

## Lyle McKenzie - Sabbatical Report, January 7 to April 7, 2022

Thank you! to the congregation for the opportunity to be on sabbatical for the first three months of this year. And thank you to Co-Pastor Lyndon, church staff, Church Council, Board and Committee members for taking on additional responsibilities to make this possible.

My sabbatical was, as I hoped, renewing, restful, and fruitful. I proposed three areas of independent study:

- to meet and commune with mentors, elders, and colleagues significant in my ministry and to further explore Lutheran Holy Communion practise, including in the home during the pandemic,
- to read more about Indigenous experience, spirituality, and practise to learn and help me gain new insights into our own practise,
- to consider what de-colonizing may mean personally and for the church, especially in worship.

My time was divided into sabbatical planning and reading in Victoria in January, a trip to Alberta and Saskatchewan to meet with colleagues, mentors and elders in February, some further time in February in Victoria reading and planning, and the month of March at Saratoga Beach just south of Campbell River for reading, reflection, and writing.

Part of the motivation for planning a trip to meet and where possible Commune with elders and mentors came from the pandemic experience of not being able to be together, including gathering for worship and Holy Communion. The isolation from others and longing to meet with those significant to us, family, chosen family and friends, was an experience shared by many of us. The trip was also motivated by reading and learning more about Archbishop Desmond Tutu following his death, and his treasuring of companionship, including a deep friendship with the Dalai Lama. Also, the Archbishop's daily practise of sharing the Eucharist, including on one occasion with the Dalai Lama - an amazing expression of friendship from both, given their different spiritual practices.

My experience of meeting and where possible communing with important mentors, elders, colleagues and friends in my life included eleven meetings in total, in Edmonton, Calgary, Chestemere, Strathmore, Camrose, Saskatoon and back to Edmonton. The meetings included my confirming pastor, internship supervisor, an early mentor, a seminary classmate and mentor, a seminary professor, long time colleagues and friends, and one new colleague. We were not able to join in Holy Communion in every instance because of circumstances, and I was not able to visit one elder in-person because of a facility outbreak of Covid-19, limiting us to visiting on the phone on two occasions and the commitment to get together soon. In every instance it was wonderful to reconnect. And where possible, it was very meaningful and moving to share in Holy Communion together.

Prior to and during the trip, I read various materials, including the Faith Order and Doctrine (FOD) report and survey results, and corresponded with the Committee about online Communion; on Indigenous experiences and ceremony, including books by Richard Wagamese, *One Drum, What Comes From Spirit*, and Michelle Good – *Five Little Indians*, and on Christian liturgy.

Learnings from this time included:

- the lifelong significance of elder and mentor relationships; the value of intentional practises of Communion together;
- the challenges of unique ministry settings like universities and the importance of community;
- the significance of returning to in-person worship, creating new connections, fostering supportive communities for the more vulnerable and isolated;
- the enduring importance of feminist, environmental, marginalized, justice and peace perspectives, including those embodied in elders/mentors;

- the strength of seminary resources and professors to support and reform the church, and the challenges facing seminaries;
- the importance of encouraging and hearing minority perspectives and voices of Indigenous, Black, and other people of colour, LGBTQ2SIA+ people, people of all generations and abilities, in theological and practical considerations and conversations and all matters of the church, including the voices of lay people, building relationships in diverse communities together.

I returned for about two weeks in Victoria, to continue reading and planning for the final month of my sabbatical. I was able to find and reserve a small rustic cabin at a very reasonable cost on Saratoga Beach, just south of Campbell River. I included the adventure of getting there in a limited range electric vehicle, which did work out eventually! (That is another story.) I then spent my days, walking on the beach and in the area, reading, journaling and some writing.

*The Book of Joy*, by the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Douglas Abrams was the first book I read while there. The book and my reflections centred on how we access and cultivate joy even in the most difficult and challenging of circumstances, like those experienced by the Archbishop and the Dalai Lama and their communities. There were many significant examples and connections between the book, reflecting on the pandemic and my meetings with elders/mentors and colleagues, reading in Indigenous experience and trauma, spirituality and practise, Christian liturgy and worship.

This formed the third part of my sabbatical which was to reflect on and do some writing about liturgy and worship and how we de-colonize ourselves and our Christian worship. This is a significant area of study in which others have and are doing more extensive work than I was able to do. But it was a chance to explore ways to gain insights from Indigenous practise, not to assimilate that practise, but to gain new perspectives, to see differently our own Christian worship practises to which I have devoted much of my love and energy in ministry. I reflected on first principles to decolonize worship, including the setting, connection to creation, leadership, ceremonial dress, music, and our words. All of these present challenges because of how treasured aspects of worship are to us. But also, in the case of language and imagery in particular, their connection to Biblical language and imagery that is very dear and important. But the reformation principles, including in worship reform, remain relevant: worship in the “language” of the people, the people’s song, gathered around word and sacraments as the communion of saints, and our being ever-reforming as God’s people. These are and continue to open us to new expressions of worship together. These reflections continue for me, and I hope I will be able to do more research and writing and have more conversations and explore what we can do in our setting to decolonize our worship and make it more expressive of the God desired transformation of us and this world that Jesus shared, and the Spirit continues to inspire.

This is probably enough of a report for now, even though, as I said, the exploration continues. Thank you again to the congregation for supporting this opportunity for me.

God’s grace and peace, in all our relations. - Lyle