

Conversations with new appointments: Rev. Esther Deng

BY JENNIFER ANANDANAYAGAM

Tides, trails, and the close-knit warmth of its people — these are some of the rhythms that define the South Shore. On December 17, 2025, a new rhythm began for the parishes of St. Luke's Hubbards and Blandford with the appointment of Rev. Esther Deng as Priest-in-Charge. Deng arrived just in time for the busy Christmas season, so her first few weeks were spent listening, learning, and finding “hidden light” in her new communities.

We sat down with her to discuss her vision for a family of parishes and why she believes in prioritizing people over programs.

As you step into the role of Priest-in-Charge for both Hubbards and Blandford, how do you envision these two unique parishes working together to strengthen their shared witness in the region?

As Priest-in-Charge for Hubbards and Blandford, I envision a collaborative hub model. This would involve sharing resources and combining efforts for community outreach, including Coffee Church, website updates to better introduce us to the public, seed share music events, and Christmas services designed to draw more people to join us.

This approach would foster deeper unity in Christ by emphasizing shared mission, learning from one another, and creating a stronger and more visible witness to the Gospel in the region. It moves beyond individual parish boundaries to build a true “family of parishes,” rooted in shared ministry, inspired by the oneness of the early Church, and supported through joint pastoral planning.

Key strategies for collaboration:

- Share resources by pooling financial, volunteer, and skill-based support. This allows for larger initiatives, avoids duplication, and makes possible work that one parish could not do alone, such as joint youth programs and shared outreach.

Work together in discernment to define our collective mission.

Present a united front in community engagement, including joint ecumenical efforts, to



Queensland Beach Nova Scotia, Conrads Road, Hubbards, NS, Canada. Photo © Liz Cummings on Unsplash



Rev. Esther Deng

strengthen our witness across the wider region.

Mutual support and burnout prevention

Sharing pastoral duties, reducing individual workloads, and offering fellowship to prevent priest and volunteer burnout.

Spiritual Unity: Cultivating a stronger sense of “oneness in Christ” by preaching and teaching the connections between the communities,

drawing from Scripture to emphasize our shared identity as one Body of Christ.

Practical steps:

Initial Listening and Discernment: Meeting with leaders and parishioners from both Hubbards and Blandford to understand each community’s unique strengths, needs, and shared goals.

Joint Ministry Teams: Forming collaborative teams in key areas (such as outreach, worship, and youth ministry) to work across both parishes.

Shared Worship and Events: Offering occasional combined services and joint fellowship events to strengthen relationships and build personal connections.

Collaborative Budgeting and Planning: Developing shared initiatives that benefit both communities and align with diocesan priorities.

Having started your appointment just before Christmas, what ‘Epiphany’ or moment of new light has surprised you most

about these communities in your first few weeks?

Community strength hidden in plain sight: Often, a community’s deepest strengths and most profound moments of grace are found not in formal structures, but in quiet, everyday acts of care and resilience. I was struck by the immediate warmth, openness, and willingness of people to share their stories with a newcomer.

A shared longing for connection and hope: Beneath our differences lies a common human desire for meaning, belonging, and hope—something that becomes especially visible during the Christmas and New Year season.

Every new appointment is a moment of transition. What is one core value or principle that you are bringing from your previous experiences to guide your ministry here?

A guiding principle I bring is “Loving People Over Program.” This means prioritizing relationships, listening deeply,

approaching ministry with humility, and empowering existing teams to build hope together.

Beyond the vestry and the pews, what are you most looking forward to exploring in the Hubbards and Blandford areas as you settle into the rhythm of life on the South Shore?

As I settle into life on the South Shore, I look forward to experiencing the region beyond church walls—its coastal beauty, local markets, community gatherings, forest trails, and the distinctive rhythm of Shore life.

Anything else you’d like to add?

While there was some discussion about accents, the greater gift was learning to listen more deeply—and gaining far more than we expected.