

A message from your Growth Animator, Jordan Cantwell...

Compost /'käm ,pōst/

def.: decaying plant material added to soil to improve the growth of new plants

I used to hate throwing out food that had gone bad. I have been known to eat bananas that were so mushy I couldn't even hold them in my hand. And many is the time I made myself ill eating more than was good for me, just so I wouldn't have to throw anything away. Eventually I figured out that putting unwanted, expired, or too much food into my body is just as wasteful as throwing it away... and it can actually harm me. This is when I became an avid composter.

Composting allows us to recycle food that can no longer nourish us into fertilizer for new growth. It takes what would otherwise be wasted and turns it into a life-giving resource. This process requires air, time, and the labour of bugs and microbes. With the right conditions and sufficient time, the natural processes of decay convert old food into nourishment for new life.

I believe God is inviting us to consider what needs composting in our churches. Ministry is a living thing. Every ministry, initiative, program, even communities of faith themselves, like all living things eventually come to an end. This is good and natural – essential even. For something new to emerge, something else that has fulfilled its purpose must be released, freeing up energy and resources to nurture what is waiting to be born. As one expression of ministry approaches the end of its life cycle, how might we transform that which once nourished the life and faith of generations into compost for future growth, rich soil for new seeds of faith to be planted? How might this change the story we tell about our church, from a story of decline to a story of resurrection?

Perhaps our community of faith still has lots of life in it, but something in the system is preventing us from thriving. Last Christmas I bought a box of mandarin oranges and was dismayed to discover that two oranges at the bottom of the box were in a state of advanced decay. I gingerly removed them and put them into the compost. If I had left them in the box, they would have hastened the demise of the rest of the oranges. Buildings that are under-utilized and costly to maintain, governance structures not suited to our current realities, programs that aren't meeting the needs of our community, and nostalgia for the past instead of a vision for the future can sap our energy and distract us from the important ministry that is ours to do. What will help us to lovingly renovate, repurpose, or release those things that have become a barrier to pursuing the purposes God has for us? How might this free up energy and resources for living out God's call for our communities of faith?

To compost something is an act of faith... an affirmation of our belief in resurrection. It requires trust in the hidden work of the Spirit that unfolds in the dark. It means placing our confidence in the grace and power of God who brings new life from death. What new things might grow and flourish if our churches became expert composters?

Lent is a time of preparing ourselves for the new life God offers at Easter. It is an invitation to look at our lives, our communities of faith, and ask – What needs to be composted so that we are ready for resurrection?

As your Growth Animator, I want to work with you to help create the conditions within your community of faith that make growth possible. If you are looking to renew, reimagine, or responsibly retire your ministry, I am here to be a resource for you. You can reach me at jcantwell@united-church.ca. I look forward to connecting with you and seeing where the Spirit will lead.

Grace and peace for this Lenten season,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jordan Cantwell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jordan Cantwell (she/they)
Growth Animator | Prairies