



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF NIAGARA

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

The Bishop's Advent Pastoral Letter

December 1, 2024

To be read at all worship services on the First Sunday of Advent

Dear friends:

Warm Advent greetings to you as we embark on this beautiful season of light. As we do, we seek wisdom and strength from the sage words of the prophets who speak into our present moment.

Now, as a diocese, we are also looking back – albeit with slightly different intentions – as we mark the sesquicentennial of our diocese. In 1875, with Canada still in its infancy, our diocese was formed by an act of the Ontario Legislative Assembly. Bishop Thomas Brock Fuller, godson of Sir Isaac Brock, The Hero of Upper Canada, served as our first diocesan bishop.

Our humble origins stand as a wonderful reminder of God's provision over time and space. Some 150 years later, we are over 80 parishes strong and are continuing to express the Christian faith in a mature and robust way. We give thanks to God with grateful hearts for the vision and faith of our forebears, and all the ways their light continues to sustain a faithful church up and down the diocese.

But this is not only an historical commitment, it's one that's rooted in our complex times too.

This is a hard time in our world - as if the last few years haven't been hard enough - with the pandemic - with the fast pace of discontinuous change in our culture - now we are enduring wars and political unpredictability - and the cost of living crisis. It's hard to know where to look for encouragement. It's also hard to know where to put our time, our energy, and our resources so that they somehow work against all the darkness.

Enter the season of Advent, which invites us to redirect our focus from darkness to light.

The fact is, to have faith in Christ is to embrace the light and to act as an antidote to the dehumanization and the polarization of our culture. If we keep our eyes on Christ and study how to live as Christians and let what we discover frame our worldview and our actions, we will have done something important to push back the darkness in our own lives, but also in this world.

This focus on the light is an act of resistance to which the Church is well accustomed. Each year at this time we welcome again the Christ who will lead us forward.

In each parish and mission in our beloved diocese are leaders who have been formed and supported to give us hope and help us to have faith in the future.

150 years is a long obedience in the same direction. It is a commitment to being the light – to saying words of mercy and performing acts of love in Christ's name. And we want to continue to be those beacons of hope in Niagara.

The Right Reverend Dr. Susan J. A. Bell
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So, in thanksgiving to God for 150 years of ministry, and in honour of all those leaders who have gone before us and who have created a legacy of witness and care for the widow and the orphan, we are establishing a new 150th Anniversary Curacy Fund: a fund that will assist young, newly ordained clergy so that they can work alongside seasoned priests and have a focused time of apprenticeship.

This is a vision that is practical and invests back into the communities where we all live, benefiting the whole Church, and even enabling the possibility for some parishes to afford a curacy placement. In keeping with the 150th anniversary of this diocese, we hope to build an initial endowed fund of \$1.5 million dollars and then slowly build it up over the years ahead. With the gains on investments, the bishop can then place new priests to serve in diverse ministry settings across our diocese. And this will only pay a greater dividend, by helping to ensure the formation of inspiring and talented clergy for long into the future.

In thanksgiving for 150 years of being light-bearers in our world, I ask you to consider, as an Advent devotion, a gift to our anniversary fund. All gifts are welcome; you might consider, in keeping with the number 150, a one-time gift of 150 or 1500 dollars, or perhaps a monthly gift throughout our anniversary year of the same. Regardless of the size of your thank offering, it will be such a valuable contribution to this legacy fund. You can make a donation through our diocesan website, or [through CanadaHelps](#).

Already we have received a legacy gift of a quarter of a million dollars to support this ministry. If your heart is moved to do the same, please speak with your priest or call our diocesan office and ask to speak with The Reverend Canon Dr. Drew MacDonald, our stewardship and campaign advisor.

Together, let us be the light of Christ for generations to come through our collective thanksgiving and through our everyday witness to the Gospel.

Every blessing to you and yours this Advent,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Niagara". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Right Reverend Dr. Susan J. A. Bell
Bishop of Niagara