



Spotlight on the Garden Ministry

It's hard to believe that we are embarking on the sixth year of our Garden Ministry's newsletter, "Growing News". We are so grateful for our readership and the positive feedback we've received. It is encouraging to know that we are not "growing" in isolation, and we look forward to even more new members joining us as we continue to follow the call to be good stewards of our outdoor Sacred Space, the St. Gabriel's Garden.

This issue, we are beginning to use our new logo, designed by Benedick Badenas, that has now completed the approval process. We hope to have it displayed on clothing worn by workers in the garden to identify them as participants in Garden Ministry activities.



As was announced in the previous newsletter, we are now under the leadership of Caroline Liggayu-Martin, and here we share her first "official" message as our new Garden Ministry Coordinator:

From the Coordinator's desk:

To be honest, I spent three years running away from a lead position. I kept trying to "reason" my way out of what I felt was a clear calling. But after all that hesitation, I am so glad to finally be here with you.

As we look toward the future, I am excited to see how we will grow together—not just in size, but in our walk with God. My goal is for us to steer this ministry hand-in-hand, following the Holy Spirit's lead.

Our Garden Ministry is a labour of love that involves real work: digging, watering, and weeding. If you feel even a small nudge to join us, please don't push it away. I spent three years hesitating, and I don't want you to miss out on the joy of this "growing season." Since its beginning in 2017, this ministry has been a beautiful way to connect with God through nature, and I can't wait to see what this next season holds!



"Growing News" is the newsletter of the St. Gabriel's Garden Ministry, published quarterly, at the turn of each season.

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Spotlight on *Ficus Benjamina*



(Part of our Indoor Garden)

The *Ficus* is an ancient genus of plants at least 80 million years old. There are two large *Ficus Benjamina* (commonly known as “weeping fig”) trees sitting in large green pots in front of the south-facing window of the indoor sacred space of St. Gabriel's Church.

There are over 800 genera* of the *Ficus* trees, vines and shrubs that grow naturally in mild to moderate temperate zones. Figs and rubber trees are also part of this family. At each watering, *Ficus* trees should be rotated to help tame their size and shape, for like most plants, they will grow toward the strongest source of light. The sap of this tree is toxic to animals and humans.

[*“genera” is the plural of “genus”—a taxonomic term used in the biological ranking of living things and fossils, which ranks above species (at the pointed bottom of the reversed taxonomic triangle) and below family, (third level above the bottom of the triangle).]

The beautiful *Ficus* trees in our church are already quite tall. They are thriving because the outdoor roof overhang prevents the harsh afternoon sun from shining directly on their leaves. The third smaller *Ficus* plant is a cutting propagated from one of the larger *Ficus* trees!

Ficus is an attractive, easy-to-grow indoor plant that has long and pointed leaves. You may have seen the pea-size beige seeds that have fallen from the trees onto the stone floor of the church.

These plants, like orchids, have aerial roots. Along with the Living Plant Wall in the atrium of St. Gabriel's, these *Ficus* trees not only contribute beauty and oxygen to the indoor environment, they also help to purify the air of the church.

How fortunate we are to have an indoor Sacred Space in which plants like the *Ficus* can flourish! The abundance of natural light means that we can naturally connect to the beauty of God's botanical creation, and frame the outdoor Sacred Space with our indoor garden.

Contributed by Pat Ahlberg



On April 22nd, we will celebrate the 56th Anniversary of Earth Day. What began in 1970 in the USA to draw attention to the plight of the planet has grown to be embraced by 193 countries around the world.

As this harsh and incredibly snowy winter finally melts into Spring, “how can we keep from singing?” It seems fitting to reproduce the first three verses of a traditional hymn that celebrates God's tremendous gift of creation... We hope you will “hear” the arrangement by John Rutter that has been sung by the St. Gabe's Adult Choir.

For the Beauty of the Earth

*Lord of all, to thee we raise,
This our joyful hymn of praise.*

*For the beauty of the Earth,
For the beauty of the skies,
For the love which from our birth
Over and around us lies:*

*For the beauty of each hour,
Of the day and of the night.
Hill and vale and tree and flow'r,
Sun and moon and stars of light:*

*For the joy of ear and eye,
For the heart and mind's delight.
For the mystic harmony
Linking sense to sound and sight:*

*Lord of all, to thee we raise,
This our joyful hymn of praise.*

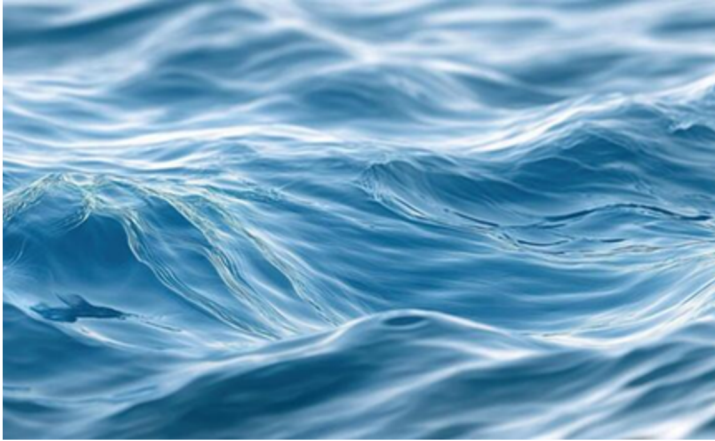
Text: Folliot Sandford Pierpont, 1835-1917.



WATER: God's Essential Gift

by Marlene Bourdon-King, Editor

The opening lines of the Bible tell us that "... darkness covered the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters..." (Genesis 1:2). Thus, water has always been.



Water is the essential component of life, upon which most of our bodily functions rely—for transport of oxygen and nutrients, lubrication of joints, health of tissues and organs, and removal of waste and toxins. We float in water in our mother's womb. Our bodies are comprised of more than 50% water, ranging from 55-60% in adults to 78% in babies. We can survive for up to three weeks without food, but we cannot live beyond about three days without fresh water. Absence of water spells the end of life for all living things, whether plant or animal.

For most (though certainly not all) people living in Canada, fresh, clean water is a resource we take for granted. We turn on the tap, and potable water flows out. Until recently, we rarely had to think about how much water we use, or how we use it.

However, the reality of climate change has forced us to recognize our dependence on water in uncomfortable and worrying ways. Wildfires erupting not only in Canada but also across the planet signal the consequences of insufficient rainfall, and depleted water tables render lakes, rivers and reservoirs to dangerously low levels.

Simultaneously, too much water can be just as devastating. "Once-in-a-century" storm events, from hurricanes and typhoons to "atmospheric rivers" have become almost commonplace: annual events, wreaking havoc on lives and livelihoods.

The importance of water is reflected in our religious symbols and Salvation History. In multiple stories from the Old Testament water figures prominently. Into the New Testament, water continues as a "main character", from Jesus's baptism, through his first public miracle, to his thirst upon the Cross. In all these stories, water is a most important sign and gift from God.

Now, as we enter the church, we dip our hand in holy water, and make the sign of the cross. Water flows from the baptismal font in front of the great south window. Water trickles behind the Living Wall in the Gathering Space. Everywhere, water serves as a reminder of the blessing of water—for purification and for life.

What most of us fail to appreciate is just how wondrous water is, and what we can learn from it. Water is transformative, refreshing both parched bodies and fields of crops. Water always finds a path, regardless of the barriers placed in its way. Water has "memory", as seen in the patterns it produces in frost. Water can be used advantageously, to give life and solve problems, and water can be used as a weapon, to end life or become a device of torture.

In many ways, water is a perfect metaphor for the duality of human nature: we can be a source of great good, or great evil. It is also a metaphor for faith: a gift we can take for granted, ignore, and reject, or one we can nurture, protect, and employ. Just as we take water for granted (to our peril), taking our relationship with our faith, and with the God in whom we have faith, as "a given", as something we do "on automatic", might be equally problematic.





Recently, Maude Barlow (of the Company of Canadians) gave a presentation about water to the North York University Women's Club. She explained to us that the world is in serious water trouble. The belief that we have unlimited water is a myth. Of water that is accessible globally, 7% has become irretrievably polluted by such things as factory farming, mining practices, and "fracking" (using water to flush out natural gas). In Canada, 77% of the country is now experiencing drought conditions: Atlantic Canada is in a 50-year drought, and British Columbia is in a state of permanent drought. Around the world, one-quarter of people are without clean water, and one-half have no access to sanitation.

Continuing the connection between faith and water, we know that vocations have dwindled in developed nations, and we in Canada now have need of priests from developing countries. Just as dehydrated bodies cannot survive, neglected souls are prone to despair. Unwatered gardens wither and die; unnurtured faith fails to sustain us in trying times. Dessicated forests become engulfed in voracious flames. Likewise, "blind", unconscious faith is also dangerous, because it fails to harness its power for good.

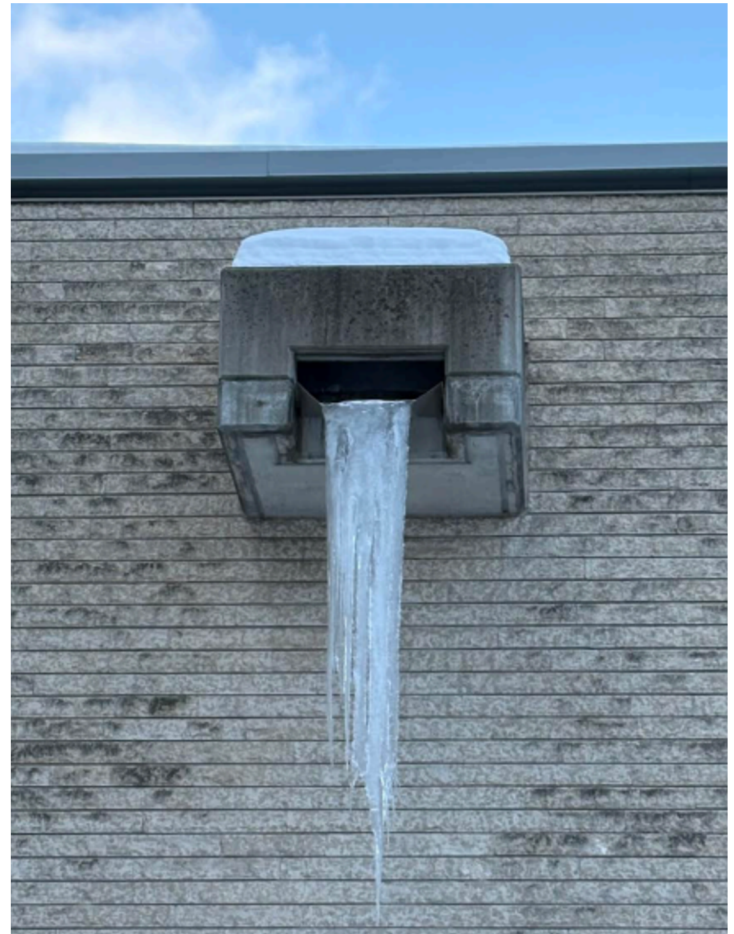
Water is essential to our temporal life, but faith is crucial to our spiritual life. The details of our lives, moment to moment, tend to distract us from the purpose of our lives, which is to join our Father in Heaven. Perhaps using water (as we use holy water) to remind us of our ultimate purpose can realign our priorities.

Being mindful of careful water usage can be paired with careful nurturing of our faith. We can hope for sufficient rain, but prayer for rain reinforces our dependence on the Father for all that we truly need. Taking care of our garden, and making sure it is adequately watered can be paired with prayerful gratitude for the gifts of creation—for our ability to nurture life and grow food sustainably. Having access to plentiful clean water is a call for regular prayers of gratitude for the blessing of this gift. It can also prompt us to measurable action, to support work for equal and equitable access to that blessing.



That blessing is absent both here in Canada (particularly for indigenous peoples moved from their ancestral lands), and also abroad (especially in developing nations), where water is a precious resource, often physically carried (usually by women and children), and used carefully and sparingly.

Our church was designed to make wise use of water; this picture, taken of water frozen in the midst of draining into the rainpool is an apt representation of how abruptly a "given" can suddenly stop.



Ultimately, we are called to remain mindful of how we use this most precious and powerful gift. We are called to remain faithful to our responsibility to be careful stewards of creation. Pondering the profound significance of water in our temporal and spiritual lives provides one more signpost of the connectedness of all of God's creation. Water reminds us in myriad ways of how blessed we are to be children of God, from whom all gifts come, upon whom we depend for everything we are and have, and with whom we are intended to share the joy of his eternal home.