The Prayer Book Society of Canada

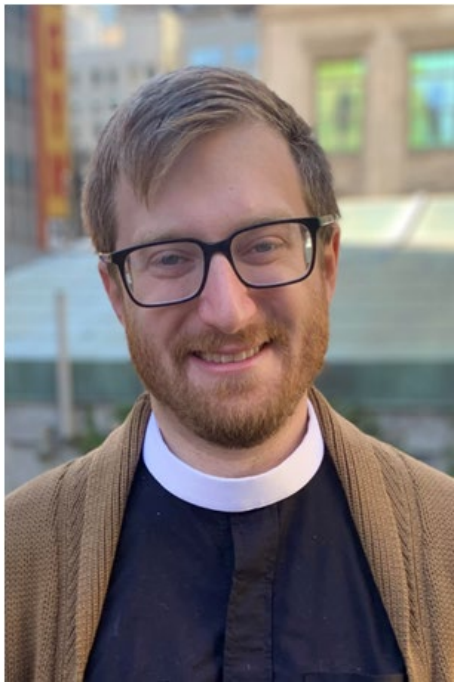
Newsletter

Michaelmas 2023

A Liturgy of Comfort

(By the Revd. Benjamin Crosby. Ben is a priest of the American Episcopal Church serving in the Anglican Church of Canada and a Ph.D. student in ecclesiastical history at the McGill University School of Religious Studies. His research focuses on the doctrine of the church in the thought of John Jewel and Richard Hooker. Ben is a member of the Prayer Book Society of Canada and a grateful recipient of a PBSC bursary.)

In the fall of 2022, I began offering a weekly service of Holy Communion according to the 1962 Canadian Book of Common Prayer in the gorgeous but little-used chapel on the second floor of McGill's religious studies building, where I work as a PhD student. We celebrate the service in an unashamedly traditional Anglican manner: I am vested in cassock, surplice, tippet, and hood; the service is conducted from the north end of the Holy Table; communicants do indeed "draw near with faith" before the confession of sins, kneeling around the altar for the service of the Table proper. The point is not anachronism for anachronism's sake, of course. Indeed, I will confess to a few innovations in gesture that are unlikely to have featured in 18th century Holy Communion celebrations, primarily the sign of the cross at the Absolution and Benediction. The point is to inhabit and be formed by the public worship of God in the mode that was normative for Anglicanism through most of its existence, trusting in the Spirit's power to work through our tradition, even today, to draw people to God. After a few months of leading weekly worship, I feel ready to write something on it. This is partly an apology (in the original sense of "defence") of the old liturgy, partly personal reflection on the experience of leading worship according to the old rite with the old ceremonial, and partly suggestions about how to celebrate it. What regular celebration has made me realize is that the dominant state of mind that this service seeks to instill is not, *pace* its critics, a sort of despair at sin or an overwhelming sense of unworthiness next to the terrifying holy otherness of God. No, the Prayer Book service of Holy Communion is above all a liturgy of *comfort*, a form of worship which seeks to remind the congregation, in word and sacrament, of the free gift of salvation that they have received in Jesus Christ.



The Revd. Benjamin Crosby

INSIDE

-Continued from page 1

Here, a brief digression is needed. When we hear the word "comfort" today, we often think first and foremost of soothing reassurance. But that does not quite capture what I mean; rather, I have in mind something closer to how the Prayer Book uses the word. When the Prayer Book liturgy itself uses the word "comfort", it is hewing back to an early modern English meaning closer to the Latin *confortare* from which it is derived. *Confortare* means "to strengthen". Now, we need not set these two definitions of "comfort" in simple opposition to each other. As we will see, the Prayer Book strengthens us through assuring us again that our sins really are forgiven, that Christ really is a saviour *for us*. But this reassurance is not given to leave us soothed but unchanged; no, we are given reassurance to strengthen us in our faith, that we may grasp all the more tightly our Lord Jesus Christ and live a holy life of loving our neighbour in thanksgiving for what Christ has done for us.

This orientation towards comfort is particularly clear in the second half of the service, following the Intercession, when the communicants move from the pews to gather kneeling around the Holy Table. This movement is quite uncommon today even in otherwise strictly Prayer Book settings, but it is what the English Prayer Books from 1549 to 1662 required. We still see a hint of this older practice in our current Prayer Book when the priest invites the people to "draw near with faith" in the invitation to Confession. And so this is what we do. I have been pleasantly surprised by just how intimate it makes the service feel. There is something profoundly *comfortable* in gathering together around the Table of the Lord to feed together upon his Body and Blood. The sense of comfort in this gathering around the Table is mirrored by the language of the Prayer Book itself. The exhortation that is sometimes used before the invitation to Confession declares that Christ has ordained Holy Communion for "our great and endless comfort". In the invitation to Confession, too, the people are directed to "take this holy Sacrament to your comfort". The exhortation (when used), the invitation to Confession, the physical movement within the worship space: all together convey that the Sacrament is a means of comfort.

The invitation to Confession is followed by the General Confession itself, and it is here that critics of the old rite as unnecessarily penitential and gloomy about the human condition will lodge their complaints. To be sure, the language is rather more extravagant than that to which we may be accustomed: as the 1662 BCP has it, "we acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness", "provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us", "the remembrance of them [i.e., our sins] is grievous unto us; the burden of them is intolerable." Indeed, perhaps out of sensitivity to this worry, the 1962 Canadian BCP omits the latter two of these quotes, regrettably, to my mind. I will grant that taken in isolation these passages may seem a bit much. But – and this is key! – within the context of the rite, they are not in isolation. No! The Law is always followed by the Gospel, confession always followed by absolution. And so it is here! We confess our sins and are reassured that we are forgiven. Remember, too, the priest's words that "Almighty God…have mercy upon you; pardon and deliver you from all your sins; confirm and strengthen you in all goodness; and bring you to everlasting life…" are said in our service not from the altar to people out in the nave, far away. No: I say them to people gathered closely around the Table who have drawn near to receive the Lord's benefits. I still speak in this moment as a representative of God and by his authority, but somehow the tenor is different, gentler, more tender, when I pronounce the Absolution to my fellow Christians assembled around the Table.

In the old rite, next follows something largely omitted from post-liturgical movement Anglican services of Holy Communion: the "Comfortable Words", a set of four Scripture passages that emphasize God's love and mercy given to us in Jesus. They are called "comfortable" for a reason: the priest's absolution (or declaration of pardon, if you prefer) is underscored by the very words of God in Scripture, reassuring the people that the forgiveness received is in fact God's forgiveness! I have been experimenting with the best way to deliver these words, and I'm not entirely sure I've settled on a clear preference. At present I have been leaving the north end of the Table (from which I kneel for the Confession and then pronounce the Absolution) and walking across the chancel in front of the

-Continued on page 3

-Continued from page 2

Table while I say them, in much the same way as I do when administering Communion. I luxuriate in these verses, saying them somewhat slowly and feelingly. And as I walk across the chancel, I look each communicant in the eye so that I can tell each one, individually, the good news conveyed in these verses. I time the recitation of the Comfortable Words so that I am back at the north end of the Table when the words are finished in order to begin the *Sursum Corda.*

This leads us to the eucharistic prayers: the *Sursum Corda*, the *Sanctus*, the Prayer of Consecration, the Prayer of Humble Access (which the 1662 book puts before the Prayer of Consecration, immediately following the *Sanctus* and the 1962 book puts immediately before the Communion). Then we get the Communion itself, followed by the Lord's Prayer and the post-Communion prayer. Again, I am struck by the comfortable intimacy of the rite. The people are gathered close around the Table, able easily to observe my minimal manual actions. I myself neither stand *ad orientem* (facing east, in front of the altar), with my body blocking visual access to the elements except at the elevation of the Sacrament, or *versus populum* (facing west, towards to congregation), framing the elements with my body. I am off to the side; the elements themselves come into focus, not as something far off and forbidding but as God communicating his benefits, his very self, to us in the homely, comfortable elements of bread and wine. Furthermore – and this is particularly important – Cranmer moves the "high point" of the rite from the elevation of the consecrated elements to their reception. This, it seems to me, explains an otherwise curious feature of the old Anglican rite, namely, the placement of the Lord's Prayer after Communion. I have been convinced by my advisor, Torrance Kirby, that this is an absolutely brilliant liturgical move by Cranmer. The adoration of the consecrated host and chalice, exhibited by the priest far off at the altar to the congregants back in the nave, is replaced by the actual reception of the bread and the wine by Christ's people gathered together around the Table. And so the Lord's Prayer follows not the elevation at the Consecration and the second elevation at the closing doxology, as in the Roman rite, but the actual reception of the Sacrament. It's not that there is no mystery, no awe before God's tremendous gift of himself in the Sacrament: portions of the Prayer of Humble Access, the Prayer of Consecration, and the post-Communion prayer speak eloquently to this. But the rite – and especially its shift of emphasis to the reception proper – does, it seems to me, convey precisely the comfort which the invitation to Confession announced as its aim: in Communion, Jesus shows that he is God *for us* by giving us his very self.

This is especially true in the administration of the Sacrament itself. At our service, our numbers are small enough that I can say the entire words of administration to each person, rather than (as is often the practice that I have observed in larger congregations) splitting up the words among four people. And I have come to so love doing so! I particularly appreciate the "for-us-ness" of Cranmer's words of administration, the way they convey the core Protestant emphasis that God has chosen to be unalterably and forever *pro nobis* in Christ Jesus. Thus the words of the administration of the bread: "The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life: Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on him in thy heart by faith, with thanksgiving." When I say them, I find myself ever so slightly emphasizing the word "thee", and taking care to look the person to whom I am administering the bread in the eyes as I do so, to try to emphasize that both the Sacrament itself and Christ's death of which it is a memorial are entirely for us, given for our benefit by our gracious Saviour.

I hasten to add that there is nothing incorrect about "The Body of Christ, the bread of heaven", the words of administration I most commonly hear in Rite II services in the Episcopal Church, the church in which I was ordained. But I miss the emphasis that the Body of Christ is given *for us*, that the Blood of Christ is shed *for us*, that both Christ's death on the cross and his gift of the Sacrament of his Body and Blood are *for us*, for our comfort, to be a means of our drawing near to him. In fact, the experience of regularly presiding at the 1962 BCP Holy Communion has changed how I administer the Sacrament when celebrating according to the contemporary language Canadian Book of Alternative Services. I

-Continued on page 4

-Continued from page 3

find myself defaulting not to "the Body of Christ, the bread of heaven", but to another option that the BAS gives: "the Body of Christ, given for you…the Blood of Christ, shed for you". I still miss the fullness of the Prayer Book words of administration, the way that their length allows you to tarry with each communicant and pray for them as you administer the Sacrament, the injunction to thankfulness. But it does, I think, enable me to preserve precisely the most comfort-bringing aspect of the Prayer Book's words, the reminder that both Christ's death and the sacrament by which we remember his death are for us.

As we have seen, the pre-Communion exhortation in our Prayer Book says that the Lord's Supper is for "our great and endless comfort". What I have found over months of weekly celebration of the 1962 Communion rite according to traditional Anglican ritual and ceremonial is that the old rite is carefully designed to convey precisely this truth. Communicants gather together close to the priest and the Table to receive Christ's benefits via the Absolution and Comfortable Words, the partaking in Christ's Body and Blood, and the Benediction. The Law in the Confession is followed by Gospel in the Absolution and the Comfortable Words, in which the people are assured of God's forgiveness and graciousness to them. The Prayer of Consecration is not something that happens far off but near at hand; north-end celebration places the focus on precisely the humble and ordinary means that Christ uses to feed us with himself. The "high point" of the service is not the elevation of the host. Instead, the elevation is explicitly replaced in focus by the reception. The words of administration themselves emphasize the Sacrament, and Christ's redeeming death, as *pro nobis*, for us, precisely in order to bring us comfort, to reassure us that we belong to Christ.

I love the old service for many reasons: for the beauty of its language, for the sense of connection to Anglicans throughout time and space, for the devotional traditions that the very stability of its language has allowed to flourish, for the way that the hieratic language instills a sense of awe before God as *mysterium tremendens*. But – somewhat to my surprise – what I have found that I am struck most deeply by, and love the most, about the old Holy Communion rite is its focus on comfort, the way it reassures us of God's love and mercy in order that it might strengthen our faith. When I come to worship, sick and needing a healer, weary and needing encouragement, sinful and needing forgiveness, dead and needing resurrection, I find a service chock-full of comfortable words, a service whose word and movements seem all perfectly designed to convey to me the good news that God is for me in my gracious saviour, Jesus Christ, and that God assures me by his Word and by his sacraments that my sins are forgiven and I am his. Thanks be to God!

BURSARIES AVAILABLE

Each fall, the PBSC makes available a limited number of bursaries of up to $1000, for Anglican students engaged in religious studies who value the Book of Common Prayer, use it in their daily prayer life, and wish to support its continuing use in the Anglican churches in Canada. Students in the ordination stream are particularly encouraged to apply. This year, the deadline for applications is November 3rd. Students wishing to be considered for one of these bursaries should submit a copy of their curriculum vitae and the names, addresses and phone numbers of two references, together with a covering letter explaining their interest in this bursary and in the Book of Common Prayer, to the chair of the PBSC Bursaries Committee, Dr. Diana Verseghy, at the following email address: diana.verseghy@sympatico.ca. Candidates will be interviewed by the Bursaries Committee via Zoom in mid to late November, and awards will be made in mid-December.

Book Review of *A Memoir: Harold Lee Nutter, VI Bishop of Fredericton and Metropolitan*

(By PBSC National Chairman, the Revd. Canon Dr. Gordon Maitland)

The subtitle of this book is "It Remains for Me to Say", and this is appropriate because it is a first-person account of the life of the Most Rev'd Harold Nutter (1923-2017), the sixth Bishop of Fredericton and sixteenth Metropolitan of the Ecclesiastical Province of Canada. The book draws on a set of memoirs that Archbishop Nutter wrote in the early 1990s for the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick, a few years after his retirement in 1989. These are supplemented by further reflections that he wrote some years later.

In his foreword to *A Memoir*, David Richards remarks that this is a story about "a time now gone, remote, and dimming in all memory", and truer words could hardly have been spoken. Whether it be Harold Nutter's birth in a community composed of only English-speaking, white Protestants, his education in a one-room schoolhouse, and his early ministry in a context in which most people went to church, the times in which he spent his youth appear to be remote indeed. What will appear most striking to anyone under 50 years of age is the extent to which the Church was respected and taken seriously by the wider society and by the governing authorities of the time. An example of this may be seen in the meeting of the Canadian House of Bishops which took place in Fredericton in September of 1966. Nutter was Dean of the Cathedral at that time, and was thus responsible for organizing the event. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, was coming to speak to the Canadian bishops, and so a large diocesan service was planned at which the Archbishop would give his address. It turned out that the service had to be held in a local hockey arena because there were about 5,000 people in attendance. Among the guests at this service were the Mayor of Fredericton and members of city council, the Premier of New Brunswick and members of the provincial cabinet, justices of the Supreme Court of New Brunswick, and the Lieutenant Governor of New Brunswick! Various media were present in large numbers and Dean Nutter could say that "all went away feeling the that the Church was still alive and vigorous". Such was Archbishop Nutter's stature in the province of New Brunswick that he was twice approached to stand for leader of the Provincial Liberal Party, was invited to become the Lieutenant Governor of New Brunswick, and was offered a seat in the Canadian Senate, all of which he refused because he felt that his calling as a bishop in the Church of God was more important than secular preferment. After his retirement, Archbishop Nutter received the Order of Canada.

How different it is today. When the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada met in Calgary this past summer not a single politician was present. It is inconceivable that any Canadian Anglican bishop would now be invited to hold an important government position or even to be awarded the Order of Canada. The Church has become completely invisible to our secular society. This divorce between the Church and those who govern or hold leadership positions in the wider Canadian society was much lamented by Archbishop Nutter who saw it as a loss for both constituencies.

Archbishop Nutter's time as Dean of Fredericton (1960-1971) and as a bishop (1971-1989) spanned some of the most tumultuous times and events in Canadian and Church history. As a senior leader in the Canadian Church, Harold Nutter was an eyewitness to almost every development in the Anglican Church of Canada during this time period. His account of the issues of the day, the proceedings of the House of Bishops, the unfolding of events at the various General Synods, and his attendance at two Lambeth Conferences (1978 and 1988) is very important from a historical point of view. The last serious history of the Anglican Church of Canada was written by Archbishop Philip Carrington in 1963, and until another distinguished historian comes

-Continued on page 6

-Continued from page 5

forward to continue the history of the Canadian Church since that time, Archbishop Nutter's memoir is a valuable source of information for those who wish to understand how Canadian Anglicans dealt with the radical changes to society in the 1960s and 1970s.

Since my review has been written for the readership of the Prayer Book Society of Canada, it is important to look at what Archbishop Nutter had to say regarding liturgical revision and change during the time that he was a bishop. He was not opposed to liturgical change in general; in fact he used some of the early experimental rites put out by the Church. He even chose to use an experimental rite that was "strikingly different" from the BCP rite for the consecration of a bishop at his own episcopal consecration (a decision he later regretted). However, at the General Synod in 1983 when the Book of Alternative Services was officially authorized for publication and use, Archbishop Nutter pushed hard to have his episcopal colleagues agree to a policy that the Book of Common Prayer was to remain the official Prayer Book of the Canadian Church and that every parish be required to use the BCP at least 50% of the time for their worship. As Archbishop Nutter regretfully remarks, "without much support from other bishops" this policy failed to gain any traction. With clear prescience the Archbishop wrote, "What is at stake in this discussion? Essentially not only a love for the language of the Book of Common Prayer or a desire to use the more contemporary Book of Alternative Services wording. These may cause some hurt, but they are not at the root of the controversy; rather it is the obvious pattern of Anglicanism to establish doctrine from worship – *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi*. If there is within the Book of Common Prayer a solid, scriptural portrayal of orthodox Christian belief, and if there are either subtle or significant changes of these beliefs in the Book of Alternative Services, then the Church is facing a decision which will change it for all time. Today far too many people hold that it does not really matter what one believes so long as it is sincerely held. No, belief determines attitudes and action and is absolutely important. Sincerity is no guarantee of truth or right." (p.158)

Some years later, after more reflection, Archbishop Nutter caustically remarked, "It is true that there are major changes in doctrinal emphasis in the Book of Alternative Services, and the serious objections are not so much that the familiar services have been changed (that might be tolerated) but that the foundation of the Faith is being eroded deliberately. The obvious question is "Why?" Was there error in the Faith as transmitted from the Fathers of old and formulated in the Book of Common Prayer in accord with scripture and tradition? If so, where was the error? Or has there been a progressive revelation under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in these latter days which is more true than that revealed in Christ? Or is there a necessity to be relevant, to be "with it" and contemporary? If so, then we are on the slippery slope of constant change as society changes. And are we not allowing the agenda to be set by the fickle change of society rather than by the sure certainty of the Almighty?" (pp.163, 164)

It is important to note that Archbishop Nutter was the Prayer Book Society's first Episcopal Visitor. It is worth quoting the paragraph that he wrote regarding this appointment, because some may be surprised at the conditions that he required to accept this position: "Having spoken, in 1990, to the national Prayer Book Society in Toronto I was invited to become the first Episcopal Visitor to the Society. I gave it careful thought for, while aware of the trauma caused by the new rites and being concerned about the implicit changes of doctrinal emphasis in them, I did not want to be identified as a liturgical reactionary. There was much in the Book of Alternative Services which was good. In additional to personal liking I have always felt that the bishops could have been more responsible toward our people by ensuring that the Book of Common Prayer was used at least 50% of the time in all parishes. Where this was not done it led to a very serious division in the Church. Consequently, I finally accepted the position with the understanding stated in writing that I would use the Book of Alternative Services and work toward an acceptance of it by the Prayer Book Society as an alternative to, and not a substitute for, the Book of Common Prayer." (p.182)

Needless to say, the Society has never had a problem with the BAS being an *alternative* to the BCP; it is the fact that so many congregations now no longer even possess a single copy of the BCP,

-Continued on page 7

-Continued from page 6

let alone use it, which is the reality that the PBSC works so hard to remedy.

There is a poignant element of tragedy in this memoir. Harold Nutter was clearly a capable, bright, sensitive, optimistic, progressive (in the true sense of that word) cleric, who sought the best for the people and the diocese entrusted to his care. His close family ties, his deep sense of community, his strong moral compass, his thorough grounding in classic Anglicanism, were all values that were increasingly questioned, challenged, and discarded by the wider society and by many in the Anglican Church itself over the course of his long ministry. By the time of his retirement in 1989 he was seen as one of the most conservative prelates in the Canadian House of Bishops. He was, in many ways and like many others, a person who was "left behind" by a Church that no longer valued the things that he believed were important.

The contrast between the confident and optimistic Anglican Church of Canada which hosted the Anglican Congress in 1963, and the pitiful condition that it manifests in 2023, is deeply saddening. In many ways, *A Memoir* is a cautionary tale worth reading for all who still love our Canadian Church.

(A Memoir: Harold Lee Nutter, VI Bishop of Fredericton and Metropolitan by Andrew B. C. Nutter. Dartmouth, Nova Scotia: Atlantic Digital Reproductions, 2022. Pp. 261. ISBN: 978-1-77835-166-2. Available from St. Peter Publications in Charlottetown, PEI, for $28.00 plus postage. To order, call 902-368-8442.)

Work in Progress on the BCP App

The Common Prayer Canada app continues to develop! Users can now pray in French, as this summer we added liturgies from the 1967 Recueil des Prières, together with Psalms and Lessons from the Louis Segond Bible.

Also, the app's Inuktitut language content continues to grow. Thanks to a generous donation from the Ottawa Branch of the Prayer Book Society, the Rev'd Samantha Kublu - an Inuk priest in the Diocese of the Arctic - has digitized the remaining portions of the daily office liturgies from the Inuktitut BCP.

Finally, our longstanding goal of adding audio content is nearing fruition. We are partnering with Heidi Fewster, the Musical Director at St. Luke's, Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia, to add musical settings of the liturgies. We hope to release Compline before the end of the year.

These and other future developments are only possible with ongoing financial donations from our users. You can give through CanadaHelps. Thank you so much for your support!

The Prayer Book Society of Canada

National Officers and Local Contacts

OFFICERS

National Chairman
The Rev'd Dr. Gordon Maitland
1983 St. Mary's Gate
Windsor, Ontario
N8Y 1J8

Episcopal Visitor
The Rt. Revd. Michael Hawkins,
Bishop of Saskatchewan

Past Chairman
The Rev'd David A. Harris
Reading, England

Vice Chairmen
The Rev'd David Curry,
Anglican Rectory
531 King St,
P.O. Box 2661
Windsor, Nova Scotia
B0N 2T0

The Very Rev'd Chris Dow
P.O. Box 11349
Iqaluit, NU
X0A 0H0
(867) 979-5595
chris.dow@arcticnet.org

Mr. Michael Edward,
R.R. #1, Belfast P.O.,
Prince Edward Island,
C0A 1A0

Recording Secretary
Mr. Ronald Bentley
737 Hot Springs Way
Gloucester, Ontario
K1V 1W8

Treasurer
Mrs. Anne Chisholm
P.O. Box 713
Charlottetown, P.E.I.
C1A 7L3

Local Contacts

St John's
Mr. Michael Donnan
(709) 753-5193

Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island
The Rev'd Benjamin von Bredow
902-874-1549
benvonbredow@gmail.com

Fredericton
Mr. Wilfred Alliston
421 Northumberland St.
Fredericton, NB
E3B 3K3
wilfredalliston@gmail.com

Ottawa
Mr. Wesley Warren
(613) 726-6341

Toronto
Dr. Diana Verseghy
(905) 303-4490

Grand Valley
Mr. Brian Munro
(519) 756-3053

Windsor
The Rev'd Dr. Gordon Maitland
(519) 564-5989

North Bay
Rev'd John Stennett
(705) 498-6549

Saskatoon
The Ven. Richard Spencer
72 Sparling Crescent,
Saskatoon S7H 3M2
(306) 649-3448

Calgary
The Rev'd Robert Taylor
Fr.Rob@shaw.ca
(403) 612-5721
Branch website:
www.bcp-calgary.ca

Edmonton
Mr. John Matthews
43 Stirling Road
Edmonton, AB
T5X 4C2
(780) 457-2207
cjmatth@shaw.ca

Victoria
Mr. Kieran Wilson
kieran.wilson
@mail.utoronto.ca

PBSC Web Site
www.prayerbook.ca

PRAYER BOOK SOCIETY OF CANADA NEWSLETTER

Editor
Dr. Diana Verseghy
12 Sherbourne Drive
Maple, Ontario
L6A 1G8
diana.verseghy@sympatico.ca

Editorial Committee
Mr. Desmond Scotchmer
The Rev'd Dr. Gordon Maitland
Dr. Diana Verseghy

Mailing Address for Donations
P.O. Box 713, Stn Central,
Charlottetown, PE
C1A 7L3

For address changes, or if you wish to join the PBSC, please contact our Membership Secretary: the Ven. Richard Spencer, 72 Sparling Cres., Saskatoon, S7H 3M2, (306) 649-3448 E-mail: kentvic@gmail.com

Publications Mail Agreement Number 40042571