



**J. Marguerite (Meg)  
Illman-White**

Meg with grandchild, David  
Emmanuel (Davey)

Oscar Romero said: *“A church that doesn't provoke any crisis, a gospel that doesn't unsettle, a word of God that doesn't get under anyone's skin, a word of God that doesn't touch the real sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed -- what gospel is that?”*

As I look back on my years of ministry, I find myself reflecting on these words.

Early in my life, the church called me to explore the world, to give freely, to understand, to be curious, and to listen deeply to stories that challenged everything I once held as ‘truth’. Gospel got under my skin, and I could not escape it.

From the late 1980's and 90's farm foreclosures in the Ukrainian community of Canora, SK to the Indigenous crossroads of colonization in Kenora ON, and all the places in between, I'm grateful for the challenge of gospel to the “real sin of society” which takes hold in so many places and so many ways. Standing witness in solidarity is the work of a gospel people.

The gospel has touched my heart in ways that unsettled and changed me - calling me from the perspectives of a white middle class child of the mythical “nice” Canada, to the heartbreak of lives devastated by racism, genocide, homophobia and other forms of hatred and oppression. Being queer has always informed that journey - even before I knew it. But it was the gospel that prodded away at me, from ancient and modern hymns, stories of faith, theologies of lament and hope.

I served the United Church with love and loyalty for 34 years and it provided opportunity after opportunity to experience with others, the despair and hope of living - to witness death and resurrection, trauma and recovery in everyday life.

What I have come to believe is that the Church, like Mother Earth, is at a crossroads and more than ever needs to trust its own narrative of death and resurrection if it is to allow the inevitable death of the institution to embrace the new gospel life waiting, beckoning, urging....

As I settle into grand parenting and welcome a new generation to an earth traumatized by the climate crisis, I believe in the impossible yet ever-present and evident core of our faith - the truth of resurrection. The gospel urges us to lead through this time, to stand witness to the groaning of Mother Earth, to visibly let go of the practices that once stood testimony to the church, and to find ways to work in partnership with creation to protect the earth. Our gratitude for the Church that nurtured us may well be our willingness to embrace the death of what we knew and the new life that awaits beyond anything we can ask or imagine. If we can help the Church to let go of what has been, then maybe the gospel - the very heart of who we are - will breathe more easily, finding possibility, and offering the bread of life, rich compost from all we have learned, and a true partnership with the earth and all its people.