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Bishop to hold town hall meetings

All invited

BY MARTHA HOLMEN

BISHOP Andrew Asbil is holding five town hall meetings in early May to hear from lay people in every episcopal area about their hopes, fears and dreams for their parishes and the diocese. With clergy gathering in late May at their Clergy Conference, Bishop Asbil says he wants to have a similar chance to get to know the laity.

"It's an opportunity for me as the new Diocesan to just be able to say words of encouragement and ask questions of the community of leaders, and for leaders to be able to voice where their hopes and aspirations are, as well as their anxieties," he says. "Large crowds and small crowds are settings that I find really encouraging and give a lot of energy."

The first meetings will take place on Wednesday, May 1, with one session at 2 p.m. at St. James Cathedral, Toronto and a second session at 7 p.m. at St. Bride, Clarkson. The third town hall will take place on Thursday, May 2 at 7 p.m. at St. Andrew, Scarborough.

The final meetings will be held on Saturday, May 4, when Bishop Asbil will visit St. Paul, Newmarket at 10 a.m. and St. Paul, Uxbridge at 2 p.m.

With no formal agenda or concrete objectives, Bishop Asbil says his goal is simply to have an open dialogue. "It's not a legislative time. It's not about necessarily setting all the courses and charts of where we're going exactly. It's really an opportunity for me just to be able to listen very carefully," he says.

In that way, he's framing the town halls as an extension of the conversations he's been having in parishes across the diocese on Sunday mornings. "What I find really helpful is engaging in conversation with people who are living their faith every single day in their



Canon Mary-Anne Nicholls with boxes of records in the diocese's Archives. PHOTO BY MICHAEL HUDSON

'I'm grateful for a job I've loved'

Diocese's archivist retiring after long career

BY STUART MANN

CANON Mary-Anne Nicholls, the diocese's first full-time Archivist, is retiring on March 31 after 35 ½ years of service.

"It's been great," she says, looking back on her long career. "I'm so grateful – for the people I've worked with and the support I've received along the way. People tell me I've got the best job, and in many ways it's true."

When Canon Nicholls started in 1983, the diocese's Archives were housed next to the Diocesan Centre's boiler. The work area was the ACW's old "baling room," where shipments of clothing were prepared for Canada's north.

Since then, the Archives have grown, both in size and scope. The department now has a modern office space, a specialized storage

area and a dedicated staff of two full-time employees and volunteers who offer a multitude of services to parishes, the diocese and the public.

Much of the growth has been due to Canon Nicholls' hard work and leadership, although she is quick to give credit to others who have helped her over the years. These include David Ptolemy, ODT, who was the diocese's secretary-treasurer from 1976 to 1994. Mr. Ptolemy hired Canon Nicholls and gave her the support to modernize the Archives; he has been a volunteer in the Archives since his retirement. Canon Nicholls also credits long-time volunteer Dorothy Kealey, ODT, and the past chairs of the former Archives Committee for making the Archives what they are today.

Another reason for the department's growth is Canon Nicholls' passion for keeping archives. She

believes they are essential for any organization, large or small. "It's everything – their life, their presence, their history," she says. "You just couldn't operate without that essential record."

The diocese's Archives are the official repository for the records of the diocese's Synod and its officials, clergy, parishes and organizations. They provide safe storage for non-current parish records such as baptism, marriage and burial records, vestry minutes, financial and property records, architectural drawings and photographs. About 90 per cent of the diocese's parishes keep their former records here – a valuable resource to draw on when they need to refer to previous decisions and commitments.

Archives also collects and maintains the diocese's current and former files. These include everything

from the minutes of the 2017 Synod to the letters patent for the diocese in 1839 – a vast trove of correspondence, decisions, lists, contracts, appointments, agreements, budgets, manuscripts and notes that touch on every aspect of the diocese's life since its earliest days.

In addition to collecting and storing records, Canon Nicholls and her staff help parishes, diocesan departments, committees and the public find information, whether it's a marriage record to help a widow or widower who is seeking spousal benefits or a church that needs architectural drawings to undertake a renovation.

"You never know what you're going to do on any given day," she says. "There can be a lot of time spent doing the research to find

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Journey through Uganda

Local writer finds food security projects taking root

BY JANICE BIEHN

In his 1908 book *My African Journey*, Winston Churchill dubbed Uganda the Pearl of Africa for its rugged natural beauty and fertile land. More than 100 years later, the moniker is still worn with pride. But the land is not as productive and parts of the country experience food insecurity.

Aggrey Nshekanabo of Send-a-Cow Uganda says that, in theory, Uganda should be able feed the world. But climate change has done a number on small-holder farmers, whose harvests supply about 65 per cent of the country's food.

"The seeds and soil are tired," he says. "It's the end of February but where are the rains? They should have started already. We don't have the knowledge to adapt." Uganda has the world's youngest population, so providing enough food will be a challenge for years to come.

I am in Uganda representing The Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF) with other communications professionals from member agencies of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. The group is made up of Becky Longhurst of Canadian Lutheran World Relief, Jon Self of World Renew, Samantha Burnside of Emergency Relief and Development Overseas and Shaylyn McMahon and Musu Taylor-Lewis of the Foodgrains Bank. We will also be joined by Nyambura Githaiga, a peace-building and crisis specialist with the Foodgrains Bank, and Edward Echwalu, a Ugandan freelance photographer formerly with Reuters.

Over the next week, we will visit three food security projects that are supported by our agencies and implemented by these Ugandan development partners: the Anglican Diocese of Nebbi, which for three years has been training rural families about conservation agriculture, empowering women with a savings and loan cooperative and training men and women on the importance of sharing household responsibilities; the Pentecostal Assemblies of God in Arua, which has been delivering a nutritional supplement to vulnerable South Sudanese refugees in Rhino Camp, as well as women's sanitary kits and psychosocial support; and the St. Jude's Family Project in Masaka, which for 20 years has been training local people to feed their families using farming techniques such as permaculture.

We know we have come to hear people's



Clockwise from above: Judith and Moses with their baby Emmanuel in Nebbi; Daniel points to an aquaculture pool in Masaka; Olivia speaks at the co-op presentation in Nebbi; Janice Biehn with Sarah Adjonye, a churchwarden of Bethlehem Anglican Church at Rhino Camp.
PHOTOS BY JANICE BIEHN

stories and share them with our respective churches, but we don't yet know how inspired we'll be by the people we meet.

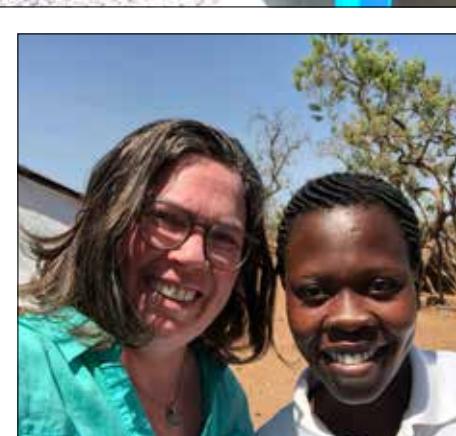
Diocese of Nebbi, Nebbi

Clusters of one-room brick buildings with sloped thatched grass roofs dot the landscape in the rural outskirts of this northwestern town. Towers of hand-made bricks are stacked to form their own kiln, and huge bundles of grass lean against the trees. Goats, roosters and pigs forage about. Children walk home from school in long lines, turning to wave and smile at our party. Women peel cassava or husk cowpeas in the shade while the men lay bricks or tend the fields. Some houses have small solar panels propped up on the ground, for if there is one thing Uganda has a lot of, it is sunshine. We are acclimating to the 35°C heat.

The development staff takes us to meet two separate savings-and-loan co-ops. In my group, 14 women gather on a tarp laid out beneath the shade of a tree. Plastic lawn chairs are set out for us and we are welcomed with singing and dancing. One by one, the women rise to tell us how this program has transformed their lives.

The women do the bulk of the farming, but with the increasing rate of climate change, the work takes longer and produces less. They have learned conservation agriculture techniques such as planting more than one type of seed at a time (to be less vulnerable to a bad crop), mulching (to retain moisture), and planting in rows (to make weeding easier). Soon their harvests were yielding enough food to feed their families and sell the surplus.

Once the men saw the increased yields and what the women were learning, couples began to work together as partners, sharing not only the farming workload but household and parenting duties as well. Gender workshops were also organ-



ized for both men and women.

Judith and Moses invite us into their home. They have a 14-year-old son, a nine-year-old daughter and a two-month-old son. Moses holds baby Emmanuel with ease but says (through an interpreter) that he would have never done this with his first-born son. With profits from selling her produce, Judith was able to purchase the decorative curtain that hid the bed behind them, as well as plates, cups and chairs. To not be able to demonstrate hospitality is a shameful thing to a Ugandan, we learn.

Pentecostal Assemblies of God, Rhino Camp

Pentecostal Assemblies of God staffers Sheshmond Esalu, Simon Ekadu and Andrew Ogwang accompany us on the two-hour drive from Arua to Rhino Camp. Almost 100,000 people live here, mostly South Sudanese. Some have been here since 2016, unable to return home, as the conflict in South Sudan continues. There are 13 refugee settlements in Uganda, hosting 1.2 million refugees, the highest in Africa.

The camp is divided into six sub-camps, which are further divided into zones. We are visiting Ofua Camp, zones two and four. Many of the brick and thatched roof houses are wrapped in the tent material of the UN Refugee Agency. The chaos of the early days is gone, yet the challenges remain.

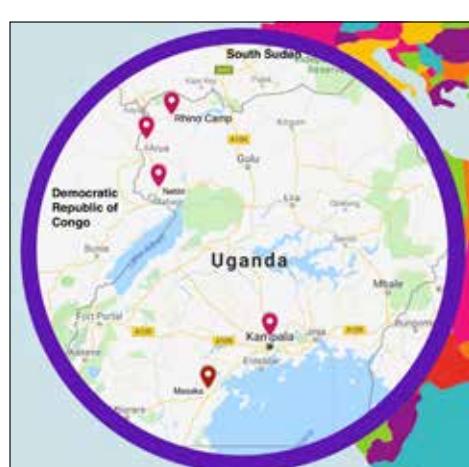
Our intrepid driver, Patrick Nsereko, expertly navigates the treacherous roads until we arrive at the church – a long mud-covered building with a grass-



thatched roof. As we file into the building, we are greeted with singing, clapping and dancing. By the time the song is over, the church is full and children poke their heads in the gap between the walls to watch.

We learn that each zone is governed by a Refugee Welfare Council made up of refugee leaders who interact with the NGOs. Each leader stands up and introduces themselves. The people are grateful for the support they have been given but they are growing frustrated. Monthly food rations last only 20 days. There is no way to make an income to buy more food for the remaining 10 days or to buy uniforms so their kids can go to school. The corn-soya nutritional porridge that the Pentecostal Assemblies of God provides to 2,500 vulnerable people in Ofua has been delayed at the Kenyan border for a month.

The next day we meet refugees in Zone 4. We speak with a group of breastfeeding or pregnant women who have been receiving the fortified porridge. They sit close together on a bench, two of them holding their babies on their laps. All but one attend Bethlehem Anglican Church, the large building behind us. Sarah Adjonye, who sits at one end, is a churchwarden there. She patiently translates each woman's names and ages, and their harrowing stories of how they arrived here, mostly on foot with only the clothes on their backs. "God must have a reason for putting us here," she says. "It's not normal for people to live like this." Then the words seem to catch in Sarah's throat and she brings the back of her hand to her eyes. Quietly, she says, "We must have really sinned for God to punish us like this." Afterwards, she tells me she is praying for help to start a small drugstore business. I tell her I will pray for her, too.



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Justice walk turns 40

March bears witness to society's wounds

TORONTO'S Ecumenical Good Friday Walk for Justice is celebrating its 40th anniversary. This year's walk will be held on Good Friday, April 19, beginning at Holy Trinity, Trinity Square at 2 p.m. The theme will be "For the Sake of the World: 40 Years of Hopeful Persistence."

The first walk, held on April 13, 1979, was organized by a group of Catholic teachers, Teachers for Social Justice of the Metropolitan Separate School Board. The theme was "Witness to Hope: Contemporary Way of the Cross," and began at the Newman Center at 80 St. George St. with more than 100 participants. There were five stations – for the wounds of Christ on the cross – and everyone was invited to meditate on five contemporary wounds of the suffering Body of Christ. The stations focused on the hazards of nuclear waste, abortion, refugee policy, exploitation in the sugar industry, and justice for striking workers in a seven-month lockout in Sudbury.



Walkers gather in front of Toronto's Old City Hall last year during a stop on the route. PHOTO BY MICHAEL HUDSON

"The purpose was not to lay blame, but to acknowledge everyone's participation in oppressive structures and everyone's need for repentance," explains the Rev. Sherman Hesselgrave, incumbent of Holy Trinity, Trinity Square. The first walk concluded at Nathan Phillips Square.

Over the decades, the themes of the stations have responded to a wide range of issues, from human trafficking to the commodification of water to climate change. The themes of the stations on the 2019 walk – homelessness, refugees, Indigenous and environmental justice – have been addressed on



previous walks. "Forty is a long time to persist, but it took William Wilberforce 40 years of offering his private member's bill to abolish slavery before Parliament took action to do so," says Mr. Hesselgrave.

This year's walk concludes back at Holy Trinity with a simple supper.

More cruise, cargo ships expected in Toronto port

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in the best way we can," she says. "Like many charities, we've seen a drop in our donations and we're working hard to rebuild relations and resources. When we looked at what it cost us to operate the building and how it was being used, we had to make the right decision, and I believe we have."

Ms. Alltree says the mission's new space in the Cruise Ship Terminal will be ideally situated to serve the cruise ships, especially their crews. Toronto is becoming a major destination and point of departure for cruise ships on the Great Lakes, with about 43 dockings expected this summer.

"Crews on cruise ships are here for hours, not days," she explains. "They usually need to make connections with chaplains when they're here. The office building will be right at the foot of the gangway."

More cargo vessels are also expected to dock at Pier 51 this summer, creating a need for volunteers who will visit the crews and drive them to shops and services in the city. "Shipping is coming back to the city, which is very exciting, but we're going to need people to help out," she says.

The Mission to Seafarers Southern Ontario was formed in 2014 when the individual missions in Oshawa, Toronto and Hamilton

amalgamated. "We're stronger together because of the connections between the three," says Ms. Alltree. "They've all grown and the need for the mission is greater than ever in all three places."

This spring, the mission is rolling out a new program called "Critical Incident Crisis Management" in the Oshawa and Toronto ports. If a traumatic event happens, Ms. Alltree or a member of her team will visit the location as soon as possible to provide counselling and follow-up support to those affected. "We want to ensure that the person's post-traumatic stress response does not turn into post-traumatic stress disorder," she says. The mission began the program last October in Hamilton and it has proven to be successful.

Ms. Alltree thanks the mission's supporters in the Diocese of Toronto. "We are grateful for the people who continue to care about us," she says. "We look at every donation as generosity from people who care, and the seafarers are so grateful, especially when they come into a cold port and there's a warm welcome."

For more information about the Mission to Seafarers Southern Ontario, visit its website, www.mtsso.org or email the Rev. Judith Alltree at glutenfreepriest@gmail.com.

Projects help transform lives in Uganda

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St. Jude's Family Project, Masaka
On our last day, we head west to Masaka. Founder Josephine Kizza Aliddeki greets us with enthusiasm. The 22-year-old organization has grown to include modern offices and classrooms, dormitories and a cafeteria for instruction in permaculture. PWRDF has been supporting St. Jude's for the past year and a half, training 210 women farmers, building 210 water tanks for rainwater harvest, establishing tree and vegetable nurseries and more.

Josephine's son Daniel recently completed a Master's degree in Oklahoma and is excited to show us the new demonstration garden. "We built it on the side of a hill to show farmers that an area that seems inhospitable can still grow food," he says. The garden includes irrigation tunnels that run down the hill and feed into three aquaculture pools where fish are farmed. There is eggplant, tomatoes, banana trees, heaps of grass compost, chicken coops and pig sty. "Permaculture is all about using the soil to feed you, but also feeding the soil," says Daniel. He explains that farmers learn to continuously plant so there is no "season." Plants are harvested in turn and carefully chosen to also return nutrients to the soil.

We take a short drive to the home of Emily, 52, who is disabled. She leads other vulnerable people in caring for a tree nursery, making soap, breeding pigs and chickens and collecting rain water. She tours us around her home and shows off her new higher-efficiency wood-burning brick stove, one of 120 in the community. PWRDF has supported St. Jude's in



From left, Janice Biehn, Becky Longhurst, Shaylyn McMahon, Samantha Burnside, Musu Taylor-Lewis and Jon Self in Uganda. PHOTO COURTESY OF JANICE BIEHN

planting more than 10,000 trees. When crops are not turning a profit, many people cut down trees to burn and make charcoal to sell, but the cost to the soil and air quality is far greater than the short-term gain.

When we return to the main building, the community is waiting to meet and

thank us. They have written a song about how their lives have changed. Josephine translates: "It is through the Canadians that we can reach higher and higher," the song goes. "We've been able now to improve our lives because St. Jude came to work with us."

Mission accomplished.

Janice Biehn is the communications coordinator for PWRDF and a churchwarden at St. Olave, Swansea in Toronto. She will be presenting an illustrated talk about her trip on May 19 during coffee hour after the 10:30 service. All are welcome.