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# Kokanee Concerns

We are reminded in the Gospels and in the Baptismal Covenant that we are called to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbour as ourselves. We are reminded also to strive for justice and peace, respecting the dignity of every human being, and strive to safeguard the integrity of God's creation, respecting, sustaining, and renewing the life of the earth. *Kokanee Concerns* is a weekly publication from the Anglican Parish of Kokanee that identifies items of concern in both the local community and the wider world, for which we can advocate, act upon, pray, and learn on a weekly basis. Consider the local community, the wider world, and your place in both as you reflect upon the topics each week. This week, please consider these thoughts in relation to our responsibilities as peacemakers and as carers of creation and of the community around us. How do we act as agents of Peace? How do we care for Neighbour?

Peace,

*David*

## Concern in our Neighbourhood . . .

This past week (Nov.23) was American Thanksgiving; last month was Canadian Thanksgiving; so it seems a good time to talk about gratitude, as a season of harvest, and for all the blessings that we have here in this oh so relatively safe and abundant area we live in. But thanksgiving, as the well-known theologian and Episcopal priest, Diana Butler Bass reminds us, is more than just a day to get together and rejoice in all our bounty. And gratitude is more than just an emotion. It is also a disposition

that can be chosen and cultivated, an outlook toward life that manifests itself in actions - an ethic. [The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks (2018)] So, what would that look like if we all chose to live an ethic of giving thanks, of gratitude?

Here we are on the cusp of winter, cold weather encouraging us to outdoor winter sports enjoyment and/or hibernation in our cozy homes. However, what of those many of us who do not have that choice? Those of us who are outdoors without choice? Whose winterwear, sleeping arrangements and food resources are lacking? Perhaps we have noticed the increase of unhoused individuals in the last years? Those growing numbers of our vulnerable population we see camping on sideroads, wooded areas, sitting and sleeping on our downtown sidewalks and doorways, etc., in our local towns and cities. So, we know that the incidence of homelessness is on the rise. The colliding crises (housing, overdose/toxic drugs, pandemic, and extreme weather) are increasing the severity of need and the dollars available spent are stretched even further. Regionally addressed, the sharing of resources and ideas can only work to improve each other's situation, load, and reduce the domino effect of shifting one's burden onto another area. It can only help alleviate everyone's situation, especially those in the most need.

To that end, Selkirk College has sponsored a regional program since last fall called *Bridging Rural Homelessness and Well-being: A Sustainable and Collaborative Regional Response*. This is a three-year social innovation project whose overall goal is to improve the well-being of rural residents experiencing or at risk of homelessness living in and around the rural communities of Nelson, Castlegar and Trail in the West Kootenay region. It is funded through the Social Science and Humanities Council of Canada and *Mitacs*, with cash and in-kind contributions from community partners. [*Mitacs* is a non-profit national research organization that, in partnerships with Canadian academia, private industry and government, operates research and training programs in fields related to industrial and social innovation.]

This feels like a regional movement that fits into the idea of an ethic of gratitude. But how might we move personally into this ethic of gratitude that Butler Bass suggests? The earliest Christian mystics have all pointed us in this direction at one time or another. The monk and mystic Thomas Merton says, "To be grateful is to recognize the love of God in everything." [*Thoughts in Solitude* (1956)]. Rabbi Abraham Heschel (Jewish mystic as was Jesus) offers a deep insight that it is humanity's role to articulate the "silent worship" of all beings, "...it is humanity who is the Cantor of

the universe ...”, that our primary task is to praise and that is to honour and give thanks in the name of all creation. (M. Fox 23/11/23). This would seem to move us from being thankful for things – our home, our income, our possessions, - out into the world and beyond. An ongoing gratitude of being an intrinsic part of the whole, and not a separate entity within it. To feel ‘beingness’ in, through and with all things ... including our relationships in our local communities, those whom we would rather be dislocated from ‘dealing’ with, are a part of the collective, and those that Jesus has taught us over and over are the face of God, the last, the least, and the lost... they are us. Perhaps this ‘ethic’ of gratitude is what Merton has called a ‘cosmic prayer’ of honouring and giving thanks in and through and for all things. And we do not do this alone. We do not sing alone; we join with other beings. Heschel says, “...The universe is a score of eternal music, and we are the cry, we are the voice”, that Hildegard of Bingen writes, is “a single voice of exultation and joy and the giving of thanks.”

If we were all to take on a disposition of an ethic of gratitude, how might this begin to change the face of our personal and family lives? Our work and community lives? Would visions, ideas, creativity begin to percolate, and would the lives of others be changed and therefore our own?

I am the other, and the other is me.

## Concern in the World . . .

This week the United Nations reported the grim reality that civilian casualties in Ukraine have exceeded 10,000 persons. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/11/1143852>.

This was devastating news to read, even as most of the media has dimmed on the two-year war in Ukraine, as international sentiment and aid seems focused on the Gaza Strip, and the Israeli – Palestinian conflict. It seems inevitable that human compassion, activism and concern has its limits. The prayers of individuals, communities and the church seem to be reflecting this reality as well. We can seldom focus on more than one crisis at a time.

Unfortunately, many concerns in the world are not solved through quick solutions and fast prayers. So many misunderstandings, impasses and conflicts need time and solutions take much longer than our human capacity for presence. So often, we offer prayers, and six to eight weeks later, there is less focus on the concern.

In the 1980s there were many instances of corporate worldwide prayer, two instances were of the struggle of South Africa with Apartheid, and the plight of Terry Waite. If you remember, Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu led a growing movement that addressed the injustice of Apartheid. Week after week, year after year, in Anglican churches in Canada and around the world, prayers, action, and effort were expended to address injustice. This went on for decades. Desmond Tutu in his book *The Rainbow People of God: The Making of a Peaceful Revolution* (1994) documents some of the rhetoric between 1976 and 1994. I'm sure that each Anglican Community in Canada did not hold the concern of the South African nation for every moment during that time. We pray, we learn, we respond, then we rest, and at times when we don't see meaningful change, we can become tempted to shift our prayer to something else. In addition, each community, and each individual only has so much capacity to hold the angst of the oppressed. In modern terms, we would say that individuals, and parishes, and the church as a whole, can experience *compassion fatigue*.

The plight of Terry Waite, former Anglican Envoy for the Archbishop of Canterbury was another familiar prayer intention in the 1980s. From 1987 to 1991 Terry was held hostage in the middle east, as a result of his role as a hostage negotiator [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terry\\_Waite](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terry_Waite). His years in solitary confinement did not break his prayer nor his faith. His memoirs *Taken on Trust* (1994) and *Footfalls in Memory* (1995) help to shape our understanding of the depth of suffering, pain, as well as the determination and resilience that one can hold through these types of ordeals.

The church today does not pray for the cessation of Apartheid in South Africa, nor for the release of Terry Waite, the end of the troubles in Northern Ireland, or the end of Fascism in Germany. These movements and actions, though long lasting in their time, were responded to by the prayer of the church as well as the acts of humanity in the world, day after day, over time.

Today, we pray for peace in Ukraine, we pray for peace in the Gaza Strip. We pray for the release of captives, for the end of poverty and injustice, for Indigenous Justice, Trans Justice, for Climate Justice. We can become so easily disheartened when we don't see major changes in the life of the world. We are called to take heart, to hold to prayer with the Holy One such that our lives, our actions reflect a larger movement – the movement of the world to peace and to love. Yes, it is exhausting. Yes, we may become demoralized or despondent. We may experience compassion fatigue.

We are encouraged to gather as community – an ever-wider growing community that takes all these concerns and prayers, and changes individuals, hearts, policies, laws, cultures, and history, such that justice is realized, love reigns, and peace become the new equilibrium.

- Consider your daily prayer.
- Does it shift? Have you experienced frustration or apathy in your prayer life?
- Will you continue to pray and voice the suffering of the world even when there seems to be no resolve?
- Hold the hurts and be held by others in the hurts of the world.
- Be resilient and determined, as the Holy One is with compassion and patience.