

The United Church of Canada
Conseil régional Nakonha:ka Regional Council
Lennoxville United Church

Theological Reflection
January 2020

I believe that an important part of personal transformation is a healthy dose of self-reflection, and the beginning of a new year is a great time for a little self-reflection. The past year has been jam-packed with adventures and experiences, achievements and failures, challenges and moments of wonder. I would like to share a few of these with you, trusting that God has influenced every step that I have taken, and hoping that in my reflection, transformation will be discovered. As I share my own story of the past year, I hope you take some time to think about the moments that marked 2019 for you. May the Holy Spirit empower your reflections, turning your reflected-experience into wisdom.

Two experiences of this past year that grounded me, reminding me of who I am, one was my honeymoon with Jillian and participating in the other being the Global Climate March this fall. France was fantastic! 16 days of moments and experiences with my best friend and partner. Highlights include tasting Champagne in France's Champagne region; watching one of my heroes, Christine Sinclair, score a goal at the Women's FIFA World Cup; and spending just over 15hrs at the Louvre in Paris where I was overcome with emotion as I stared at a rock, that is over a couple thousand years old holding the oldest known engraving of the names 'Yahweh' and 'Israel'. Jillian, soccer and ancient history... can't get much better than that in my books. In the fall of 2019 I walked as part of the Global Climate March and I did so wearing a clergy shirt. As a panentheist caring for God's creation is foundational in my practice of faith, and making a stand with thousands of others gave me hope, not only in the future of the earth but also in God's power to bring healing to humanity through justice and truth-telling. These experiences reminded me of how God is both ancient and new, and that our call is to be in the *now*.

The two professional experiences that marked 2019 for me echoed calls of cooperation and community building. In the spring of 2019, I was elected as the first President to lead the Conseil regional Nakonha:ka Regional Council. My mandate is to be at the beginning, my mandate is to build avenues of cooperation, my mandate is to demonstrate how every person has a role to play as we do our best to transform our church for a new generation. I am humbled by this calling and I am grateful for the many faithful people that I have the privilege to join with in work and worship. The Holy Spirit's movement here at Lennoxville United Church lead to the spark that created our special service "You Are Not Alone: A service for mental health." This was important for me in so many different ways; the strongest among them is the knowledge that this event will outlive my time as your pastor. I did not create this service on my own, it didn't even start with me; the desire to reach out and be present to people within our community who are struggling came from you and it was possible, in part, because of the structural changes that we have made together. 2019 reminded me that within our call to lead, we are

called to follow; we are all in the same boat, following the Holy Spirit's leading to build community through cooperation and compassion.

2019 brought me endings and beginnings. I was honored to tell the story of my Grandfather's life and love after his death at 104. I have been surprised at just how big a hole his death has left within me. He was the oldest of my grandparents, and I guess I thought he was stubborn enough to live forever, but I guess he wasn't made to live through another round of the 20s. "The death of a loved one is a time to recall the miracle of life." These are words that I speak at every funeral I lead. To actually recall the miracle of living at a time filled with grief and pain is no easy feat, but to do so is the call of every Christian as we wait in joyful hope for the promise of new life and resurrection. The love my grandfather gave me, will always be with me, for his love was a part of making me; I am one part of his resurrection. 2019 was the year that Jillian and I grew our family from 2 to 3; we brought home a very small puppy and named her Willow. Her curiosity and playfulness has filled our home with laughter, and I am amazed at how much I can love such a small being. God has been with us every step of 2019, sitting with us in the darkest times and playing with us so that we may experience deep joy.

And so, may we bring with us the lessons of 2019 into this new decade along with the Hope, Peace, Joy and Love that comes from trusting *Emmanuel*, God is with us. I am excited to be with you at the beginning of this decade, to see how the Holy Spirit will lead us as we do our best to follow the call of Christ to build community through justice and compassion. May all that we do be grounded in the wonder of God who is both ancient and new, may we be present to each other in the dark times that will come, and may God keep us aware so that we can experience moments of joy together as a community of faith.

Blessings,

Rev. Linda Buchanan