

Self-directed Study Leave

April 13 – April 19, 2026

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Introduction:

For this self-directed study leave, I had set 3 goals:

1. To read:
 - a) *Respecting Congregations*, Clyde Ervine (2025)
 - b) *Reading the Bible on Turtle Island*,
T. Christopher Hoklotubbe, Daniel Zacharias (2025)
 - c) *The Gospel of Judas*, Kasser, Meyer, Wurst (2006) (Time permitting)
Various documents from PCC, requested by members and adherents.
2. To develop a SMART strategic ministry plan for summer community engagement.
3. To plan a Leading with Care (and Safe Church) workshop.

By the end of the week, Goals 1c and 3 remain unfinished. Goals 1a, 1b and 2 are reported on in what follows.

In this report, some lines are highlighted. The green highlights suggest possible actionable thoughts. The yellow illuminates thoughts that are key to the author's argument.

Goal #1 a) Review and Response: *Respecting Congregations*, Clyde Ervine

From the epilogue, Clyde Ervine summarizes his 2025 book *Respecting Congregations: Encouraging congregations to rediscover their truest identity, purpose, and ministry* by writing:

My purpose was: to press the idea that time taken from the pressures and problems of congregational life to rethink what a congregation is, why a congregation exists, and what a congregation's ministry patterns should be will turn out to be time well spent. More than that, I have argued that Christian congregations are not at liberty to set aside the three New Testament based givens that define Christian congregations: their Christological identity, their missional purpose, and their gathering/scattering ministry pattern.¹

And, his final words:

A congregation that keeps Jesus at its core is not guaranteed success, but it ought to be applauded for taking seriously, attending to, and respecting the One who defines what a Christian congregation is all about: Jesus.²

¹ Clyde Ervine, *Respecting Congregations*, 119

² Ibid. 122.

The theme of this book is *respect*. Specifically, respect *for* Christian congregations. Respect for what a congregation is, why it is, and how it is: its identity, purpose (mission), and ministry as given to us by Jesus in the written records of the New Testament. (Throughout this report, 1st person plural references (“us”, “our”, “we”, etc.) will usually refer to the congregation of Knox Presbyterian Church in Bobcaygeon.)

a) Respecting identity

Rev. Dr. Clyde Ervine began his book with a discussion on terminology.

First, he suggests the word *congregation*, more so than the word *church*, evokes the emphases of the Greek word *ekklesia* that was originally used in the New Testament to refer to the “community that God plants, constructs, inhabits, ... a congregation belongs to God; it is God’s work before it is that of local leaders, even though God may use the latter as field hands!”³ Although not wrong, *church*, suggests a greater emphasis on human ability to organize and manage communities. *Congregation*, on the other hand, suggests that the human agency is a response to God who calls us. God calls, we congregate.

Secondly, Ervine notes that the majority of 2nd person pronouns (‘you’) in the original Greek of the New Testament utilize a *plural* form. This suggests the *respect* which God has for the community (over individuals or corporations) as the prime means of communicating Christ’s grace to the world. Interestingly, he notes the King James Version of the Bible maintained this emphasis: “In the KJV⁴, ‘thou’ is used for the single pronoun ‘you’ and ‘ye’ is used for the plural pronoun ‘you’; but that distinction disappears in current English bibles that consistently use ‘you’ as both a single and plural pronoun.” (22). This subtle linguistic change Ervine suggests, has had a profound effect on the individualization of Christianity and the loss of much of the *congregational* emphasis of the New Testament within the preaching and teaching of the community.⁵

³ Ibid., 21.

⁴ *King James Version* of the Bible

⁵ “The individualization of Christianity” refers to the movement, over the past number of decades, within Christianity towards the individual as the primary recipient of God’s grace and agent in the world. Personal salvation, while not unimportant, replaces communal life and witness.

Never less than social communities localized in place and time, congregations are much more.⁶ **Congregations are: Spirit-led *in Christ* communities.**

Ervine offers three examples of situations in which respecting this *in Christ* identity manifests in ways that will distinguish *congregations* from other social communities:

1. **Solving problems and conflicts by holding them up against the teachings and examples of Jesus.** “Paul’s consistent response to congregational problems was to focus on Jesus. ... Paul consistently draws Corinth’s congregation away from its own drama to it’s “in Christ” identity.”⁷ Before using cultural/societal values for solving problems, first turn to Christ’s teachings and examples (in his living, interactions, speech patterns, the cross, the resurrection, ...).

Some of these problems and conflicts arise from navigating change that is necessitated as we face challenges while respecting our New Testament-given *in Christ* identity. To that Ervine offers three helpful points for consideration:

- “a more *respectful* approach to change will recognize that congregations need the wisdom of the past to help them adapt and innovate into the future ...”
- “congregations untethered from the biblical Jesus will not long remain Christian.”⁸
- Change must be made only when congregational leaders learn and *respect* what a congregation is and what it is for.⁹

2. **Living in public “with an integrity that commends Jesus to unbelievers”.**

3. **To be not a private club.** (“... worship is not just a gathering of believers but an entry point for ‘outsiders’ or ‘unbelievers’ to hear the gospel.”).¹⁰

Furthermore, “... a congregation is a body that has the spiritual power to overcome divisions...” (35). **Respect for one another as siblings *in Christ*, he urges, is stronger than affinity which “allows a congregation to respect those whom the world despises.”** (37)

⁶ Clyde Ervine, *Respecting Congregations*, 24

⁷ Ibid., 30.

⁸ Ibid., 49.

⁹ Ibid., 50. Furthermore, referencing Eugene Peterson, Ervine writes: “rather than use gimmicks, pastors should slow down and intercede between the wreckage of human lives and the reality of God’s grace.” (53)

¹⁰ Ervine, 28.

b) Respecting purpose (*mission*)

"What are congregations for, beyond sustaining themselves?" (66). Respecting congregations involves respecting their purpose "in relation to God's plan to re-establish God's rule and restore God's whole creation." (66). Referencing many others, Ervine wrote that:

The good news of the kingdom is not just that God desires to see life on earth transformed, ... but that Jesus placed himself at the center of the kingdom he proclaimed ... *the kingdom of God is not a free-floating social project; the kingdom of God is about the sovereign God coming to reign and doing so through Jesus.* (78, emphasis mine)

Thus, respecting congregations as God respects them, as Spirit-led, locally located, *in Christ* communities necessitates respecting their purpose to "represent in their neighbourhoods, even if imperfectly, God's rule inaugurated by Jesus." (78)

... the mission to which they are called is not their own project supported by their own financial resources. No, congregations are *called to partner in God's mission narrated in God's word, ... not called to be vendors of religious goods and services, but to be a people sent to the world to witness to Christ and his kingdom.* (79, emphasis mine)

In our various engagements with the wider Bobcaygeon community, are we representing "a free-floating social project" or "God's rule inaugurated by Jesus"?

c) Respecting ministry

Having identified congregations as local, Spirit-led *in Christ* communities, and having argued their purpose is to *witness to Jesus as Jesus serve's God's kingdom and purpose*, Ervine then argues that there are two primary *movements* in a congregation's life. **Congregations *gather* "to be formed as God's people" and *scatter* "as God's people to serve God's mission."**

In regards to respecting a congregation's *gathered* ministry, Ervine encourages:

- respect for preaching (**words, listeners**, the Bible, God's role in preaching, the preacher's role in preaching) (pg. 93ff.)
- respect for preparation:
Corporate worship that sets out to form and transform a gathered congregation will respect the need for preparation. ... maximizing parking for worshippers; ensuring good signage outside and inside church buildings; the cleaning, heating, or cooling of said buildings; teaching worship greeters and ushers to understand their ministry as hospitality ... **What motivates thorough preparation (much of which is hidden) is respect for the capacity of corporate worship to enable people to encounter God and have their need for hope, meaning, forgiveness, transcendence, and more met.** While it is true that a sovereign God is free to act beyond or in spite of human plans and preparation, that does not justify incoherent, underprepared corporate worship. ... Public worship is about encountering the true God and being formed as an "in Christ" community. (100)
- respect for both *praise* and *edification*: "Respect for congregational worship, then, means being clear that worship is about both God's praise and the building up of God's people." (101)

Rev. Ervine offers a simple, yet sometimes overlooked (or, disrespected) question: "What helps gathered congregations to praise God **and be formed** as God's people?" (102)

In regards to *scattered* ministry, Ervine suggests two arenas: Global and Local. Because, for the majority of congregations within Canada, global ministry usually involves offering financial support to organizations and individuals who are actively involved in on-the-ground ministries around the world, for this report, I will concentrate on Rev. Ervine's thoughts regarding local ministry.

"If a congregation is a body of believers that gathers to become more Christ-like through preaching, worship, prayer, and more, it is also a body of believers called to locally embody, exhibit, and express something of the kingdom of God." (114).

There are, he argued, at least four critical considerations for local, visible, needs-based scattered ministries (pg. 115):

- i. Congregations need to be aware of the potential power divide between the givers and receivers so they can ensure they are reflecting Christ's grace and not their own goodness.
- ii. The givers are as much in need of God's mercy as the receivers. (A congregation can become so outward focussed a vacuum is created within.)
- iii. Although clothing, food, shelter, money is needed; there are also less visible, yet equally critical needs (God's love, forgiveness, new life, lasting hope).
- iv. Congregations (and individuals) need to exhibit faith in words as well as deeds.

As to evangelism that verbalizes faith to our neighbours, 1 Pet 3:15-16 ... joins many New Testament texts in expecting not just apostles, evangelists, prophets, or preachers to "speak Jesus," but also ordinary believers. ... giving witness to Jesus to our neighbours is not easy, which is why most congregations prefer gathering to scattering. But if congregations are to respect the identity, purpose, and ministry pattern that the New Testament articulates for them, then the ministry of scattering must be attempted. (117)

Clyde Ervine's book *Respecting Congregations* is a refreshing encouragement to respect local congregations as inseparable elements of God's redemptive purposes. He encourages us to learn, re-learn, and respect congregations' identity, mission, and ministry as God has caused them to be described in the New Testament scriptures: Who/What/When/Where Jesus has called us to be, Why Jesus has called us to be, How Jesus has called us to be.

Goal #1. b) Review and Response: *Reading the Bible on Turtle Island*, T. Christopher Hoklotubbe and H. Daniel Zacharias

When the round dance takes place, everyone gathers in a wide circle, shoulder to shoulder, and performs a two-step shuffle to the beat of the drum that is simple enough ... 'We dance before your holy throne,' the song continues, alluding to the imagery of the 'persons from every tribe, language, people, and nation' (Rev 5:9) who encircle the throne of God (Rev 4-5). ... In this book we invite you to join us in the round dance of North American Indigenous interpretations of Christian Scripture. (pg. 1-2)

So begins Hoklotubbe's and Zacharias' 2025 book exploring *Turtle Island Hermeneutics*.

Hermeneutics is the process of interpreting Scripture. *Turtle Island* is an Indigenous name for the land mass "that Euroamericans have called North America" (pg. 2-3).

Whenever we read, wrestle with, and try and discern meaning from God's Word we are influenced by experiences, traditions, emotions, preconceived ideas, books we read, people we talk to, food we eat, air we breath, birds we hear, etc. All of these stimuli inform how we see/respond to the Spirit's illumination of the words of scripture. They create the community of the round dance in which we learn Jesus through His Word.

Turtle Island hermeneutics refers to the process of interpreting and living out the Scriptures and Christian faith under the influence of the experiences of the people indigenous to "North America."

I will attempt to organize my thoughts according to categories present in the book: 1. Core Assumptions, 2. Sabbath, Shalom, Jubilee, etc. 3. Ceremony, 4. A word about Land Acknowledgments.

1. Core Assumptions

Firstly, that God has been present and active throughout on Turtle Island even while (and before) calling forth the covenanted community descended from Abraham.

... Creator, who made a covenant with the Israelite patriarchs and matriarchs, had not ignored the Indigenous peoples of North America until the European colonizers arrived. Rather, Creator has always been present on Turtle Island and made a mark on the stories, ceremonies, lands, worldviews, and lifeways of its Indigenous

peoples.... After all, God indicates that he works with nations outside Israel in passages such as Amos 9:7... (3)

(We can learn this as well by observing God's promise to Ishmael in Genesis 21:12-13, 17-21. It behoves us to remember that the Biblical story, culminating in Jesus of Nazareth – the Messiah for all nations – traces God's involvement with one line of humanity. We ought to therefore proceed with caution in assuming there is only one line in God's story of redemption.

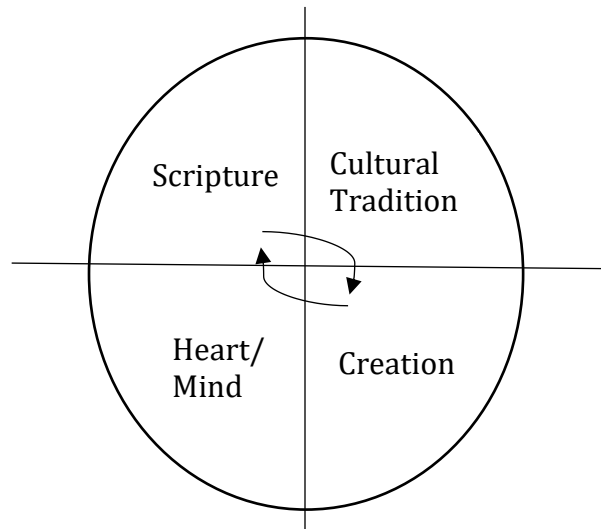
Secondly, Turtle Island hermeneutics assumes a *social location* for theological reflection.

Turtle Island hermeneutics expressly does not seek a universal frame of reference that comes from nowhere yet is everywhere. Rather, we try to take seriously all those things in our lives and history that have shaped us to be who we are and the goodness within our cultural heritages. From there, we ask what assets we bring with us as we encounter the text. (5)

Instead of a “one-size-fits-all” approach that might limit and/or restrict the power of God's Word, Turtle Island hermeneutics asks of the text “What was the intent of the original authors” and “What is the Spirit saying to me and *this* congregation where we are and when we are?” (See as well “Contextual Ministry” in Casey Church's *Holy Smoke*.)

Thirdly, Turtle Island hermeneutics employs an *asset-first* theology. Concluding, from experiential observations of how Christianity has been presented by Euroamerican missionaries in the past, that “Western Christianity” tends to focus on Genesis 3 and the story of the “Fall” as the starting point for God's redemptive program, Turtle Island hermeneutics leans more heavily on Genesis 1 as the starting point. Instead of anchoring theological reflection with a fixation on sin (without ignoring the seriousness of it), Turtle Island hermeneutics begins in the goodness of God's created world and the joy and delight God (Creator) finds in Creator's creation. We need and, in God's mercy, are invited to rely on God's forgiving and reconciling grace; nevertheless, as image-bearers of the divine and God's beloved children, we have worth – as does our culture, histories, relations, etc. We can learn from Jesus that God's grace is *incarnational*. Meaning, that God values the created world so highly He took on flesh. God knows the assets of His created, tangible world, so became *incarnate* to save the goodness of the world He loves.

Fourthly, Hoklotubbe and Zacharias introduce the “Medicine Wheel” of interpretation and invite us to “join the dance through the Wheel.” (7ff.) Indigenous Christians recognize the priority of the influence and authority of Scripture on their in-Christ living, without ignoring the insights of Cultural Traditions, Creation, and one’s own Heart/Mind. As you reflect on each of these authorities, you begin to discern the leading of Christ through His Spirit.

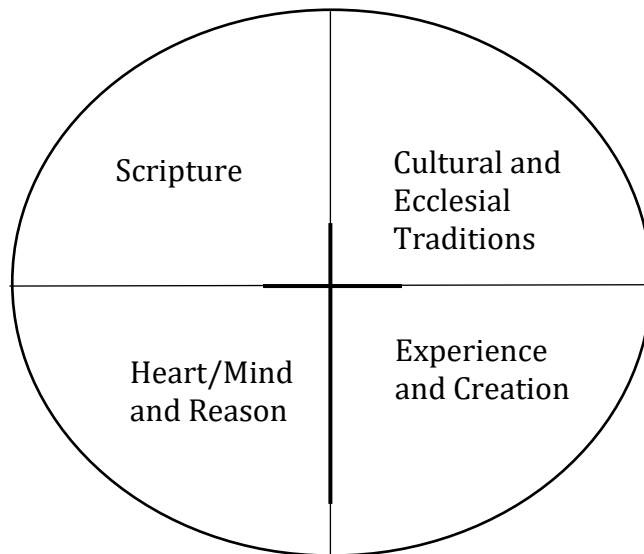


I should note that the section “Dancing through the Medicine Wheel” is one that bears further consideration.

Interestingly, within “Western” Christianity, a long-respected (although perhaps sometimes forgotten) practice of *hermeneutics* uses the Wesleyan quadrilateral. Likewise, this tool helps Christ’s disciples hear what the Spirit is saying in their present time and place. Four key authorities inform our decisions as we seek to live faithfully to Jesus: Scripture, Tradition (church history, church creeds/confessions, teachings/doctrines, personal, cultural, etc.), Experience (what has shaped our lives), and Reason:

Scripture	Tradition
Reason	Experience

Perhaps combining the two will give us a more complete method of reading and interpreting God's Word:



Fifthly, Hoklutubbe and Zacharias observed that our reading of Scripture, and thus our understanding of the gospel of Christ, is conditioned by the culture in which we're immersed. When culture contradicts gospel, we misrepresent Christ, cause harm to others, and miss the balanced joy of fellowship with Creator. So, Hoklotuube and Zacharias encourage Christians (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) to be aware of how culture is influencing our faith, always working towards *decolonizing* our reading, interpretation, and application of Scripture. In other words, increasing awareness of how our interpretations reflect more the values of our colonial ancestry (which viewed one culture as superior to/more in-step with God than another), or the individualistic, consumer-society of which we are now apart than those of Christ. It is an invitation to discern what is essential for receiving God's grace and living in Christ, in our current circumstance, what is imposed on the gospel by the dominant culture, and who gets to decide.

Sixthly, Turtle Island hermeneutics "walks into the future backwards" "with the wisdom of the past and present guiding our steps into an unknown future." (164):

- i. recognize and respect, repent from and honour both the wisdom and the foolishness of the past (pg. 108-110). Using the story of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21), Hoklotubbe and Zachariah invite "settler Christians [to] reckon with the reality that past Canadians and Americans have played the role of Ahab and Jezebel." (108)

- ii. treaties and covenants (109). God is always with us, is God always blessing us? Referring to 2 Samuel 21, Hoklotubbe and Zacharias writes (referencing Richard Twiss, *One Church, Many Tribes*):

Moreover, God refused to answer Israel's prayers for relief and health for the land because their previous leader had violently broken a peace treaty in his greed to acquire more land for his people. Twiss wonders why it is such a stretch for North American Christians to consider that Creator might *not* be "blessing" their nations and land because of their own history of broken treaties with Indigenous peoples. (122)

- iii. Noticing and filling my own "cultural vacuum."

...we are all indigenous to somewhere. Anecdotally, we have observed in some Christians a cultural vacuum that they attempt to fill with foreign cultural practices. Settler people, often disconnected from their ancestral lands for many generations, lose their cultural traditions and practices and adopt [unawares] modern consumerist culture,¹¹ which is a mile wide but an inch deep. This lack of cultural rootedness sometimes results in cultural appropriation.... (12).

The experience of some settler Christians of a cultural vacuum (which is sometimes filled through cultural appropriation) is "In the words of Cayuga First Nation theologian Adrian Jacobs, 'It is because they do not have their own Old Testament!' Having lost the riches of their own cultural heritage over generations, and unsatisfied with the vacuous nature of American pop culture, they turn to the riches they see in the cultural heritage they are most familiar." (13)

On the assumption Creator has been involved with Indigenous communities before European settlers arrived, Hoklotubbe and Zacharias argue that many of their cultural rites and ceremonies which deepen their fellowship with Creator can be thought of as their culturally specific Old Testament.

Although I do agree that un-critiqued cultural appropriation ought to be discouraged, I do think that gleaning wisdom from the ceremonies and traditions of cultures other than one's own can be of great value. And, with the assumption that Creator is not limited to my own experiences, those of other cultures might enhance my own understanding of God and

¹¹ An observation discussed at some length in KPCB's *Centre for Missional Leadership* training talks.

the gospel! Especially in regards to the *Body of Christ* which is not homogenous but rather each varied gift is of use for building up the faith of the whole.

This discussion seems to dovetail well with a sense I've been considering for some years of this "cultural vacuum" after hearing the song "I know you're sorry" by Anishnabee singer Leonard Summer, the chorus of which proclaims:

I know you're sorry,
but you're more lost than me.
Your home's across the ocean;
I'm right where I need to be.

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2O9cXp_GvT8)

The idea of culturally specific "Old Testaments" intrigues me. The language can be problematic because it can suggest one's own experiences and traditions supersede the Scriptural testaments. This is not in any way Hoklotubbe's and Zacharia's intention! Rather, one's cultural "Old Testament" can weave into the round dance of Scripture, be illumined by the Holy Spirit through it, and both grounds and shapes – by the gospel – our present and future living.¹²

Seventhly, Turtle Island hermeneutics takes seriously the concept of "All my relations." I won't go into much detail on this aspect in this report (see chapter 2 of *Reading the Bible on Turtle Island*) except to say that a core assumption in Turtle Island hermeneutics, is the **interconnectedness of all creation**. This connects directly to a Genesis 1 and 2, asset-based theology that understands God made all that exists (humans, animals, plants, stars, fish, etc.) and made it "good." Thus, **all of creation influences all other parts of creation.**

One point re. "All my relations" I want to remember is Hoklotubbe and Zacharias' observation that **humans, despite our arrogance in thinking we are in control, are the neediest of all God's creatures!** **True, we bear the image of God; true, God made us "a little lower than the angels"; and yet, we cannot survive without the rest of creation!**

Maybe the fact that humans were made last in the Genesis 1 creation story is less an indication of our "specialness" (although it is that as well), as the statement that we need the rest of creation to survive!

¹² cf. pg. 161 for discussion re. *syncretism*

In this, Turtle Island hermeneutics assumes that the *shalom* of Eden is built on a relationship of *reciprocity* between all parts of creation with Creator.

2. Sabbath Shalom, Jubilee, the Bright Path, dreams, and visions.

Referencing Randy Woodley, the authors write that “the concept of shalom in Scripture illustrat[es] what life looks like at its best according to Creator’s vision in the Hebrew scriptures.” (57) The Indigenous equivalent of Shalom is the Bright Path.

Asset-based theology, that is one of the core assumptions of T.I.H., leads to the revelation that the absence of Shalom is not so much that original sin is the “central, primordial problem” (as often emphasized by the Settler-church) as it is that life is out of *balance* with our relations (59). In other words, creation – including people, animals, rocks, plants (*all our relations*) is good by Creator’s design. It is good, but the relationships are *out of balance*.

Into this “out of balance” world, comes Jesus to restore Shalom with Creator “bringing the whole of creation back into harmonious relationship, balance, and shalom.” (61)

In this framework, Jesus’ crucifixion is viewed through the lens of the Sun Dance wherein “Jesus as the ideal Sun Dancer, whose gift of flesh restores and maintains a harmonious relationship with God and all of our relations.” (62) Our response then is “to embrace the partnerships and reciprocity within the community of creation, and we believe Jesus shows us the way.” (78)

3. Ceremony (pg. 159 ff.)

One of the legacies of European settlers and missionaries was the outlawing of many Indigenous ceremonies and rituals because they were seen as evil or demonic. (Casey Church humorously highlights the short-sightedness of some of these settler-imposed prohibitions: cf. “Native drums ... How ridiculous!” (*Holy Smoke*, 65-66)).

Ceremony, and the symbolism employed, is central to “what it looks like” to be a follower of Jesus, whether Euroamerican or Indigenous to Turtle Island. “Ceremony is an embodied practice of an individual and community that integrates our life with the life of Creator and the sacred, reinforcing our worldview(s) and our sense of belonging in the circles of relationships that we are part of.” (164)

When we are willing to examine and listen to what is being said and represented, we learn that the value of the ceremonies must be gleaned from the fruit they produce. So, the authors extend an invitation (which is equally applicable to KPCB's ceremonies – Sunday worship, Communion, Baptism, community meals, fellowship hour, meetings, etc.): "What spiritual fruit do such ceremonies produce?" (175) This question dovetails with Rev. Dr. Clyde Ervine's question regarding evaluating a congregation's ministry in light of respecting the ministry to which Christ calls us.

4. Some helpful insights regarding Land Acknowledgments:

- reminders of the "community of creation that we are a part of" (xiii)
- reminders that the place in which we are is a "storied place": everywhere there is history, life has happened, relationships have happened; reminder that "I" am not the first person – nor the last – to inhabit this place
 - reminders that stories and histories matter
- reminders of potential gaps in our own knowledge of the history of place and may inspire gratitude and further learning.
 - the human responses to the words direct their significance:
"While we recognize that land acknowledgements can frequently feel rote and perfunctory, we could as Christians say the same thing about calls to worship, about the Lord's Prayer said together. ... It is the work of individuals and communities to continue to imbue importance into these aspects of communal life." (xiii)

Goal #1 c) Holy Smoke: The Contextual use of Native American Ritual and Ceremony, Casey Church (2017)

This book was a last-minute addition to my Study Break curriculum. I haven't finished reading it and my summary and response are far from complete.

In Casey Church's book *Holy Smoke*, I was introduced to a concept that I have been aware of but did not have the words to give it shape and depth: *Contextualized Ministry*.

At the risk of oversimplification, the idea of *contextualized ministry* is for Christian ministry to make sense for the culture within which one ministers. Worship, discipleship, spiritual development all employ rituals and ceremonies – the essence of which are the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. But, the mode of delivery can change according to cultural variations.

Contextualization requires understanding what is essential and what are the variable modes of delivery of our message and ceremonies.

What about our ministries and traditions at KPCB are essential? What have we uncritically inherited from a cultural context that is no longer present?

What defines the culture of KPCB? Of Bobcaygeon?

How might contextualization inform my preaching, and teaching?

What about private prayer?

How much of the culture can be maintained, how much must be relearned or discarded in order to give faithful expression to the gospel, and who gets to decide?

What are the "dimensions" of my own "cultural prisons"? (48)

The contextual approach to presenting the gospel to Native people permits a return to the familiar rituals of their ancestors. Within this approach we can now use the same ritual; but, instead of the Native person praying to the spirit world and the gods they were familiar with before their faith in Christ, they can now use the ritual to pray to the true God known in the person of Jesus Christ. The original functions (purification, prayer, strengthening of relationships) remain, but in a Christ-honouring way. (67)

The incorporation of the contextual expressions of faith ... intended to reinforce to Christian Native Americans that they can be redeemed from the lies told them about their culture and thus be brought into Christ-honouring expressions of their heritage. (66)

Goal #2 Ministry Discernment

I began my considerations of summer community engagement by brainstorming what a summer ministry plan might consist of:

1. Revitalization of the Bobcaygeon Ministerial Association (B.M.A.).
 - a) Over the past few years, the formal Christian presence in Bobcaygeon has changed. At the time of writing, one congregation has closed, one congregation is served by a part-time, contract minister, and one congregation is served by what the Presbyterian Church in Canada would designate “stated supply.” There remain 3 full-time pastors in Bobcaygeon. One who divides their time between multiple charges.
 - b) The B.M.A. has not been meeting regularly. Apart from the Lenten lunches/worship gatherings (which continue to be eagerly anticipated and well-attended), there is not much regular communication between ministry staff within Bobcaygeon.
 - c) I think that there are opportunities to bear witness to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ within Bobcaygeon that might become apparent if the BMA were meeting regularly once again. Even if there is no “business” or “projects” to attend to, meeting regularly could provide the opportunity to strengthen relationships between congregations, demonstrate to the wider community the “gathering together” which is central to Jesus’ ministry and share what’s happening in one another’s congregations. Also, in informal conversation that happens best in regular gatherings, ideas can develop for future Witness Projects. By committing to the same day each month, we minimize the risk of “weeks getting away from us” which often happens (and has happened) when meetings are left *ad hoc*.
 - d) So, I will take steps to propose to the other congregational leadership within Bobcaygeon that we try and establish a monthly gathering for pastors and/or lay-leadership. I propose it be in a public setting (as opposed to a church hall) so that we proclaim an unspoken testimony of the presence and power of Christ’s grace exhibited in the Body of Christ in Bobcaygeon.
2. “Thicken” the ministry potential of our current activities (Knox Frox, Lenten lunches, worship, fellowship, concerts, Shrove Tuesday, etc.)
3. Offer myself to lead worship gatherings at Case Manor and Aspira Residences.
4. Blessing of the summer season:
 - (i) Many congregations have developed the habit of setting aside special services to “Bless the animals”, “Bless the planting/harvesting season”, “Bless the bikes”, “Bless the fleet” (especially in fishing communities). Because Bobcaygeon

relies heavily on summer tourism *and* is able to host and provide hospitality for many throughout the summer, there is an opportunity for the town to be a representation of Christ and His Good Way within the summer culture. My thought was (after seeking permission from Parks Canada, and if granted) to offer a gathering on the lawn of Lock 32 to seek God's blessing on the staff, the boaters, and anything else pertaining to the summer boating/cottage season. Or, to approach a prominent marina with the same proposal.

(ii) Public, ecumenical Canada Day Worship Gathering

5. *The Land Between Forest Church*

The SMART plan shifts:

As I continued considering *summer community engagement*, or, "Neighbouring-in-Christ", I found myself being led in a slightly different direction. Number 1 above is still worth pursuing, as is Number 3. (At the time of the final editing of this report (June 9, 2026), I have partially completed #3, connecting with Aspira). Numbers 4 and 5 still have a firm grip on my imagination, for perhaps another year.

Number 2, with some variation has taken on greater significance. Instead of adding programs and projects, maybe my ministry to and within KPCB is entering a season of "thickening". ("Thickening" is a term I've adopted from the Center For Missional Leadership course, an evocative verb which I'm still trying to define!)

While reading *Respecting Congregations*, I began to realize that, as a pastor called to a specific congregation, in the name of Christ, part of my role is to respect both the scattered *and* the gathered aspects of congregational life and ministry. Too many activities in the one, leaves little energy to respect the other. Eugene Peterson once wrote that "A busy pastor doesn't have the time/energy/focus to be *present with* their congregants, their family, their self, or God!" This isn't an invitation to laziness. It's a reminder of priorities and a call to respect what Christ is doing *and how* He is doing it.

In *respect* of the role of *teaching elder* to which my Lord has ordained me, and the *preaching ministry* that includes; in *respect* of the *sacred writings* He has entrusted to us and encourages me to teach and proclaim; in *respect* of the *people who congregate* each week to worship – to pray, praise, learn, and hear a word from our living God – and for whom my Shepherd has entrusted me as *pastor*. And, in *respect* of the other aspects of my ministry to the KPCB congregation, it behoves me to not leave my preaching and worship preparations to the last minute!

To that end, my SMART ministry plan for the next few months involves:

1. Sunday morning preparedness.
 - a) ~~Choose preliminary preaching texts for the remainder of Easter, Pentecost, Advent, and Christmas Eve~~
 - b) For each sermon offering, discern and script:
 - i. ~~working title~~
 - ii. How/Where is God's glory revealed in the text?
 - iii. preliminary "last words"
 - iv. "difficult" words, themes, references requiring further research
 - v. any other ideas for related worship (Youth Fellowship, visual/tangible aids, music, etc.)
 - c) ~~legibly and logically write out above schedule; post in minister's study and give copy to Ruth Eberts~~
 - d) Discern preliminary answers to: Why is the "working title" and the "last words" helpful for: me, my family, the KPCB congregation, visitors?
 - e) "Sermon board" with above information.
 - f) At the time of the final edit of this report (June 9, 2026), this has expanded to re-learning sermon structure and methods of preparation in order to "tighten" the sermon offerings.
2. Arising from discussions held within the *Certificate for Missional Leadership* training course; as well as reflecting on Clyde Ervine's encouragement for congregations to respect our "in-Christ" identity, one of my ministry goals is simple to say, strangely hard to do: Name God in Public/Speak Christ (Ervine, 117).
 - a) Cultivate the courage to speak openly about what I believe to be true about my Lord and my God Jesus Christ.

...but in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect...
(1st Peter 3:15)
 - b) Develop "language consciousness": How can my regular speech become a means of expressing the love Christ has for all?
 - c) At the time of the final edit (June 9): Consider my own holy habits and how what I believe to be true, and how I minister shape (or which I prevent from shaping) how I think, speak, and act within family and amongst friends.
3. Discipleship and spirituality.

Identity and heritage are themes that were pervasive in all the books and articles I read this week. Christians' identity and heritage includes the tangible aspects of our ancestry, traditions, place we live, etc. And, is much more. In Colossians 3:3, Paul wrote: "...your life is now hidden with Christ in God" and, in his first letter to the Christian diaspora, Peter wrote:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Pet 1:3-5)

Together with Neighbouring-in-Christ and inviting God's people to join us in worship and at Christ's supper table, *respecting* our Spirit-led, in Christ identity as a community formed to glorify God and be channels of His redeeming and sanctifying grace, it behoves us to *thicken* our discipleship activities; to develop and respect our in Christ identity, to cherish and learn of the heritage into which we've been adopted by God's grace, and to trust the inheritance which we share with our Elder Brother, Lord, Saviour, and Friend, Jesus Christ (Ervine, 114).

We can learn from the experiential observations of Indigenous Christian leaders such as Hoklotubbe, Zacharias, and Church, that without a *thickening* understanding of who, what, where, and when we are, we begin to lose Why we are. (cf. pg 13 *Reading the Bible on Turtle Island*.) And, as Clyde Ervine observed, not diminishing the congregation's imperatives to be reaching beyond ourselves in Christ to help bring the needs of the wider community to be met in Christ, "doing such ministry may conceal the fact that its givers are as much in need of God's mercy as receivers ... God's love, forgiveness, new life, and lasting hope." (*Respecting Congregations*, 115)

So, to the plan of "thickening our shared life" (cf. Certificate in Missional Leadership) through discipleship and spiritual development, the following are areas I want to devote more purposeful energy:

Sunday morning prayer gatherings

Knox Frox

- i. presence and engagement
 - check-in

Clothing Closet

Youth Fellowship

Foodbank partnership

Community lunches

Online

- social media → website → in-person connection
- i. revitalize communication with Emily Woods-Girard

- download Facebook Professional _____. in order to give administrative rights to Emily (who can then synch Facebook account with Instagram)
 - Deadline: _____

ii. Website

- “Who are we? Why are we?”
- Resources for discipleship (spiritual development, reading and praying the Bible, theological reflection, etc.)

Fundraising Committee

Bible Studies

Worship/Choir/Music

“Ministry of invitation”

Board of Managers

Knox Mission Tea and Talks

- i. presence and engagement
 - attend meetings

Elders

“Priestly reading”

Pastoral visiting