditional knowledge, education and health.

Throughout decades of working with Indigenous peoples, I have witnessed communities experiencing social and economic despair, environmental impact on their traditional lands, and inherited trauma from past generations due to imposed state policies that stripped them of their Indigenous languages, ancestral cultural practices, and spiritual beliefs. However, I have also witnessed a resilience and profound wisdom that comes from within, from nature, from Mother Earth, and from the practice of a deep spirituality based on love, respect, honesty, wisdom, humility, truth and courage.

At PWRDF, we are proud to support and celebrate Indigenous communities. Their contributions to our shared history and their ongoing leadership in various fields inspire us all. Join us this month in celebrating the achievements and contributions of Indigenous peoples. Attend local events, support Indigenous businesses, and take the time to learn about the diverse cultures that enrich Canada. We also invite you to learn about some of our partners' recent successful programs (see below).

Together, we can build a future based on mutual respect, understanding, and unity. Let's celebrate Indigenous History Month with positivity and a commitment to ongoing support and partnership.

Read the whole story at <https://pwrdf.org/celebrating-indigenous-history-month-honouring-the-past-embracing-the-future//>



## Hope: Our Daily Bread

# Friday, December 6

### READ

#### **Matthew 6:9-11**

Pray, then, in this way:

Our Father in heaven, may your name be revered as holy. May your kingdom come. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

### REFLECT

During Advent (and at all times) scripture invites us to connect and compare the kin(g)doms of earth and heaven. We wish with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength that the two become one, that the passion of God-in-Christ be the same in all realms—heaven and earth—today, and forever. The evidence of injustice—of warring nations, the unequal distribution of wealth, the heinous acts of persons, peoples, and powers—seems to continue unabated. Yet we still pray, and hope, and act, out of discipline, and out of love, that what we have been shown and given in Christ be available for all.

Some time ago I enjoyed the company of lively and passionate Ugandan Bishop Zac Niringiye. He could not say the words: “Give us today

our daily bread” until everyone had access to good, nutritional, daily bread. While I find his commitment a bit extreme, I can appreciate his intent.

Daily bread is not simply a metaphor for wisdom and religious experience. Neither is it a guarantee that all stomachs will be filled. Using the image of daily bread—itself an archetypal symbol for food—Jesus reminds us of the need for food security and justice for impoverished persons and peoples everywhere.

This is the work of the PWRDF and the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. So I will think of them when I pray the words of Jesus’ prayer.

### PRAY

*Our Father in heaven,  
may your name be revered as holy.  
May your kingdom come.  
May your will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.*

*Give us today our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And do not bring us to the time of trial.  
but rescue us from the evil one.*

*For the kingdom and the power  
and the glory are yours forever. Amen.*



## Breadfruit cultivation yields results for Haitian women

Working with the Haitian Women's Federation, RSCH aims to increase food security for families of the 4th and 6th sections of rural Haut de St. Marc, to train and support leaders within the Haitian Women's Federation and to combat the negative effects of deforestation and climate change through sustainable agriculture. PWRDF is supporting the project with \$20,000.

Project lead Renaud Thomas has been working with RSCH since September 2018. He is a qualified agronomist with a specialization in the cultivation of breadfruit. The project included restoring and securing mills that had been used for rice and corn. There have also been many, many trips up the rocky mountain path to deliver construction supplies to build two cement cisterns. These will serve as reservoirs to both supply the mills' equipment with a constant supply of water, as well as irrigate the tree nursery.

Thomas reports that a key part of the success has been empowering the women from the Haitian Women's Federation. For example, in April 2021, 36 participants received preliminary financial training. This training needed to be extended into the federation, because it was essential that leaders from each zone knew how to manage project funds, track and report expenses, and create their own plans for financial management within their respective organizations. The leaders were very

motivated to train the other women, but it was a new experience for many of them, so they needed additional preparation to teach others. Thomas and his staff saw this as an opportunity to strengthen the leadership of the federation for the long-term. By the end of June 2021, the training had been extended to all seven member associations in the seven different villages.

In September 2021, the tree nursery foundation was constructed, along with a shade covering. In November 2021, women with specialized training in harvesting collected the roots and stems that are used to cultivate breadfruit saplings.

Thomas trained 14 members of the women's federation and 11 additional community members. Together they planted one complete bed. (By June 2022, they plan to have 1,000 saplings.) Ready to apply their new skills the women surprised Thomas by planting another bed on their own.

The women also applied chicken manure from a nearby farm to fertilize the breadfruit nursery. Local volunteers also supported the project by digging a latrine. This was no easy feat, as the terrain is solid rock and the volunteers dug by hand with only a pickaxe! As Rayjon Share Care noted, "they are supportive friends of the women's federation leaders, believing in what they are doing and proud to be part of this initiative they know will help their whole community."

Read the whole story at <https://pwrdf.org/breadfruit-cultivation-yields-results-for-haitian-women/>



Peace: Liberation

## Sunday, December 8

### READ

#### **Luke 3:3-6**

[John the Baptizer] went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, -as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; -and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’

### REFLECT

At this point in the Advent story, things are getting lively. Here, and likewise in Mark and Matthew, we are pointed to a liberation event, one which parallels an earlier, similar event described in Isaiah 40:3-5. In both, something great and good is about to happen through in both cases, unusual agents.

For the Israelites in 6th century BCE the Persian Emperor Cyrus would release an exiled people to return home to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:2-4). John later prepares the way for Jesus to appear in the political and social messiness of first-century Palestine, itself annexed and occupied by the Roman Empire.

The experience of liberation is key to appreciating both events. Luke’s final verse says it all: “All flesh shall see the salvation of God.” Such a discovery is our wish for everyone, for the human

and non-human world. The News is Good; a *liberator* is coming.

The energy of love knows no limits, though we often impose restrictions on love to our own detriment and to that of others. The limits of love were imposed on those dispossessed from ancient Jerusalem. In Jesus’ day, a temple-centric piety excluded the poor and vulnerable driving seekers to John’s wilderness adventure. Subsequent history records countless aggressions, dispossessions, and genocides, a horrible legacy and current practice which must, in love, be challenged and resisted.

*Freedom is a fundamental right for all.* So our prayer today is a traditional South African liberation song.

### PRAY

*Freedom, Oh freedom;  
Oh freedom; freedom is coming,  
Oh yes it is;  
Freedom, Oh freedom;  
Oh freedom; freedom is coming,  
Oh yes it is.*

—African traditional





## Shallow well project contributes to improved health for women and girls

PWRDF began partnering with the Utooni Development Organization in Kenya in 2019 on a project to build shallow wells. In 2022, that project expanded into its second phase, working in Machakos, Makueni and Kajiado counties. Approximately 2,500 people will be affected directly, and 6,800 people will be affected indirectly. The project concludes in September 2025.

The goal the Shallow Wells for Health Project phase 2 is to reduce the impacts of climate change on women and girls. Specifically, it will:

- Increase the number of households accessing water from improved water sources.
- Reduce the time and distance it takes for women and girls to access clean water.
- Reduce the prevalence of waterborne diseases.
- Improve transport of water by vulnerable female-headed households.

UDO engages local expertise and contributes technical knowledge to determine sites for shallow wells that have an abundance of water nearby. Community members have contributed labour and resources, which has proven effective in ensuring community ownership. UDO also engages with community groups to identify households that would benefit greatly from receiving a water tank to store potable water

close by, as well as a donkey or carts to reduce barriers in carrying water.

Donkeys are provided to help families get water home more easily from the well or tank.

Donkeys are provided to help families get water home more easily from the well or tank.

Last year, four female-headed households received donkeys and three women groups received 10,000-litre water tanks to implement their group activities. Six shallow wells strategically located near water sources were established, which notably reduced the time and effort needed by community members to access clean water. Installing solar pumps and hand pumps at these wells has improved water accessibility and reduced waterborne diseases. Despite challenges posed by heavy rains experienced between October and December 2023, established wells did not sink and community groups have resumed their work.

Through water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) training and promoting safe hygiene practices, the project addresses the specific hygiene needs of women and girls and the incidence of waterborne diseases. Simple practices such water treatment, ensuring community access to sanitation facilities and hand washing are effective in reducing infections. To date, 20 shallow water wells groups have been trained on WASH best practices.

Read the whole story at <https://pwrdf.org/shallow-well-project-contributes-to-improved-health-for-women-and-girls/>



Peace: Love Overflowing

Monday, December 9

## READ

### *Philippians 1:3-11*

This is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight -to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, -having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

## REFLECT

On this, the second week of the Advent season, we hear these beautiful words, about love. Paul shares not a command but an *encouragement*—to love one another and all creation. Love’s action leads directly and consequentially to the “harvest of righteousness.” We are all gifted with “knowledge and full insight” to “determine what is best” in order to be found “pure and blameless” at the time of “the day of Christ.” It all sounds so simple, yet profound. Paul speaks from prison with the voice of a cheerleader. *You can do this*, Paul chants.

Speaking personally, in my family I come from a long line of pessimists. I often tell the story of my

Auntie Mary, who said (I exaggerate not) that “I don’t want to hope for something good to happen as I might then be disappointed.” I have pushed back against this for much of my life.

Speaking as a preacher, I regret that I often make things too difficult for my listeners. Sometimes distracted by context, analysis, and homiletical strategy, I forget to underscore that our witness is not solitary. Everything comes “through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.” As a colleague no longer with us often reminded me, “trust the process,” or in this case, trust Jesus, the Creator and Sustainer of all.

## PRAY

*Source of overflowing love,  
Host of heaven’s banquet here on earth;  
Help us to know  
what is best,  
what is pure,  
what is love;  
Through the One who shows us  
the Glory and Praise of God,  
In whose name and spirit we pray.  
Amen.*

—KJG



## Project improves children's safety and supports women in Ethiopian settlements

Almaz Adane is a mother of five living in the Mai-weyni Internally Displaced Persons site in Mekelle, Ethiopia. Before Adane was forced to leave her home, she ran a successful restaurant. But then in November 2020, when conflict broke out in the West Tigray region of Ethiopia, she and her family had no choice but to flee their hometown.

Adane and her five children began a difficult journey to safety, walking through bombings and shootings. After reaching the Mai-weini IDP site in Mekelle, Adane found comfort and safety in the services provided by Lutheran World Relief, including child feeding programs and child-friendly spaces for her youngest children.

From April 2023 to May 2024, PWRDF supported LWF with \$100,000 in a project to bring hope to the families in the camp. This project aims to create a safe space for children to learn, play, and express themselves creatively, addressing the severe threats faced by children due to conflict. These threats include displacement, violence, trafficking, and emotional distress.

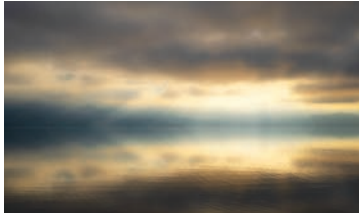
Child-friendly spaces have been established, providing organized activities, education, and psychological support to more than 1,200 children, helping them recover

from trauma and regain a sense of normalcy. The project also empowers caregivers like Adane through financial support, skill training, and entrepreneurship opportunities, enabling them to start small businesses, earn a steady income, and regain dignity and hope.

With the financial support, Adane was able to launch a street shop with 7,000 Ethiopian Birr (\$165 CAD), selling everyday essentials like soap, candles, soft drinks, coffee, and sugar. She also creates woven baskets, which she sells to eager customers. Beyond her own small business, Adane was able to invest 10,000 birr (\$236 CAD) in her firstborn son's tuk-tuk driver training thanks to the program. Her son completed training and was able to purchase his own tuk-tuk, now earning a monthly salary of 3,000 birrs (\$70 CAD).

Adane's daily net income of 100 birr (\$2.60 CAD) enables her to provide for her children more effectively than before. She dreams of returning to her land of origin once peace is restored, where she can rebuild her life, reunite with her husband, and contribute to her community. This project demonstrates the power of humanitarian work in addressing the difficult and diverse effects of conflict while empowering families to rebuild their lives.

Read the whole story at <https://pwrdf.org/project-improves-childrens-safety-and-education-in-ethiopian-settlements/>



Peace: Water

Tuesday, December 10

## READ

### **Revelation 21:6-7**

The One seated on the throne said: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

## REFLECT

Increasingly across Canada, and in most places throughout the world, our thirst for water continues. Whether it is in the interior of British Columbia and Northern Alberta during wildfire season, or across prairie farmlands, whether we live in Eastern Canada in the Maritimes or Newfoundland, and in so many Indigenous communities, water continues to be scarce or degraded.

Throughout scripture, between the bible’s first and last verses, water is a primary creation symbol and an embodiment of divine love and presence. It permeates our liturgies—especially through baptism and at other times such as the Easter Vigil— when our communities are sprinkled with holy water in rites of blessing and encouragement. In all these, water—physically or symbolically—is present.

During a visit to Pikangikum in the Spiritual

Territory of Mishamikoweesh, former PWRDF board member Rev. Canon Martha Tatarnic reflected on the presence of water in all of life.

“Water is life – our bodies, the food we eat, the composition of our planet, all of it is mostly water. Water connects us, and the bodies of water that dot our landscape are connected, too. Access to water defines the kind of society we can build; it affects physical, mental and spiritual health; it affects everything from hygiene to education. Water is a fundamental human right. Water is dignity. Water is wellness. Water is opportunity. Water is connection. Water is reconciliation. Water is justice.”

If Coleridge’s old, grey-bearded mariner can proclaim “Water, water, everywhere, Nor any drop to drink” he cites a gross injustice. May we all find a way to demand justice for the thirsty among and around us.

## PRAY

*We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water.*

*Over water the Holy Spirit  
moved in the beginning of creation.*

*Through water you led the children of Israel  
out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise.*

*In water your Son Jesus received the baptism of John  
and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ,  
to lead us, through his death and resurrection,  
from the bondage of sin into everlasting life.*

—BAS Liturgy of Holy Baptism



## Board sees impact of Fiona and reconciliation in Western Newfoundland

When Canada's national housing crisis is in the news the small coastal town of Port aux Basques, Newfoundland isn't the first place that comes to mind. But almost two years ago, on September 24, 2022, Hurricane Fiona tore through that community of approximately 3,500 residents and destroyed over 130 homes. A further 57 are slated for demolition since, while they are still standing and habitable, they are in the path of the "next big storm." Because with climate change comes warming oceans and with them, evermore powerful storms.

Meeting in Corner Brook, Newfoundland in the first week of June, the PWRDF Board of Directors and staff travelled south to visit Port aux Basques as well as the community of Burgeo, also on Newfoundland's south shore.

In Port aux Basques the group toured the town with Mayor Brian Button who described what happened during the storm and showed the now empty shoreline where homes once stood. Back at the St. James Anglican Memorial Hall, the Rev. Jane Allen and a number of women whose homes had been lost shared a lunch with board members and spoke about how the devastation and loss has affected their lives, but also about how family and community have sustained and upheld them.

A recurring refrain in the community prior to Hurricane Fiona making landfall was, "It's just another storm, and we've been through storms before," said Mayor Button. But warnings from provincial meteorologists pushed the town council to phone, text and go door to door, urging people to leave their homes. As a result, the loss of life was limited to one person. But Mayor Button also said that what was lost was more than physical structures and one life. More than 100 years of family histories and way of life were also lost as homes along the shore were washed away, while trauma and psychosocial needs remain.

Both Mayor Button and the women spoke about the generosity of the response from within and beyond Port aux Basques. The mayor noted that they received more toilet paper than they knew what to do with and surplus clothing was given to the Salvation Army for distribution to other communities. What remains is the lack of housing. The struggle with insurance companies and the government for compensation is for some, ongoing. Rebuilding is slow and some have left the community for good. Those who have stayed and rebuilt have relocated well away from the sea, which is both missed and feared.

Read the whole story at <https://pwrdf.org/board-sees-impact-of-fiona-and-reconciliation-in-western-newfoundland/>



## Peace: The Supper of All Suppers

# Wednesday, December 11

### READ

#### *Isaiah 25:6-8a*

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples  
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,  
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.  
And he will destroy on this mountain  
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,  
the covering that is spread over all nations;  
he will swallow up death forever.

### REFLECT

He was a very, very large man, truly impressive in a jet black suit, the mayor of Savannah, Georgia, who addressed a music conference I attended some years ago. After giving us his Chamber of Commerce speech: “spend, spend, spend” he encouraged us to visit local restaurants, saying: “just look at me.” Clearly he loved to eat out—and we happily took his advice.

I also love eating. I would not go so far as to say that “I live to eat,” and I certainly am aware that many do not enjoy the privilege of gratuitous recreational dining—hunger is everywhere around us. But the idea of a banquet, of a supper appeals. I used to tell people that the bible can be summed up as a series of suppers: The Last Supper (Matthew 26); The Picnic Supper (Matt 14), and the Eternal Supper (Isa 25, my lection for today).

Isaiah describes a banquet where abundance is on full display; quality is intentionally named; food and drink are carefully and fruitfully prepared; the experience of the guest is of utmost importance; and all peoples are welcomed. Anticipating similar images found in the Book of Revelation, in these words we glimpse a perfect world—the beast is vanquished and love prevails. It’s a victory celebration, because victory is possible, in time, and in Christ.

Advent shows us not only what must change. The prophet shows us what is possible. This is Good News. As Canada’s former UN ambassador and former UN Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS, Stephen Lewis, remembers while sitting at his childhood dinner table, thanksgiving was always offered: “What we have, we wish for everyone.” Indeed.

### PRAY

*Faithful God,  
we thank you for feeding us with this heavenly banquet.  
Help us always to hear the prophet’s call  
to turn our hearts to you;  
in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.*

—Prayer following communion BAS



## Clean water and food security projects improving lives in Cuba

In rural communities in Cuba, where poverty, hunger and inequality are a daily reality, the Episcopal Church of Cuba's Integral Development Program (PDM) is bringing hope and transformation. By addressing the root causes of these issues, PDM is empowering individuals and communities to break free from the cycles of poverty and injustice.

Food scarcity, poor nutrition, and reliance on external aid are being addressed through PDM's holistic approach. Seniors are gaining financial stability, families have access to nutritious food, and resources are available for continued growth. PDM prioritizes gender equality, safety and financial inclusion, ensuring all community members can thrive. Despite facing significant challenges, including limited access to basic services, economic opportunities, and social support, PDM's work is helping to bridge these gaps. By providing essential services, creating economic opportunities, and fostering community and social support, PDM is empowering rural communities to build

a brighter future for themselves and their families.

Modernized water purification systems are now bringing clean water to more than 5,000 people daily. Additionally, 21 food security projects are promoting sustainable agricultural practices and ensuring communities have access to nutritious food.

One such initiative is providing families with the required infrastructure to raise chickens. This includes the necessary materials to build a chicken coop (cement, bricks, windows, electric power, cages and water dispensers), as well as 35 chickens. Families are also given chicken feed, access to veterinary services and medicine for one year. Chicken's nutrient-rich eggs or meat can be eaten to improve nutrition, or sold to improve family income.

Through PDM, the Episcopal Church of Cuba is demonstrating the power of community-led development, empowering individuals and communities to build a more resilient and sustainable future.

Read the whole story at <https://pwrdf.org/clean-water-and-food-security-projects-improving-lives-in-cuba/>



## Peace: What Makes for Peace?

# Thursday, December 12

### READ

#### **Luke 1:77-79**

Because of the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

### REFLECT

With faith, hope, and love, peace is a traditional Advent theme.

Ordained to the priesthood in 1990, a friend wove a beautiful blue stole for me that featured a stylized dove, an emblem of peace, thinking that a priestly vocation included both peace and peace-making. The jury is still out whether this was successful for me personally—I did inherit some pretty nasty parish conflict along the way—but the pursuit of peace remains for me a constant priority.

Peace-making today is darned hard work. There is so much in our economy, secular and church culture, and inter-personal communicating that frustrates the fostering of peaceable relationships. Most people tend to avoid conflict (myself included) rather than do the tough work of healing and reconciliation. There are some good models of reconciliation in our own church as we have learned about and responded to our legacy in the residential schools—that work continues to progress, though slowly.

The word, peace, can be limiting. I still tend to think of peace as an absence of conflict. Such an understanding only scratches the surface of a much more profound experience, one well described by Randy Woodley of the Centre for Action and Contemplation:

“*Shalom*, a Hebrew term often translated as “peace.” But peace doesn’t capture the depth of this word. *Shalom* is who the Creator is—the one God, a trinity of persons (from a Christian perspective) dwelling in harmony, mutuality, and deference toward one another and the creation . . . *Shalom* embodies wholeness, completeness, and love.”

Some will ask, do I still use my blue stole? Absolutely, with fond memories of the gift given, and knowing that conflict is still with us; our role in the peacemaking journey continues. Let us all sow (sew) peace together.

### PRAY

*May we all be peacemakers  
who sow peace  
and reap a harvest of righteousness.*

—James 3:18





## Beekeeping sweetens incomes and protects pollinators in rural Colombia

The Páramo de Pisba, located in the eastern cordillera mountain range of Boyacá province, is an important Andean ecosystem that reaches elevations of up to 5,300 meters above sea level. This region is home to around 20,000 rural women, known as Campesinas, who depend on the land for their livelihood.

Despite their understanding of the ecosystem and the impacts of human activities, such as livestock, agriculture, mining and climate change, the Campesinas face significant challenges. Gender discrimination thwarts their economic inclusion, limits their rights, and prevents them from participating in any decision-making processes.

A project focused on empowering Campesinas in environmental and gender rights, economic independence, and political engagement has been implemented to address these issues. Coordinated by the Instituto Latinoamericano para una Sociedad y un Derecho Alternativos (ILSA), and led by women's association from each of the nine participating municipalities, the project aims to strengthen the voices of women, enhance their land and territorial rights, and promote sustainable development initiatives.

The project includes a beekeeping initiative in which women obtain hives and tools required to manage a bee colony. Through this activity, they are able to produce and

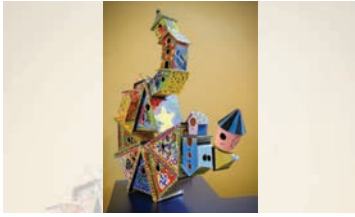
sell honey and other products, while also ensuring pollinators are in good health. Part of the training includes distribution of stickers that include some pollinator facts, translated below:

- The most threatened pollinators in the world are the honey bees
- Pollinators contribute to the fruit having better quality in size, shape and weight.
- Feed them sunflowers, mint, lavender, rosemary, basil, thyme. Flowers: Cucumbers, onions, chives, pumpkins, broccoli, cauliflower, apple, cherry, blackberries

Emilse Ravelo is a testament to the true impact of the project. As treasurer of Agromujerespisba and now a municipal Councillor in Pisba, Ravelo has participated in ILSA's training programs on human rights, women's political participation, and agricultural initiatives.

The project's evaluation findings indicate a need for continued support in strengthening network processes, enforceability of rights in political agendas, and accessing income projects, credit and savings options. By addressing these needs, the project can further empower rural women in the Páramo de Pisba to defend their territory, counteract climate change, and manage resources sustainably.

Read the whole story at <https://pwrdf.org/beekeeping-sweetens-incomes-and-protects-pollinators-in-rural-colombia/>



## Peace: Prophets Awake

# Friday, December 13

### READ

#### **Mark 1:35**

In the morning, while it was still very dark, Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

### REFLECT

As an early riser, I love the calm and quiet of the early morning, around 5:30 a.m. most days. I enjoy waking up. Laying down to bed the night before I sometimes, literally, can't wait for the morning to come. Lots of intriguing conversations to enjoy, projects to commence or complete, lots of life with which to engage.

During our Advent journey, I have reflected on prophets like John. Such reflection can risk us investing all our energy and respect in *other people* who look like prophets to us. But what about us? Are we prophets? Or can we become prophets? Have you searched for or found your own prophetic voice?

Not all are called to a specific ministry of prophecy—there are many dangers with such an aspiration. I suspect, however, that many of us have stuffed a prophetic voice in a pocket thinking that

others will assume this necessary role. As a result, we are all impoverished.

Retired Indigenous Bishop and theologian Steven Charleston reminds us that a prophetic role is accessible to all. He equates prophecy with a familiar Advent theme: *Being awake*. He writes:

You are a prophet. You are already making your migration. You have been chosen because you have been born. You are a prophet because you are awake. You are a keeper of revelation: a person with a thought that may create a new world. Do not hide that piece of the sacred tablet, for the time is short, but give it to as many as you can, as often as you can, until the apocalypse becomes a blessing.

So wake up; stand up; speak up; face up to what is before us.

### PRAY

*“Sleepers, wake!” A voice astounds us,  
the shout of rampart guards surrounds us:  
“Awake, Jerusalem, arise!”  
Midnight’s peace their cry has broken,  
their urgent summons clearly spoken:  
“The time has come, O maidens wise!  
Rise up, and give us light;  
the Bridegroom is in sight.  
Alleluia!  
Your lamps prepare  
and hasten there,  
that you the wedding feast may share.*

—Common Praise 110



## Promoting LGBTQ rights over the air waves in El Salvador

Deep in the countryside of El Salvador, PWRDF partner CoCoSI has worked for decades with local community members and leaders to destigmatize non-binary gender stereotyping and provide safe spaces for people of diverse gender expression to share experiences, collaborate with one another, and advocate for safe and inclusive communities.

PWRDF recently visited CoCoSI in rural northeastern El Salvador, where the pavement ends and communities emerge tucked between rolling hills thick with vegetation. Remote communities, especially in this part of the world, are not often perceived to be the safest spaces for freedom of expression, but the sense of welcome, warmth and hospitality one encounters is genuine and unmistakable. Reaching these communities is done through several innovative community approaches, and one of the best methods by which CoCoSI can reach out to the people and develop community acceptance and visibility to LGBTQIA2S+ perspectives and needs is with community radio.

Community radio in El Salvador has played a crucial role in grassroots communication, social advocacy, and community empowerment, and remains a key medium

for promoting local culture, informing rural populations and addressing social and political issues. CoCoSI works with local radio stations to communicate their message of acceptance and celebration of diversity, provide educational programs, and promote civic participation. In this manner, community radio offers CoCoSI an avenue for social change by embracing alternative narratives that embrace diversity and destigmatize myths and safeguard the rights of the most marginalized.

El Salvador is a country where economic migratory pressure continues to challenge local communities, and the preservation of local knowledge and talent is threatened. LGBTQIA2S+ persons have the added pressure of some of the strongest cultural persecution in the Western hemisphere to seek safety abroad. Radio messages that mobilize community solidarity and build local acceptance for diversity of expression are a vital component in CoCoSI's multi-pronged approach to strengthening community support and acceptance for diversity in gender expression, protecting Salvadoran youth.

Read the whole story at <https://pwrdf.org/promoting-lgbtq-rights-over-the-air-waves/>



*Joy: Heroes*

**Sunday, December 15**

## READ

### **Luke 3:15-16**

As the people were filled with expectation and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

## REFLECT

I wonder if you, dear reader, have a personal hero? Your hero could be in the realm of sports, or music, someone in the church, or even a politician. I am not sure we need heroes; in fact, hero worship can distract us from the quiet influencers of our day. Leadership however does matter, and sometimes public figures can lead well given their own influence and reputation: consider Desmond Tutu.

I loved my few trips to South Africa, where one way or another I bumped into the community (and in one case, the person) of Archbishop Desmond Tutu. If I have a church hero, he’s my guy. If there ever was a true successor to John the Baptizer, each

with the strength of personality and a passion for justice, it was *The Arch*.

Our Advent journey now moves forward in a surprising direction—we are not so much thinking about the eschatological Jesus, the one who is coming again, in a future time. John knows that the Messiah is coming *in his time*, though not as his hearers expected. We know that Jesus is coming, as Incarnate Lord of all Creation.

There’s a bumper sticker that says, “Jesus is coming; look busy.” I think we need a new message: “Jesus is coming, soon; be surprised.”

## PRAY

*God for whom we watch and wait,  
you sent John the Baptist  
to prepare the way of your Son:  
give us courage to speak the truth,  
to hunger for justice,  
and to suffer for the cause of right,  
with Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

—Common Worship: Additional Collects (2004)



## Answering the Lambeth call: Ottawa diocese digs in to tree planting initiative

The Anglican Diocese of Ottawa's Branches of Hope project recently moved into action mode when the local working group of the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF) began to receive orders for hundreds of young trees that will be distributed throughout the diocese.

Branches of Hope is an "offshoot" of the Communion Forest, a global initiative to plant trees, as well as conserve, protect and restore ecosystems throughout the Anglican Communion, launched at the 2022 Lambeth Conference.

This work began in the diocese of Ottawa when the PWRDF Working Group accepted the challenge of its chair, the Ven. Patrick Stephens, to work toward Lambeth's goal to "renew the life of the earth across the Anglican Communion and beyond."

A generous donation from Christ Church Cathedral, Ottawa, enabled the working group to purchase locally grown tree seedlings – red maple and black spruce – that they will distribute to individuals, families, parishes and community groups. Planting trees in the diocese of Ottawa will improve the health of communities for years to come.

Branches of Hope also has an international goal in Uganda, where industrialization, wars and wetland destruction have contributed to flooding and soil degradation. Recipients of

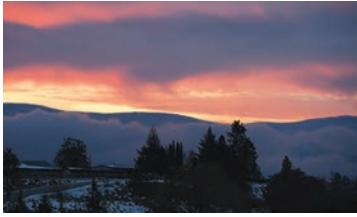
young trees in the diocese are encouraged to donate \$10 per seedling to support this important work.

PWRDF partner Josephine Kizza of St. Jude Family Projects visited Ottawa's diocesan Synod in 2023. She explained that she and her family have operated St. Jude's in Masaka since the 1980s. Today, recognized internationally, the farm attracts students from around the world who are learning the principles of soil conservation and restoration. Tree-planting is also part of the curriculum, and part of the work supported by PWRDF. As of June 12, the Branches of Hope crowdfunding page on PWRDF's website had raised more than \$4,000 towards its goal of \$5,000.

The project notes that you don't need to own land to purchase or receive a tree: trees make excellent gifts. A tree might mark an occasion like a birthday, the arrival of a grandchild, an anniversary or honour the life of a loved one. Some municipalities might also accept seedlings to plant in parks or other green spaces.

Visit the Communion Forest website to learn more about how you and your parish can get greening. If your church or diocese is engaging in Communion Forest activities, let us know at [pwrdf@pwrdf.org](mailto:pwrdf@pwrdf.org).

**Read the whole story at <https://pwrdf.org/answering-the-lambeth-call-ottawa-diocese-digs-in-to-tree-planting-initiative/>**



## Joy: People Look East

# Monday, December 16

### READ

#### **John 3:7-8a**

John said to the crowds that came out to be baptised by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance.

### REFLECT

As a child I was taught that, “if you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all.” So, the language of “brood of vipers” was neither encouraged nor welcome in our home. As a result I never learned how to debate or argue with siblings, friends, or elders. As the youngest of three well-spaced children in my family of origin I never learned how to squabble fairly and effectively. Given the social insecurities of my family, it took years, even decades to find my own voice.

In time I learned how to use speech to my advantage, especially in response to schoolyard bullying. I also learned how to find space for projects and friends who shared my interests, especially photography. I found partners, in some ways similar to PWRDF in its relentless search for, and work with, partners locally and abroad.

John welcomed persons of all vocations and life experience to his wilderness ministry. John had no standing in the temple courts; people had to travel to him for the baptism of repentance and for the forgiveness of sins. Tax collectors, soldiers, farmers, artists, religious and civic leaders, all found an open welcome from “the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’” (Luke 32:4)

Up to this point our Advent reflections have focused on the Lord of all creation, of all space and time. We now tilt towards the incarnate Jesus, the One who will come in the spirit of King David and as *Messiah*, the One for whom everyone must wait, God, for a particular place, space, and time.

Things are getting exciting; what seemed far off is coming closer. Jesus is coming, near.

### PRAY

*People, look east. The time is near  
Of the crowning of the year.  
Make your house fair as you are able,  
Trim the hearth and set the table.  
People, look east and sing today:  
Love, the guest, is on the way.*

—English traditional



## Primate and PWRDF issue joint statement on Gaza Hospital

Over the last few days there has been an escalation of attacks on Gaza City that resulted in an evacuation order in several areas, including the evacuation of the Al Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza. This hospital is under the oversight of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem and has been offering shelter, aid and medical care to those affected by the ongoing war between Hamas and Israel.

Archbishop Hosam Naoum has called for the reopening of the hospital and protection for its humanitarian work. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, said, "In the face of intense Israeli bombardment, this closure puts injured and sick people in even greater danger. I join Archbishop Hosam's appeal to the Israel Defence Forces to allow the hospital to continue its sacred and courageous work of caring for people in desperate need. To relieve the immense suffering in the Holy Land, I continue to pray and call for a ceasefire, the release of hostages, and for unfettered aid for the people of Gaza."

Hospitals are intended to be safe zones for all who are in need during a conflict. Under international law they are to be protected from attack and permitted to continue their humanitarian work unimpeded. The

evacuation order is particularly concerning when there is nowhere in Gaza to go that is safe in the current situation. Vulnerable people, the sick and injured were forced to flee along with the medical personnel who have courageously served under extreme conditions without pay for many months and without the needed medical supplies consistently available.

On July 11, the hospital was permitted to reopen which is welcome news. However, the chaos of the evacuation and now restart has added pain and trauma to many vulnerable people. There must be stable, consistent healthcare and refuge available.

Through the Anglican Alliance, agencies in the Anglican Communion are offering aid to the Al Ahli Hospital, including PWRDF. See the Anglican Alliance joint statement.

Please consider supporting PWRDF's efforts through the Gaza and West Bank Emergency Appeal, or the Companions of Jerusalem, which is also supporting efforts.

We add our voices to those around the world calling for a full ceasefire, the release of hostages and access to humanitarian aid for the millions of Gazans suffering at this time. We offer our prayers for all who are suffering.

Read the whole story at <https://pwrdf.org/primate-and-pwrdf-issue-joint-statement-on-gaza-hospital/>



Joy: Gaudete

Tuesday, December 17

## READ

### *Philippians 4:4-7*

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

## REFLECT

During the middle ages and at other times since the late fifth century, Advent has been a fiercely held penitential season. The season originally stretched from St. Martin's Day (Nov 11) through to Christmas. Both Protestants and Catholics would adapt diet, personal routines, and worship practice to prepare for the Feast of the Epiphany. In later years, organs in European churches would be shuttered and congregational music temporarily suspended. Abstinence was abundant.

Relief and relaxation of discipline would come however, on the third Sunday in Advent, named *Gaudete*, "Rejoice," the first word of the Epistle for the day. Where penitence had been previously observed, the contrast in mood was life-giving.

In his 2014 *Gaudete* Sunday homily, Pope Francis said that *Gaudete* Sunday is known as

the "Sunday of Joy," and that instead of fretting about "all they still haven't" done to prepare for Christmas, people should "think of all the good things life has given you." The pontiff's point is well taken. Penitence makes room for joy. Paul shares a similar message with the Philippians. The rigours of religious discipline are a means to an end, that of contemplation of God's gift and real presence available to all seekers.

"The surest sign of the presence of God is joy" wrote the French Catholic theologian, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. We cannot deny any of life's realities, even its many tragedies. But, we are free at all times, especially today, to let the joy we have found in Christ break out in the communities in which we live and move and have our being. Joy *shall* come; joy *has* come; and joy is *still coming*.

## PRAY

*Joy shall come, even to the wilderness,  
and the parched land shall then know great gladness;  
as the rose, as the rose shall deserts blossom,  
deserts like a garden blossom.  
For living springs shall give cool water,  
in the desert streams shall flow;  
for living springs shall give cool water,  
in the desert streams shall flow.*

—Now in the public domain





## Healthcare and education support making an impact in Gaza and the West Bank

The current conflict in the Holy Land began on October 7, 2023, when Hamas launched attacks in Israel. In response to the ensuing violence, PWRDF provided \$30,000 in emergency funding to Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza, a long standing partner of PWRDF. Shortly afterwards, PWRDF and the Anglican Alliance began consulting with the Diocese of Jerusalem on ways to support communities affected by the ongoing conflict. From February to July 2024, PWRDF contributed \$175,000 to the first phase of the project, enhancing access to healthcare and education. Building on the project's success, PWRDF is now allocating an additional \$100,000 to continue from August 2024 to January 2025.

Restrictions on aid delivery and movement of people in Gaza have caused shortages of essential supplies, including food and medical care. Poor sanitary conditions have led to disease outbreaks, which have been increasing the need for medical services and straining medical staff. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, an estimated 40,000 Palestinians have died and 1.9 million have been displaced.

With this ongoing violence, displacement, supply shortages, and loss of livelihoods affecting communities in the Gaza Strip and

the West Bank, the Diocese of Jerusalem (which encompasses all of Israel, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon) identified five of its pre-existing ministries that were well positioned to make a difference. In addition to supporting health services at Al-Ahli Arab Hospital, this project also enabled people in the West Bank to access healthcare at St. Luke's Hospital in Nablus and Penman Clinic in Jenin, along with maintaining access to school for children at the National Kindergarten in Nablus and St. George's School in East Jerusalem.

The project supported 1,502 at-risk families and successfully reduced mortality rates through early detection and intervention and provided quality education for 125 children.

Support of Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza has made it possible for medical staff to provide critical care to those in need. The Diocese of Jerusalem shares the story of Ahmed, 35, one of the many patients who was injured during an Israel Defence Force military operation in Gaza. Ahmed underwent urgent surgery at Al-Ahli Hospital, where the medical team made every effort to save his leg. Thanks to their expertise and dedication, the operation was a success, and Ahmed received the necessary physical therapy to recover. The hospital provided all treatment and care, free of charge.

Read the whole story at <https://pwrdf.org/healthcare-and-education-support-in-gaza-and-the-west-bank/>



## Joy: A Beautiful Rose

# Wednesday, December 18

### READ

#### *Isaiah 52:7*

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”

#### *Song Of Songs 2:1-3*

I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys. As a lily among brambles, so is my love among maidens. As an apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among young men.

### REFLECT

I love to photograph flowers. Mountain landscapes, stormy seas, architecture. and bustling urban street scenes aside, flowers delight me each and every time I photograph them. I inherited this interest from my grandfather and have lovely memories of Sunday evening slideshows after roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, looking at amongst other subjects, flowers.

Given my sensitivity to artistic line, colour, shape, and form, flowers deliver all these to my lens and through my viewfinder to my eyes and heart. I am simply overwhelmed by their intricate beauty, an emotional response familiar to the wisdom keeper and the prophet. Every year, season after season, bulbs punch up stems, blossoms appear as buds on dead-looking branches; beauty evolves and grace appears, visually.

Our Advent journey now pivots away from the

boisterousness of John and his cohort towards Mary, the very young mother of Jesus, one whose response to the angel’s call is beautiful, to carry the One for whom everyone has been waiting.

There is a rich history associated with Anglican worship and the Rose, the symbol of Mary. One of thirteen carols found in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge, a carol composed in Middle English, incorporating Latin phrases from the liturgy of the Catholic Church, is “There is no rose of such virtue, as is the Rose that bear Jesu; Alleluia.” This carol has been set to music by no less than Benjamin Britten and the rock musician, Sting.

Beauty in music; beauty in imagery; beauty in gift; beauty in response; beauty in creation; beauty in love. Simply . . . beauty.

### PRAY

*There is no rose of such virtue*

*As is the rose that bear Jesu;*

*Alleluia.*

*For in this rose contained was*

*Heaven and earth in little space;*

*Res miranda.*

—English Traditional, c. 1420



## Planting ideas in young people in Uganda

In Uganda, PWRDF partner St. Jude Family Projects is teaching young people how farming practices and tree planting can improve nutrition and income. "Agroecology for School Nutrition Enhancement and Entrepreneurship" began in November 2023 and will continue until the end of 2026. It builds on the successes of a previous project, as well as the organization's 25 years of community engagement in sustainable organic agriculture. The project focuses on:

- improving implementation and management of integrated land use design (ILUD) on school grounds;
- increasing sustainable use of diverse food resources at schools and students' homes;
- improving agroecological entrepreneurship at schools.

St. Jude's is working with agriculture and biology teachers in 15 schools to improve agribusiness knowledge and skills in approximately 4,500 young people. The students are in the lower secondary level, where practical agriculture has been rolled out in the new curriculum for four years.

"We have always taught the principles of agricultural science, conservation and economics to the learners but most of them could simply cram and pass," says John Ssali, head teacher at Timothy Girls High School, one of the participating schools. "Thanks to this project, now learners are practically

instructed on the demonstration plots in principles of biofertilization, landscaping for erosion control and value addition, among other principles. We have the confidence that this will translate into improved grades as well as stimulating an entrepreneurial spirit among our young people if they see the improved harvests once science is put into practical application. Many of our parents are equally impressed with this project work and have increased confidence in the school."

The project started with a one-day workshop on soil and water conservation techniques, followed by training sessions on manure composting and Bokashi fertilizers (a fermented organic compost). By the end of the sessions, students and teachers gained practical knowledge on composting and received materials to make Bokashi fertilizer. Students learned soil conservation techniques as a basis for crop production.

Next, 30 teachers participated in a five-day training on agro-ecology, expanding their knowledge on farming practices that support ecosystems. Each school also received training in climate change adaptation and mitigation, emphasizing improved crop varieties, intercropping, soil management and drought-coping strategies. Training sessions on nutrition underscored the importance of food security and healthy eating habits among students.

Read the whole story at <https://pwrdf.org/planting-ideas-in-young-people-in-uganda/>



## Joy: Sonnet

Thursday, December 19

### READ

#### Luke 1:46-50

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowly state of his servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name; indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

### REFLECT

As a photographer I sometimes challenge myself with a restriction. It might be using a particular fixed focal length lens instead of a more versatile zoom lens. The restriction forces me to position myself and to “see” the world differently. In a similar manner, poets express the world uniquely when they adopt as a starting point a particular form, such as a Shakespearean Sonnet, as in “O Emmanuel” (below) by Cambridge poet and theologian Malcolm Guite.

A sonnet is a type of fourteen-line poem. Traditionally, the fourteen lines of a sonnet consist of an octave (or two quatrains making up a stanza of eight lines) and a sestet (a stanza of six lines).

Within such a disciplined form, beauty appears.

As I read Guite’s text, certain turns of phrase come alive for me. A jazzlike riff on *flame* becomes “O quickened little wick so tightly curled, Be folded with us into time and place.” Especially relevant to the work of the PWRDF the words, “To touch a dying world with new-made hands, And make these rags of time our swaddling bands” ring true.

As people of faith through whom God seeks *to be love incarnate* the words, “Unfold for us the mystery of grace, and make a womb of all this wounded world,” can only inspire, direct, and motivate.

Enjoy.

### PRAY

*O come, O come, and be our God-with-us,  
O long-sought With-ness for a world without,  
O secret seed, O hidden spring of light.*

*Come to us Wisdom, come unspoken Name,  
Come Root, and Key, and King, and holy Flame.  
O quickened little wick so tightly curled,  
Be folded with us into time and place,  
Unfold for us the mystery of grace  
And make a womb of all this wounded world.*

*O heart of heaven beating in the earth,  
O tiny hope within our hopelessness,  
Come to be born, to bear us to our birth,  
To touch a dying world with new-made hands,  
And make these rags of time our swaddling bands.*

—Malcolm Guite



## ADSE and PWRDF are transforming communities in Kenya with goats

In Mavindini and Mbitini, Kenya, Anglican Development Services Eastern (ADSE) and PWRDF are working together to improve livelihoods through social inclusion, income generation, and environmental sustainability. Established in 1987, ADSE is the development agency of the Anglican Church of Kenya. By improving access to essential services, promoting sustainable livelihoods, and fostering healthy environments, the organization aims to make life easier and healthier for individuals and families.

The Integrated Initiatives for Sustainable Livelihoods (IISL) project is being implemented in arid and semi-arid lands of Lower Eastern Kenya, with funding from PWRDF. By April 2026, the project aims to improve the livelihoods of 15,549 community members through training and the formation of self-help groups. The project will ensure equal access to opportunities and resources for all individuals regardless of their gender, disability status or social background.

As part of this project, ADSE is providing female Galla goats to families who are food insecure and have low income. The Galla is

a unique breed of goat common to Ethiopia and Kenya that has a reputation for surviving droughts, thanks to its higher resistance to opportunistic diseases. The Galla breed is also known for higher yields of milk.

Protein-rich goat milk and meat improves local nutrition and can also be sold to increase family income. Goats are also relatively easy to care for and require less land than a cow. They breed quickly, often producing twins. The offspring can also be sold, creating another income stream.

This initiative is part of ADSE's broader mission to achieve three key outcomes: improve social inclusion of the Kenyan people, increase incomes for vulnerable community members, and enhance the use of environmentally sustainable water sources that are already available.

In partnership with PWRDF, ADSE seeks to strengthen community institutions, increase incomes of those living in the community, and enhance water accessibility. Together, they aim to create a lasting impact in the lives of vulnerable populations.

Read the whole story at <https://pwrdf.org/adse-and-pwrdf-are-transforming-communities-in-kenya-with-goats/>



## Joy: Two Mothers Talking

# Friday, December 20

### READ

**Luke 1:39:42**

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

### REFLECT

In *The Chosen*—an American Christian historical drama television series about the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth—Elizabeth is giddy with joy at greeting her visitor, Mary. Both women are pregnant and near term; Mary is younger; Elizabeth is older and thus far unable to conceive or carry a child through to birth.

Ecstatically happy, they consider together the future of their children. Elizabeth in particular bubbles with enthusiasm. I am reminded of baptisms at which I have officiated over the years, especially when parents and sponsors look imaginatively and curiously towards the future:

*Sustain them, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit.  
Give them an inquiring and discerning heart,*

*the courage to will and to persevere,  
a spirit to know and to love you,  
and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works.*

—BAS Holy Baptism

In *The Chosen*, even before the door is opened and Mary calls out, Elizabeth's unborn child leaps in the womb. Later in Acts a man born lame meets the disciples and is healed. "Leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God (3:8).

At this point in our Advent journey, expectation is rising, curiosity is growing, along with a sense that something beautiful is coming, and we shall all be changed—then, and now.

### PRAY

*Almighty God,  
who looked with favour on your servant Mary,  
and called her to be the mother of your Son,  
nurture in us the humility and gentleness  
that found favour in your sight,  
that with her we may proclaim the greatness of your name  
and find the mercy you show to those who fear you;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

—Collect for the Visitation

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PHOTO ABOVE: Br Mickey McGrath OSFS



## Community Preparedness in Cuba: PWRDF continues to support longstanding program

In Cuba, a program to create disaster management preparedness and resilience, including improved diets, reduced food scarcity, and increased economic independence for families living in low-income and rural communities across the country, has been renewed for a new phase. PWRDF has partnered with the Episcopal Church of Cuba (ECC) for over 10 years, working within the country on the Integral Development Program (PDM). The PDM – which was renewed in August 2023 – also focuses on empowering women, mothers and their children. PWRDF is supporting this year-long program phase with \$39,440.

PDM activities include the design and implementation of climate-resilience projects focused on disaster risk mitigation, as well as community development projects to promote and support education, proper nutrition and good water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) practices. The program also aims to support 8,200 people – including 5,430 women – across 50 Cuban communities, through action in the areas of food security, economic empowerment, water and sanitation and disaster risk management.

Long-standing and massive sanctions placed on Cuba by the United States decades ago, as well as more recent restrictions, have left Cuba with limited financial resources and access to trade, with devastating consequences on the country's supply of food, medicines and medical supplies and

other essential resources. Further, natural disasters like Hurricane Irma and COVID-19 further decimated the already-limited resources within communities.

Through the PDM, community members are trained in money saving and other best practices for financial security, good agriculture practices, animal husbandry and food conservation, while some individuals will also be trained to become leaders in these initiatives to promote sustainability for years to come. Programs and projects are led primarily by project participants of previous years. The ECC and the PDM operate on the belief that transformative social change and self-sufficiency are possible when communities lead, and the effectiveness of this approach has been proven time and time again.

As the COVID-19 pandemic reached Cuba – like much of the rest of the world – in 2020, PDM project participants, trained in disaster mitigation and resilience, were ready to respond. Local Community Promoters carried out activities to support communities, with special care given to the most vulnerable community members. Within days, thousands of COVID-19 related information materials were produced and distributed in schools, churches and other community spaces. Community members also donated fabric and came together to create cloth masks, with an aim to reduce the spread of the virus.

**Read the whole story at <https://pwrdf.org/community-preparedness-in-cuba-pwrdf-continues-to-support-longstanding-program/>**



## Love: The Changing Face of Love

# Sunday, December 22

### READ

#### **Luke 1:30-33**

The angel said to [Mary], “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

### REFLECT

Some thirty years ago I watched my spouse, Kathie, carry our children through pregnancy to birth. My memory of her pregnancies is of course vicarious and mottled by time. The outcome was marvellous, but given some medical challenges, getting to that point was nerve wracking for both of us. Her body and our lives, changed forever.

In these last days of Advent we are thinking of Mary’s pregnancy, of her physical and spiritual journey. We likewise learn of Joseph’s disciplined response. Recalling Zechariah’s obedient naming

of John (who will become the Baptizer), the angels, coming and going, have been busy during Advent.

God is about to do a great thing — Messiah is coming. But what a strange way to go about it. Bodies, lives, communities, cultural and religious traditions are all about to change, drastically, though lovingly. Sometimes change comes slowly, and painfully and sometimes it comes as a complete surprise. Love is our vocation, as persons changed into the image of God. This is our Advent work.

### PRAY

*God is a surprise I surprise myself  
You, surprise me; I discover God’s surprising presence everywhere*

*I am not alone on a clifftop on the edge of a mighty river  
at a new trailhead of my life of our life together*

*Early morning sunrise  
Inspiration blooming  
Love’s pain burning  
Write  
Speak  
Share  
Care*

*Love is Grace actioned  
Grace is love*

—KJG





## A safe space for Ukraine's children: Voices of Children's Program

Countless children and families have experienced great pain, trauma, and displacement as a result of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Voices of Children, a partner organization of PWRDF, provides an essential lifeline amidst the destruction. For children and their caregivers, its 21-day program offers a secure refuge where they can recover, cope, and start over, while participating in camp-like activities, regaining a part of their childhood they lost due to the war.

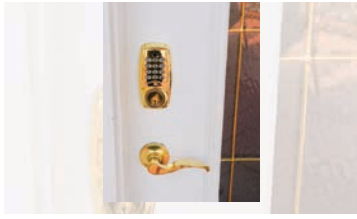
Located in the Carpathian mountains, the program provides a peaceful space away from the chaos of the ongoing conflict. Personalized art and verbal therapy is provided by skilled therapists to the young participants. They are able to face their feelings, talk about their experiences, and

start the healing process in this encouraging setting.

The program's comprehensive strategy addresses the children's varied emotional and psychological needs. Children and caregivers can more effectively handle the difficulties of war and displacement by learning useful coping mechanisms and stress management techniques. They are able to repair connections, rekindle hope, and anticipate a better future thanks to this empowering assistance.

The Voices of Children initiative offers hope during a period of extreme need. They are assisting Ukrainian children and families in their healing, recovery, and reclaiming of their lives by offering vital assistance and care.

Read the whole story at <https://pwrdf.org/a-safe-space-for-ukraines-children-voices-of-childrens-program/>



## Love: Out For Delivery

# Monday, December 23

### READ

#### *Isaiah 7:13-14*

Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel.

### REFLECT

Several times each month I receive an email from the delivery company advising that I have a package “out for delivery.” The item might be a piece of clothing, an electronic device, a book, or dog treats. The good news is that the item is on its way!

At this point in our Advent journey the *Good News* is on its way, in person. *Immanuel*—God with us. Jesus-Messiah is out for delivery. Something, or rather, someone is coming to complement what has already been shared. God’s presence is found within a tradition including stories of Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, David and Jonathan, Isaiah, Jeremiah and other “minor” prophets with a major message. All things are coming together for a special moment, called by Christians, a *kairos* moment, a time of change and opportunity. The latter builds

upon the former though one does not eliminate or denigrate the other.

The word itself—*Immanuel*—God is with us, a sign of God’s protection of Israel for the Jews, and for Christians a prophecy of the birth of the Messiah is as pregnant (!) with meaning as it is short. It has inspired reams of music including Gospel songs and elaborate compositions for organ.

As I often say to persons in need and distress, the good news is that you—we—are not alone. Personally I can face most things if I enjoy the support of others. If I feel isolated, then I panic. The promise for us, and for all, is that God is coming to be with us in a physical and enduring way. God, in Jesus, is out for delivery. The wait continues . . .

### PRAY

*God with us  
Coming, coming  
Almost here  
Everywhere*

*The One for whom we wait  
expectantly  
hopefully  
patiently  
faithfully*

*Coming, coming  
Almost here  
Everywhere*

—KJG



## Work continues in Zambia to protect children

As PWRDF enters its third year of partnership with the Zambian Anglican Council Outreach Program (ZACOP), the development arm of the Zambian Anglican Church, real results are being achieved. The Zambian Council Outreach Program is working to end child marriages, educate young people about sexual reproductive health and rights and raise awareness about child abuse, particularly in young girls. It has resulted in a reduction of teen pregnancies from 68 cases in 2020/2021 to 24 cases in 2022. The Omleo Mumba Primary School recorded zero teen pregnancies in 2022.

Zambia has one of the highest child marriage rates in the world with 31% of Zambian girls married before they turn 18 and 6% before the age of 15. In rural areas, poverty leads many parents to withdraw their daughters from school and offer them for marriage to older men, in most cases in exchange for payment of lobola, or a dowry.

This project strives to make young people, especially girls, less vulnerable to gender-based violence, teen pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, child marriages and inter-generational poverty. To do this, ZACOP works with young people through sports and drama and creates safe spaces in schools, churches and communities for young people to access remedial services. Church

and community leaders are also involved in implementing the program, bound by their shared desire to address issues that harm the social fabric in Zambia. ZACOP addresses taboo issues in communities, including the church community, that has led to further engagement with both.

The ZACOP Field Officer is instrumental in the program and has held two meetings with the community leaders, including six section leaders, 15 church leaders and five Katete parish youth executive leaders. In these meetings, the Field Officer provides education on the issues and promotes the program.

Sports have proven to be an innovative entry point for 1,800 girls and 904 boys who were able to play soccer and netball. These activities were combined with education on child marriages, child abuse, teen pregnancies, hygiene, sexually transmitted infections and substance abuse. Counselling services were offered to 108 girls and 56 boys, which included support and referrals to other psychosocial services. Young people in the project area are also in the process of re-enrolling for school. Moms continue to be supported by mother mentors on issues affecting their children and 127 men and 106 young men have attended twelve Men Engage meetings (MENS) in their communities.

Read the whole story at <https://pwrdf.org/work-continues-in-zambia-to-protect-children/>



## Love: The Sign of the Times

# Tuesday, December 24

### READ

#### *Luke 1:1-4*

Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I, too, decided, as one having a grasp of everything from the start, to write a well-ordered account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may have a firm grasp of the words in which you have been instructed.

### REFLECT

It's a question I often ask my clergy-self: What do congregants take away from sermons, from liturgy, ritual, and music? Apart from the sacramental benefits of taking, thanking, blessing, and sharing the living Bread of Jesus, what do worshippers take away from our communion time?

Based on my experience of Christian leadership dating back to 1982, I find that people cherish *stories* more than anything else. These can be stories of biblical persons (Peter, Paul . . . and Mary); they are often stories of special places—how many of us remember the late Herbert O'Driscoll who took us, figuratively and literally, to Iona? Stories feed us; stories linger and smoulder; stories comfort, challenge, delight, and motivate us. We walk with Christ as we receive and tell stories; in time, we *become* part of the story.

Advent is a season rich in stories—stories

of John the Baptizer, Elizabeth and Zechariah, Gabriel who announces the One who is to come, *Messiah*, and only in the last days, Mary and Joseph. Stories carry theology, tradition, and spirituality in narrative form. Given present-day cultural mores, the inventiveness of advertisers, and the complexities of family expectations, it is difficult to keep “Christmas” at bay until—at the very least—Christmas Eve.

Advent deserves its full due, its own expectational space. Advent teaches us how to wait, to anticipate, to pay attention to the *signs of the times*. Advent reminds us of the thin skin between earth and heaven, of things known and things not yet understood. If we can wait for Advent to do its thing, we are indeed ready for Christmas, when something quite different is revealed, and shared, and celebrated.

### PRAY

*Tell me the stories of Jesus I love to hear;  
Things I would ask Him to tell me if He were here;  
Scenes by the wayside, tales of the sea,  
Stories of Jesus, tell them to me.*

—Traditional



## Baby on board! Women in remote Lesotho communities receive prenatal support

Lesotho, a tiny country landlocked by South Africa, faces many healthcare challenges in the rural areas. The country's mountainous terrain and limited transportation also make healthcare delivery, particularly maternal and childcare services, extremely difficult. Despite these obstacles, a collaborative project between PWRDF and Partners in Health Lesotho is transforming the lives of pregnant women and their babies. This initiative provides financial incentives, support, and care to pregnant women, encouraging early antenatal care, alleviating social stigma, and ensuring a supportive environment for mothers.

Since 2020, PWRDF has been supporting Partners in Health Lesotho in their work to strengthen primary care, especially for new moms and babies. In the past year, the project trained Village Health Workers on maternal and child health topics, equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills to identify pregnant women and promote antenatal care. PIH Lesotho has also conducted outreach clinics, reaching 965 women and 578 men with healthcare services, including immunization and pregnancy testing.

The organization has provided prenatal care to pregnant women, with 80 women attending their first ANC appointment and 53 attending their fourth ANC appointment.

To encourage women to seek prenatal care, the project provides funds to pay them, approximately \$20 during their first three months, and again during their fourth session. Completing the eighth prenatal visit entitles them to receive a new baby starter pack, which includes a onesie, a baby blanket, a top and diapers. The aim is for these women to spread the word about the benefits of early ANC attendance to their peers, encouraging more women to seek timely care.

During their stay at maternal waiting homes, women receive essential toiletries, ensuring they can maintain personal hygiene and dignity. These toiletries include towels, toothpaste, toothbrush, body wash, lotion. These sets help alleviate social stigmas that might otherwise deter women from attending their prenatal appointments. The incentive strategy has expanded the reach of the Bobete Health Centre, attracting women from outside its catchment area.

PIH Lesotho provides transportation for women in emergencies, ensuring they can get to the hospital in a timely manner. Additionally, pregnant women receive bed, blankets, mattresses, sheets, food and clothes washing basins. PIH Lesotho assists the Bobete maternity clinic by providing babies with a warm and nurturing start in life.

Read the whole story at <https://pwrdf.org/baby-on-board-women-in-remote-lesotho-communities-receive-prenatal-support/>

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