Memoir and Appreciation II

"So much to be thankful for"

80th Anniversary

April 28, 1946 – 2026

The Anglican Church of
St Augustine of Canterbury

Church of St. Augustine of Canterbury:

Memoir and Appreciation II – *"So much to be thankful for"*

April 2026

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The Church of St. Augustine of Canterbury celebrated its 50th anniversary in April 1996 and marked the occasion with a book entitled **"Memoir and Appreciation**". Written by Newman Bracken, Everett Fleming and John W.B. Hill, the book offered some history, a perspective for change and view of the future. In April, 2026 we celebrate our 80th anniversary with this update. Ross Beer asked if I could make a contribution.

To start off, Ross and I sat together, over a beer, considering the past 30 years and organizing ideas about the highlights. Not long after we started Ross commented ***"We have so much for be thankful for!"*** and there was our theme. I will focus here on my gratitude, memories and appreciations for; 30+ wonderful years, a very special spiritual community, and our caring and sharing of the christian tradition. Others are also contributing including a colourful description of the Church's stain class windows.

Memories and Appreciations II

I offer these reflections recognizing that there are many wonderful parts of St. Augustine that I haven't been close to – the music for example – and others are invited to fill in gaps. My perspective will be on the amazing people who I have had the honour of knowing and privilege of learning from.

Everett Fleming

My focus will be on our wonderful clergy and their leadership. But I want to begin with Everett Fleming. This is partly because he contributed to the 1996 Memoir and Appreciation, but mostly because he was such a powerful mentor for me. I remember Everett for his grace and integrity. He was also a great musician and enthusiastic organist. He invited me to work on the fundraising and rebuilding the organ. That was a very big and very successful effort. It raised important issues of how we wanted to worship. Everett's optimism was always with us as we confronted several financial challenges. He never worried about our capacity to reach any goal – confident that people would come through - and he was always right.

Everett was always open and looking for opportunities to talk about his own spiritual path and learn about others. Everett had roots in many Christian traditions that are very distinct from Anglicanism and he enjoyed talking about the differences. His faith was deep and broad – a classic leader at St. Augustine. In the early 1990's, he (and John Hill) set up a Thursday morning group that gathered businessmen in the congregation and invited us to share our views on the place of God in our life and how it impacts our work. That group is still meeting on every other Thursday morning and brings together current and past members of St. Augustine. This group likely spans 30+ years and still contains many original members.

Now I turn to the clergy. Across 30 years strong leadership found roots in a wonderful culture at St Augustine. We take their guidance deeper into a powerful spiritual energy and momentum. I think this spiritual dynamic is possible because the community openly accepts a wide range of personal experience and interpretations. We accept and share all of them; adding momentum across the community. This is more than an openness and sharing of ideas – it grows in a casual atmosphere and fondness for fun. In my experience this all begins with John W.B. Hill and his New Era; bringing authentic worship and new ideas for liturgy.[1] John describes this as a transition of the church from a clerical institution providing spiritual experience for individual consumers to a group who are, together, intentionally following Jesus. This momentum for change carried us across thirty years with Megan Jull's introducing our newest innovation - Playful Liturgy - with St. Augustine's as a research base.[2]

We care for each other and we care about our individual spiritual growth. As Ross said, there is much to be thankful for!

John W.B. Hill

I arrived at St. Augustine around 1980 with a young family and some skepticism about Christianity. I was raised as an Anglican but had ventured far into other spiritual traditions. My wife Jane shared these experiences as we visited Buddhist, Unitarian and other communities. But we understood that our young children, Erika and Will, needed to be grounded in a spiritual community and teachings. I remember friends in university who had no spiritual learning in their youth and saw how their life was poorer for not having the opportunity to learn and then, perhaps, reject a spiritual base. With this in mind, I remember teaching Sunday School at the start.

[1] John Hill A New Era, Memoir and Appreciation Church of St. Augustine of Canterbury, 1966
[2] Megan is taking her Doctorate of Ministry at Trinity College and her topic of Playful Liturgy

But my real introduction to Christianity began with the arrival of John Hill and his unique and powerful teaching. I moved from Sunday School to being a reader (good move). John had this wonderful practice of meeting on Saturday morning to rehearse and discuss the readings, and I took full advantage to dig deeper and offer challenging questions. Over and over again, John offered a new way of hearing these readings and helped me accept their wisdom in the context of history, symbolism, poetry, other religions and imagination. Nothing needed to be taken literally. A world of spiritual wisdom opened as the room for interpretation and imagination widened. I did not feel tied to a narrow interpretation of Christ's teaching, I was invited to look at it from many perspectives.

I remember one of John's innovations, as he would pause in the middle of a sermon, step towards the congregation, ask a question about what he had just said, and then wait for an answer. You never know when he would do it. John remembers one early response to this practice as Peter Shepard commented "John, you should give us some advance warning so that we can pay attention!"

John nurtured a creative and flexible way of experiencing Christ's teachings as he removed the pews and replaced them with chairs. This created a whole new way of seeing each other. He remembers drawing us into a circle for communion and one parishioner commenting "when I am waiting in the circle for communion, and I sense that if the person next to me seems unhappy, I feel like taking their hand". John arranged focus groups where, in his absence, a leader would ask for reactions to celebrating communion in a circle. He remembers that I was reported to have commented that "Spirit used to seem far away during communion but, in the circle, I feel, as I see the congregation around me, that Spirit is here".

John's willingness to experiment included an adult candidate for baptism who wanted to be emersed in water. John agreed, went out and bought a watering trough for horses and used it for baptism. There were some objections with a Warden commented "You can't do that!"

These were important symbols of flexibility that I found wonderful. There were many more examples.

Schuyler Brown

John also leavened the bread of our experience with some special support. Schuyler Brown was a very different spiritual leader than John, offering another dimension to my spiritual growth. Schuyler led many powerful adult education sessions for the church. I remember Schulyer loving the poetic quality of the King James version of the Bible. I discovered that he attended a Zen meditation practice. I also attending a course, with

others from St Augustine, that he taught “On the Psychology of Meditation” at the University of Toronto.

We have been blessed with a succession of teachers; each offering a new perspective and each allowing us to open our hearts and our community to new and exciting social and spiritual ideas. Consider, for example, our amazing work with refugees and their families.

Floyd Green

And then there was the decidedly unique Floyd Green with his own, often irreverent, spiritual approach. Floyd brought a bit of wild energy and lots of humour along with often challenging ideas. My favourite Floyd moment was when, as he was preaching, someone’s cell phone rang. Floyd paused, looked out over the room and said in a loud voice “**That better be God calling!**”. Floyd brought another, very different, Christian wisdom to St. Augustine through his work as a chaplain at St. Michael’s hospital.

Floyd and his daughter Liz initiated a wonderful connection of St. Augustine to the indigenous community. For me, this was a delightful opportunity to experience indigenous spirituality and join the changing attitude of Anglicans towards our native neighbours. For several years a group from St. Augustine visited the Pow Wow hosted by the Curve Lake First Nation and became friends with the leadership there. Floyd’s compassion for the poor, homeless and victims of racism was at the core of his Christianity.

Pamela Lucas, another chaplain at St. Michael’s and very special Anglican leader, brought her amazing spiritual presence to St. Augustine.

Marg Fleck

Marg was another great spark for our spiritual flame. Her roots extend far back into St. Augustine’s history. And her energy and participation fit perfectly into the profile of our amazing leadership. My personal favourite Marg story is linked to my starting as an intercessor for the Prayers of the People. When I was asked if I would join the intercessors, I hesitated. I was interested in the role but I knew that I would like to use my own words in some places. I remembered Marg offering a different approach in her prayers for the people so I asked her about bringing something new. Without hesitating for a moment, she said “Go for it. Keep going until they tell you to stop”.

One measure of the outstanding quality of our leadership is the arrival of other Anglican Church leaders – including Alan Perry, Secretary of the Anglican Church of Canada, to join us and John Hill’s move to the clergy at St. James Cathedral after leading us at St.

Augustine for over 25 years. John carries on the real calling of the church even now as he leads a Food Bank at the church of the Redeemer.

With John's departure, we welcomed **John Wilton**. John seemed to radiate a spiritual confidence and wisdom about leading the community. I remember how he would greet every group of children who joined our ceremony saying "Remember that God loves you". His time with us was brief but I know he took his wonderful gifts to many other congregations.

Megan Jull

To me the transition to Megan's leadership was almost seamless. Her style embodies all of our culture naturally – with an important addition. I would feel Megan reaching out into the Leaside community and I began appreciating our connection to the school, Stage Coach and the neighbourhood through the BBQ, Hallowe'en and work with the food banks.

Our tiny but mighty community stepped to the front of the line in support of refugee claimants and Megan offered deep support from our members. Bringing her family into our celebration added to the overall feeling that we are all a family. Of course, the BIG step was the arrival of the Swedish congregation and a whole new family. Again, Megan's open and inclusive leadership style carried the community to a new dimension.

Megan encouraged my interest in the indigenous community as we added a service to honour National Indigenous Peoples Day and invited Sandra Campbell from the Toronto Urban Native Ministry to join us.

My deepest connection with Megan has been a remarkable moment that often happens when I am doing the Prayers of the People. As mentioned, I like to add a personal note and always worry that what I see and hear in the readings will sound out of place. But as I hear the wonderful words of her sermons, I find that her message somehow fits with my short offering and I feel like I am stepping deeper into her insights and wisdom. Her sermons are amazing; offering the opportunity to hear the message of the text, we have heard many times, in a completely new way. For me this allows Christianity take on an exciting new life. This is no simple success after 30+ years of amazing teaching by our clergy.

My Time as Warden

I have served twice as a Warden and always found it to be a rewarding experience. Strong support from fellow Wardens, especially Shirley Griffin, clergy and the office eased the challenges of the job. Advisory Board was always active and supportive and volunteers always available.

For example, I was a Warden at the time when we had extensive repairs and masonry work done in the Bell Tower. This was fixing leaks and problems that went back many years. The community supported this work with enthusiast input and needed funds. At this important point in our maintenance of the church building, we took the opportunity to ask important questions about the space and how we use it. I have always felt that we have done a good job of caring for the church and the community. There has been regular use of the building by other groups, and we have nurtured a socially valued space for the broader community.

Another challenge came with COVID and its disruption and separation. I remember strong and valuable support offered by the Diocese. There really was a coming together of our community to meet the challenge. I remember the weekly task of ringing the bell to acknowledge the contribution of health workers in the community. This was an unexpected opportunity for me, as I often brought my young grand-daughter, Sarah, to come with me and ring the bell in the early evening. Alone in the silent church, as the bell rang, was a strange and unexpected opportunity to share with her.

There were times when we were divided and troubled. These challenges were built on important and sometimes painful differences. We sat together in many, many settings with the intention of better understanding and healing. And it worked as we emerged as the inclusive and loving group that carried on in the tradition that makes me so proud. Again we were very fortunate to have dedicated leadership – in particular, I think of Beth Nelson.

Conclusion

The Spirit is with us in Saint Augustine. The world continues to change and challenge us and the traditions we represent. I am encouraged that our faith and practice has lasting value and our community has important spiritual wisdom to offer. For example, we are

learning from our indigenous neighbours and their traditional teachings. There is even more dramatic change and powerful momentum to spiritual teachings that grows out of new evidence emerging from science. Now we know that there is no fundamental contradiction separating ancient, mystical wisdom and the emerging science of a cosmic consciousness. Our open and caring community has offered a home for me as I grow. We have much to be thankful for.