



Niagara Anglican

A section of the Anglican Journal

NEWS • PERSPECTIVE • REFLECTION • FOR A GROWING CHURCH • DECEMBER 2009



Advent | The short sweet season

PETER WALL
DEAN, RECTOR, CHRIST'S CHURCH CATHEDRAL

As this edition of the paper hits the streets, we are just beginning the season of Advent, that time of four Sundays but often just three weeks or so which mark for us the preparation for the Nativity of Jesus. While the world has been trimming the tree and decking the halls since long before we even had Halloween (as one radio announcer said, around Halloween, "could we please not bring on Rudolph until after Remembrance Day?"), we in the church enter a time of deep and meaningful preparation which takes us right up to THE day.

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What the Spirit says to the Churches

ELEANOR JOHNSTON
ST. THOMAS' CHURCH, ST. CATHARINES

Nothing irritates regular churchgoers, especially priests, more than someone blithely asserting, "I'm spiritual but not religious." Why is this line so annoying? Partly, it's the sinking feeling that this claim is the inevitable prelude to a criticism of the church. Great, just what we need. Still, like it or not, this popular pronouncement demands some thought, if only for us to develop a ready rebuttal.

Christians have been given two testaments about and a trinity of faces for God. The two testaments focus on God in the Old and Jesus in the New.

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The Advent of our God

CHRISTOPHER M. GRABIEC
EDITOR

The wonderful season of Advent is upon us. Most of us enjoy this time as it represents that which we all so desperately want and need—the gift of hope. It is for us the countdown to a Christmas season of warmth and love, fulfilling our deepest needs and desires. In its historical way it reminds us of that last month as Mary waited patiently to give birth to a child who would change the face of this earth. Unfortunately, the earth that we live on is still ravaged by

war and hatred, by famine and poverty, by poisoned waters and air that causes people sickness and death. There is even division among the people of God who are supposed to be the ones who bring unity and peace to all people. Oh, how we long for an earth whose face is changed.

The Baptist cries out that we should prepare a way for the Lord. We should make certain that this world of ours is God's world—the Eden that God wanted to be. He tells us to live life hoping for God, hoping for a better world.

The time has come for us to dig deeply into the meaning of these four weeks which are intended to only remind us of how we are called to live every moment of our lives. Instead of giving birth to evil, division, destruction and hatred it is up to us to give birth to an innovative, Godly world of justice, stewardship, leadership and communal worship of the Author of all gifts and the Source of our very existence.

Our paper this month is simply full of wonderful thoughts which can help

us to attain the spiritual and communal heights which can enable us to fulfill the mission to which we are called by the forerunner Baptist and by the Christ who is the Creator's gift to us.

As each candle is lit, week by week, let's hope that each of us and all of us can look back and say that we have taken yet one more step in faith, in hope and in love. The past is over—the future is ahead and there is nothing for us but the pursuit of excellence as a church in our ministry to one another and to the world at large.

There is another kingdom



MICHAEL THOMPSON
ARCHDEACON, RECTOR, ST. JUDE'S OAKVILLE

A few weeks ago, an American department store commercial mentioned the store's "layaway plan". When I told our seventeen-year-old son that meant giving the store some money each week until the item was paid for and you took it home, he thought I was pulling his leg.

We have, I think, more or less abandoned the practice of waiting—our capacity for waiting has atrophied,

and we find ourselves living in a just-in-time world of consumer credit and quarterly results.

So when a season comes along that's all about waiting—a season such as Advent, for example—we find ourselves ill-equipped to enter into its possibilities. It starts when we describe Advent as a season of preparation, suggesting a kind of busyness on our part. And because the Victorians created a culture of Christmas that demands preparatory frenzy, we can occupy ourselves decking the halls, stringing garlands, baking, cleaning, entertaining and being entertained, overeating and worrying about R.I.D.E. stops. Add a few church bits—Lessons and Carols, a Christmas Pageant, and maybe an Advent supper,

and the time left for waiting is equal to the time available for sleeping.

In the midst of all this preparing, it would be easy for us to make the mistake of imagining that Advent is all about what we do, about all the preparing we do. And it would be pretty easy to get the impression that all the preparing we do is preparing to celebrate Christmas—an event two millennia ago, in that long-lost country called "Bible Land" among the lost tribes of "Bible People". So, not only do we lay aside waiting in favour of our often-frenzied preparations—it turns out that what we are preparing for is a celebration of something that God used to do, an event in the past now safely preserved in biblical amber.

God, on the other hand, having accomplished the incarnation we cele-

brate as Christmas, having cracked the shell of history and entered it with its transformation in mind, moved on. Jesus grew into adulthood, and took up the proclamation and enacting of a radically alternative way of ordering the life of creation, a way he called "the kingdom of God". Jesus spent his entire public ministry disclosing that kingdom in parables, inhabiting that kingdom as a trustworthy promise of God's purpose and power, and enacting the ethic of that kingdom in healing, exorcism, and in the culminating parable of costly and courageous love on the cross. Jesus (for the celebration of whose birth we so frantically prepare) did not exhaust his purpose in the manger.

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Who needs a building anyway?

ANDY KALBFLEISCH
MISSION STRATEGY COMMITTEE

The status quo is no longer good enough. How many times have we heard or read that phrase? Perhaps so often that it is now a snoozer. If it has become that, then it is indeed time to wake up and move out of our comfort zones and look at things with new eyes and hear them with new ears.

A few years ago somebody opined that the Meeting House in Hamilton was not a church. Why? Because it is located in theatres on Sunday mornings and therefore didn't have a real physical presence in the community. That is, people can't drive by the theatre and admire the historical aspects of the building situated on well-manicured grounds.

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Our bottom line responsibility



IAN DINGWALL
RETIRED ARCHDEACON OF NIAGARA

Evelyn Crouch and Mrs. Threadgoode are principle characters in Fannie Flagg's best seller novel titled, *Fried Green Tomatoes and the Whistle Stop Café*.

Mrs. Threadgoode lives in a retirement home and Evelyn visits each week and they enjoy each other's company. And, to top it off, Evelyn receives all sorts of good advice. Mrs. Threadgoode is very religious and Evelyn had promised that she would take all her troubles "to the Lord" and ask for help through some bad times. It says, in the novel, "...that unfortunately, she didn't know where the Lord was" ...for she and her husband hadn't been to church since their children had grown up.

It is a sad fact of life that there are many of us (in the church and elsewhere) who experience the same problem: i.e. we don't know where the Lord is.

A while back I got involved in a conversation with a casual acquaintance who said that he had a personal concern that he'd been anxious about for some time. It seems he was in a similar situa-

tion as Evelyn. He mentioned that he had been, some years earlier, quite involved in his church membership but now, alas, he was "a lapsed Anglican". Recently, however, he found himself wondering about his life—and the Church and God. He expressed his deep concern in all of this for himself and his family and asked for some practical advice concerning what he should do. We talked for a while and one suggestion I offered was for him to go back to church and see what developed. And so he did.

Meeting him again some weeks later, he told of his experience. He attended a local Anglican church one Sunday morning but, sadly, found himself after the Service to be worse off than before. All he received from the service and the sermon were, he confessed, irrelevant words about Human sinfulness and information about who was "In" and who was "Out" of God's grace. Not helpful, he said.

He persevered though and went back to the church on another Sunday and in talking with one of the clergy he was given a pamphlet that explained the essentials of being an Anglican.

Good, he thought, as he began reading the pamphlet, only to discover that what the pamphlet did was to reiterate the concern as to who was in and out of God's grace.

He said, "Surely there is more to it

and asked me what I considered the Essentials to be.

An off the cuff question. Woe is me, I proffered an off the cuff reply. I spoke of God and incarnation and unconditional love. But, he responded, with the same negative feeling that he had been experiencing for some time. My words, he said, were not particularly helpful and he pressured me in a soft but persistent way to step back, think again, and take another run at it.

Here's what I remember saying (along with some additional thoughts that have come to me subsequently):

There are 2 words that are essential if we are to understand the basic stuff of real faith experience. If only we could allow the meaning of these words to get inside us and transform our lives we might find ourselves on the right track. Of course we would recognize that the process or journey that invites us to consider is never absolute or final.

The first word here is Hospitality

I remembered, in contemplating the meaning of hospitality, an episode of Scottish History called the Massacre of Glencoe. At the King's request a band of the Clan Campbell were ordered to visit the MacDonalds in their encampment at Glencoe and eliminate the entire MacDonald community, which they did in a violent and bloody way.

The winter that year was a harsh one and on their arrival at Glencoe the Campbells were afforded the best of Highland Hospitality to fortify them against the rigours of the cold Scottish winter. The MacDonalds were lulled into a complacency which ended in the middle of the night some 3 or 4 days later with the Campbells falling upon their Hosts as they slept, killing all but a few who escaped into the wintry weather.

An historian summed it up in this way: "We remember that dreadful affair not because of its treacherous brutality but because the Campbells had breached Highland Hospitality.

What's all this to do with the Church, you could well ask? The answer is simple. Hospitality is the main business of the Church wherever it is. And that is so because it is the chief work of God. God is the Host of the Universe and God's family encompasses all of life: human, animal, environment, the whole of Creation. The author of the New Testament letter to the Hebrews summarizes his understanding of Christian Morality by simply stating that Christian duty calls us to "show hospitality" (Chapter 13, Hebrews).

The marks of hospitality are easy to list. To welcome; to make room for all; to accept; to include; to be a friend. Your life might be the only sermon some people will hear. The task of each

Congregation is to incarnate or make local God's love here and now. It is to establish Hospitality that overflows with unconditional love for all who enter our home. No ulterior motives—we are not a factory whose goal is to "Make Christians" and stamp them with the mark of Religion or Church. It is to welcome all people as Guests who deserve the best hospitality we can offer. Inclusive of all: no fences or walls or barriers of separation. All this is because God is the Great Host of the Universe and we are all one in his Home of Hospitality.

The second word is Friendship

God fundamentally is our Friend: not Potentate; not Superior Nose in the Air deity and not vengeful Judge whose main task is to zap offenders. God is love and compassion and caring. God is alongside and inside and all around us. We are called to be friends with this Divine Love God and Jesus made the same point over and over again: we are not servants or slaves but friends. When a stranger enters, we embrace them no matter—it's simply our responsibility.

Faith Communities need to take all of this very seriously. We are responsible to create here Church homes/communities that are filled to overflowing with Hospitality and Friendship. Nothing more is required. Anything less is not good enough.

Make a real difference. Share your Christmas with a family in need...

Christmas is coming but it won't be an easy time for hundreds of families that are registering with St. Matthew's House Christmas Adopt-a-family program. If you, your family, parish, choir or group are looking for a special way to share your Christmas with a family experiencing hard times, St. Matthew's House offers you an opportunity to make a real difference.

Last year St. Matthew's House Christmas program helped 4,773 family members and individuals. Based on the number of families suffering from the impact of an economic downturn, poverty in Hamilton—nearly one in five—unemployment, layoffs and financial hardships, we expect to help as many or more families to enjoy a happier Christmas. Too many of them are at risk of becoming homeless.



Three ways you can sponsor a family:

- Provide the food or grocery vouchers for Christmas dinner for a family of two to five people or for a larger family.
- Or, provide new unwrapped toys for children or gifts for teenagers.
- Or, sponsor a large or small family by supplying Christmas dinner as well as one new gift for each child according to the size of family chosen. St. Matthew's House suggests gift certificates from major grocery stores e.g., Metro, Food Basics, Fortinos or No Frills to cover the cost of the main course, vegetables and dessert.

As a suggested guideline, you should be able to sponsor a family of four for \$150-\$175. If it is not feasible to provide food or gifts, you can help sponsor a family by giving a donation to:

St. Matthew's House Christmas Adopt-a-family Program

St. Matthew's House
414 Barton Street East, Hamilton, L8L 2Y3
Income tax receipts will be provided

St. Matthew's House provides sponsors with first names of family members, plus ages and sizes of children. Sponsors will bring the food and gifts to the Christmas program site located at: the Wentworth Campus, Mohawk College, 196 Wentworth St. North, Hamilton on **December 10, 11 or 14** for distribution to families.

Families registered at St. Matthew's House are eligible for assistance from only one agency, thereby avoiding duplication.

Please call the Christmas Program (905) 522-4584 if you wish to sponsor a family or to obtain more information. Thank you for remembering children and families most in need at St. Matthew's House this Christmas. We send our best wishes for every blessing to you and your loved ones this Christmas season.



St. Matthew's House
Helping People Most in Need Across Hamilton

All are welcome to join us



CHARLES STIRLING
HONORARY, CHRIST'S CHURCH CATHEDRAL

Well, it has been a few weeks since Anglicans have had the opportunity to officially join the Roman Church. To my knowledge there has been no great rush, and this is likely due to the fact we always could transfer our allegiance. Anyone, at any time has always been free to move to Rome. The Bishop of Rome seems to have been following, off course and at some distance, the maturing, and the growing of the Anglican Church. He has missed the realities of our church's agonies and ecstasies in our growth and in addressing our realities with God in our midst over many years. It has been a remarkable journey.

Anglicans are presumed by the bishop to be oppressed and overwhelmed by female priests, married priests and of course same sex unions, and to be truthful, some folk may be. But aside from a few parishes in this and other dioceses who do oppose same sex unions and female priests, we seem settled in our new ways. In being very fair, I am bold enough to suggest that at their advent a very few female priests were aggressive and were set on changing the world. At the

same time there were congregations of people whose churchmanship had not changed in centuries. Time, it is said, heals all wounds, and so it did, with a move to assess and rethink attitudes and positions. The whole thing is close to being finally settled. The Canadian Church has benefitted greatly by female priests, who bring dimension, understanding and pastoral ministry not necessarily always possessed by males. New concepts and old ideas take a while to work together, and so it has taken 30 years or so. But really what is that in the history of the church. We give thanks to God for leading us to this reality.

Same sex unions are the current challenge to some. It takes a wider concern of interest and understanding for the Church, but a very necessary one. To oppose such unions seems to stand in the way of much of what we have lived through and have come to understand related to female priests. In reality many of the church's clergy would be happy if marriages/unions were held elsewhere, and we could welcome people openly into our world. But, we are not quite there yet.

Gay and lesbian people are not mistakes of God, to be loved and honoured by congregations who deny them of the sexual gifts and rights of their creation. Make no mistake, it is a matter of natural desire and not an acquired taste or habit. Sex is the natural expectation of all creatures, who come to develop and find a need for

each other. Homosexuality is evident in animals, although it may usually miss our observation, and fortunately we don't have folk chasing them down to prevent it. Fundamentally it is a matter of human rights, as we seek to improve these rights for all people, as they come to us in faith, as whole people of God.

One of the curious things about the Bishops of Rome is the continuing attempt to attract Anglicans to the Roman Church by dwelling on interests Anglicans will certainly resolve themselves. Your Holiness, it has been near to 500 years since Henry VIII ended your influence on the Anglican Church, and look what has happened! We are the third largest communion in the world. We welcome you to join us as we continually seek the word and mission of the Anglican Church in the 21st century and beyond. I know many have!

To those among us who yet have not come to appreciate the current status of our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters who have not yet been fully included into the life of our church, I urge you to pray and seek God's revelation in our time. My wife and I have already been present to honour our gay and lesbian friends and family, and will shortly honour parishioners who have, and will be joined together in the name of God. It is good. It is not medieval and it is not oppressive. It is the will of God.

Eggs and Advent



MARNI NANCEKIVELL
DIRECTOR OF INTERIM MINISTRIES

One of my favourite websites for sending e-cards is www.gratefulness.org, which is based on the teachings of Brother David Steindl-Rast. On that site, an e-card which I frequently send is found in the "Seasons of Life" section. It is a rendering of a Blue Egg. The card says: "A magic dwells in each beginning."

I've been thinking a lot about eggs lately. I'm not quite sure why that is. The other day, I found myself picking up an extra crate of eggs so I could hard cook a dozen. And close to the surface of my Tupperware collection in my kitchen is the "microwave egg poacher", because we've been using a lot lately.

Until recently I was uncertain about what was driving my current preoccupation with eggs, until I realized that we are teetering on the edge of Advent. "Eggs?" you say? "Eggs are a symbol of Easter, not Advent!"

Perhaps so, but I clearly recall the Advent when I was pregnant with my daughter. Not only did I feel akin to Mary, but I was aware in a way that I have never been before or since, that Advent was a time of "coming close". In that December long ago, I was aware that the birth of my child was coming close. I could feel her movement within me, and I was beginning to know this intriguing 'other' who was for a brief period, sharing my body. This creature was a product of egg and sperm, and the time to meet her was coming close.

At this time of year, the Christian Church begins the season of Advent (which literally means the season of 'coming close'). What is coming close? The birth of the Christ Child, of course...

However, Advent is a time not only for the gestation of the Christ child, but it is a time when we are beckoned into a time of gestation as well. Advent is the time when the egg of our lives is to be cracked open—so we can receive depth and energy and awaken our deepest selves to the pulse of God in our lives. This Advent time is the time when we are called to wake up—to wake up to ourselves, and in doing that, to wake up to God. Advent is the time when the God of Hidden Spaces moves from potential to birth, and so is comes to tumbling into the world in and through in our lives.

The thing is, eggs don't open easily. The hard cooked eggs sitting in that bowl in my refrigerator are reluctant to let go of their shell. Opening one of them at work the other day, one of my colleagues commented that it was so full of craters, it resembled the landscape of the moon. And that microwave egg poacher lives at our house because I find soft cooked eggs difficult to open, between the heat of the boiling water, the oozing yolk, and the resistant shell (which, no matter how careful I am cracking it open, inevitably lands inside the egg).

Several Advents ago, I discovered this poem. It is by Ted Loeder, and is found in his book: *My Heart in my Mouth: Pray-*

ers for our Lives, and is available through Augsburg Fortress publishing.

Gentle Us Open

Lord of Life and Light,
help us not to fall in love
with the darkness that separates us
from you and from each other,
but to watch large-eyed, wide-hearted,
open-handed, eager-minded for you,
to dream and hunger and squint and
pray
for the light of you and life for each
other.

Lord, amidst our white-knuckled,
furrow-faced busy-ness to this season,
we realize deep within us that your
gifts
of mercy and light, peace and joy,
grace upon grace
can be received only if we are
unclenched open.

So this is our prayer, God: Open us!
gentle us open, pry, shock, tickle,
beguile, knock,
amaze, squeeze, any wily way you
can us open.

Open us to see your glory
in the coming again of the light of
each day,
the light in babies' eyes and lovers'
smiles,
the light in the glaze of weariness that
causes us to pause,
the light of truth wherever spoken and
done.

Open to us songs of angels in the
thumping of traffic,
in the rustle of shoppers, the canopy
of pre-dawn silence,
in the hum of hope, the wail of long-
ing within us,
in the cries of our brothers and sisters
for justice and peace,
and in our own souls' throb toward
goodness.

Open us, then, to share the gifts you
have given us
and to the deep yearning to share
them gladly and boldly,
to sweat for justice, to pay the cost of
attention,
to initiate the exchange of forgiveness,
to risk a new beginning free of past
grievances,
to engage with each other in the
potluck of joy
and to find the gifts of a larger love
and deeper peace.

Open us, God of miracles of the
ordinary,
to the breath-giving, heart-pounding
wonder of birth,
a mother's fierce love, a father's
tender fidelities,
a baby's barricade-dissolving burble
and squeak,
that we may be born anew ourselves
into the "don't be afraid" fullness of
your image,
the fullness of a just and joyful
human community,
the fullness of your time;
through the eternal grace of
your son, our brother Jesus.
Amen.

Who needs a building anyway?

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Did you know that in September 2009 the Hamilton Meeting Houses had an average attendance of 843 per Sunday—Ancaster with 565 and East Mountain 278? How many of our 'real' churches can boast this level of attendance? Wake up folks it's not about the building. The status quo is no longer good enough.

And there's more. The homily at the Meeting House is beamed from their central facility in Oakville to their eight satellite 'theatre' locations by—you got it—satellite! And worshippers can text message questions and comments to the "teaching" pastor during the service, which are then answered live at the end of the talk. Between the East Hamilton and Ancaster locations there are nineteen Home Church ministries where community is formed and conversation about the teaching of Jesus happens. Then there are what we would call outreach mission initiatives; supporting local ministries as well as programs in Southern Africa focused on HIV/AIDS, food, security, water, and peace-building and sending short-term teams to Southern Africa so people can experience the situation first-hand to support and encourage their mission work.

Why do I mention this? Well, the time may be approaching faster than

we think that the majority of our time, talent and offerings will be spent renewing, upgrading, repairing and just keeping open some of our older churches that in many cases have declining membership and attendance statistics. Take the \$50,000 it might take to upgrade the washrooms. How far would that go to support a ministry in the local community or a food bank or a homeless shelter? Or the \$200,000 that may need to be raised to replace a leaking roof that might be better suited to set up an after school program for kids at risk or an intake station for abused women and children? What is more important—the building or the ministry?

When we were in England in September many of the churches that we visited that had a variety of community outreach programs didn't worry too much about how they looked—well manicured lawns and gardens—but rather how they could serve their community and be an example of Christ's love in that community. It's not that they don't care how they are seen as a physical plant, but rather it is that their volunteers' time and talent are deployed in ministries that will make a difference in other people's lives.

At some point when churches in Niagara engage with our diocesan vision and begin to move forward in mission they will ask themselves a very important and perhaps life-

changing question—does this building meet the needs of our new ministry objectives? Or put another way for those who are fortunate enough to have modern up to date, energy efficient facilities—are we fully utilizing the building that we have? Most churches—I'm not talking about the parish hall or offices—are empty more than 90% of the time. Is that an effective use of our resources? We have heard about the mixed economy church, one that may have traditional services as well as a Fresh Expression of church be it a Messy Church or Café Church at different times or on different days or in different places. A church could also be one that has an after school ministry in the local school then conducts its Sunday worship in the school's cafeteria or gym. Without the encumbrance of a little-used building, ministry could be more flexible, mobile and non-threatening to those who might be otherwise uncomfortable in a traditional church setting.

As we go forward in these financially and societal challenging times, we need to look at how we do ministry from a different perspective. Now may be the time to not only think outside the box, but act outside the box and, God willing, live outside the box—moving from our comfort zone to places where God is calling us to be.

So, who needs a building anyway?

Post Christendom Christianity | What form will it take?



MICHAEL BURSLEM
ST GEORGE'S GUELPH

Bishop John Spong has thrown us the gauntlet in his *Why Christianity Must Change Or Die*. His book disturbed me as I thought that in rejecting them, as he proposed, to produce what computer lingo might call a WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) world, he was throwing out the baby with the bath water. Most people have eyes of faith, perhaps under-developed, through which they view the world differently; not that any should condemn him for being theistically blind, but show compassion, as they would to anyone physically blind or disabled.

But Christianity did indeed change from the plain teaching of Jesus to love one's enemies and to bless those who curse you. This is more evident to Muslims, than to Christians. Abd al-Jabbar (d.1025) said that Constantine reigned for fifty years, killing those who did not venerate the cross or accept the divinity of Christ (Goddard, Hugh; Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations [Birmingham, England]—*Muslim Perceptions Of Christianity*). Another medieval

author, al-Biruni (d. 1048), wrote that Christianity was "a noble philosophy which gives the shirt to him who takes the coat, and which blesses an enemy and prays for all, but since the time of Constantine, it is the sword and the lash which have been the instruments of the Christian governors" (Goddard, p.19).

More recently, in the last century, Muhammad Abu Zahra taught that prior to the Council of Nicea the opinion of Arius—that Christians were Unitarian—was so widespread that only the intervention of Constantine led to the deification of Jesus. Further Mahmud Abu Rayya claimed that Jesus' religion was twisted at the time of Constantine.

I'm not arguing that the faith was, or was not, Unitarian, but that it changed at the time of Constantine. It 'repented' from the plain teaching of Jesus and went in the diametrically opposite direction to justify strife, schism and war, all in the name of Christ.

Lately Christian authors have also acknowledged this change. Jonathan Bartley in a recent blog says that Christianity "presented a problem for the emperor Constantine who was intent on marrying Christianity with the power that had often been its persecutor. The death of Christ was a bit embarrassing. And it wasn't just that the emperor was running the empire which had put the founder of the faith to death. The way of Christ—loving enemies, forgiving and turning the other cheek—was particu-

larly ill suited to the business of Government... It was Constantine more than any other who set in motion in the Western Church the events what would turn Easter on its head, and neutralize its subversive dimension. He placed the responsibility for Jesus' death squarely on the Jews, not the Romans..." (www.guardian.co.uk).

In Jonathan Bartley's recent book, *Faith And Politics After Christendom: The Church As A Movement For Anarchy*, Bartley again argues that Constantine laid the foundation of Christendom, the alliance between Christianity and the state. Jesus' teachings became an embarrassment to him, and were 'spiritualized'; they were so impractical and unrealistic to power politics that they referred not to earth, but to heaven.

At this time also Christians became concerned about who was 'in,' and who was 'out.' Before all had been included in God's reconciliation of the world, but after Constantine, baptism became the sign that one was in, and the non-baptized were out, destined to burn in hell. Images of hell grew very graphic. Freedom from hell, rather than God's new creation, assured by Jesus' resurrection, became the church's gospel.

But, Bishop N.T. Wright said in his Easter message this year (lentpilgrimage.christianaid.org.uk) freedom from hell was not what Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were writing about. Rather the good news was that

Jesus was Lord and creator of a totally unexpected new creation. Repentance was the gift of this new creation, not the means by which we achieve it.

A further alteration to Christianity is described by Diana Butler Bass in her book, *Christianity For The Rest Of Us: How The Neighborhood Church Is Transforming The Faith*. Prior to Constantine every Christian had a testimony to the resurrection and to Jesus' lordship in his or her life, that many were willing to die for, rather than recant. Die they did, and to his credit Constantine did bring an end to Christian persecution in the Roman Empire. However, after him their testimony began to wane, and was replaced by 'creed,' recited by rote, rather than a testimony from the heart.

If Christianity has changed so dramatically in the past, should it not change again, as Bishop Spong says it must? Many have stated that Christendom, not Christianity, is either dying or dead. Malcolm Muggeridge has emphasized this in his two lectures at the University of Waterloo. Christianity is still very much alive (Muggeridge, Malcolm, 1903-1990—*The End Of Christendom*). But we must ask ourselves whether Christianity today is the genuine article, and, if not, what should replace it.

No one really knows the answer to this, but the Sermon on the Mount should give us clues. Bartley suggests that Christianity will become more an 'anarchical movement,' concerned

with justice, peacemaking, protection of the vulnerable, identifying with the marginalized (as Christians themselves become increasingly marginalized) and care for the planet.

Bass sees Christians in the new Christianity as more diverse, racially, politically and theologically. They reflect God's love for all people, not only for the chosen few. Conservatives blog against diversity, believing 'God wants us all to be the same—believe the same things, worship in the same way...' (Bass, p.148) To them, change is evidence that liberalism and secularism have broken into the church. In reaction to this, some have retreated into holy huddles.

Others react more positively, seeing new opportunities and 'fresh expressions' to communicate their faith in post Christendom; for Bartley politically, especially in demands for justice, and for Bass to build up neighborhood churches. We need more Red Lettered Christians to right the church.

This Christmas, let's not grieve the death of Christendom, for Jesus never intended there to be Christendom in the first place. Let us not be fearful either. The angel told the shepherds "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord." Because of this news we should rather rejoice, and spread it by living as if it meant something.



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A 15-day tour (June 2 - 16, 2010) entitled **European Splendour** will take us to Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic. The tour has been carefully designed to be relaxing with a fair amount of free time.

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Contact: Canon Gordon Kinkley 905 934-1020 OR kinkley@sympatico.ca OR ROSTAD TOURS 1-800-361-8687

An information meeting will be held at St. John's Church, 80 Main St. (Port Dalhousie) St. Catharines Sunday October 25 at 2PM. Early booking discount until October 31st.



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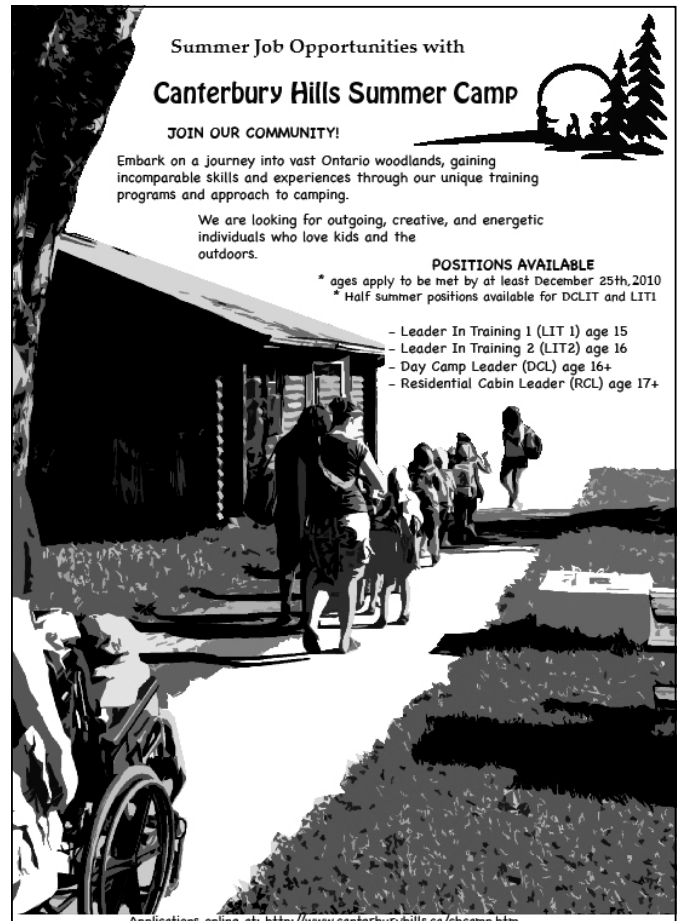
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PARISH NEWS

Epiphany celebrates anniversary

NANCY BLACKIE
CHURCH OF THE EPIPHANY

The Church of the Epiphany hosted a 100th+ anniversary weekend with a catered dinner on Saturday, October 24th and church services the following day as current parishioners were joined by past members travelling from across the province to celebrate the church community's centennial. The Rector, The Reverend Suzanne Craven warmly welcomed honoured guest speaker, The Venerable Michael Patterson. Archdeacon Patterson spoke enthusiastically of the indomitable pioneering spirit shown by John Wilson and others that brought the Anglican Church to Bronte, Oakville a century ago in the midst of many hardships; the same spirit that we must embody today to reach out to others with the Bishop's vision.

As for that Wilson zeal: it's alive and well in the third generation! John Wilson's first-born grandchild, Doug Wilson, still robust in his eighties, drove through misty rain from North Bay to attend the festivities. His cousin, The Reverend Barbara (Wilson) Murray managed to secure a ride

from Fort Frances to Thunder Bay where she caught a flight with Porter Airlines to Toronto Island Airport. In a happy twist of fate, she was able to assist at the 10:30 a.m. service where a previous generation had served. Awaiting her arrival was her youngest brother, Alex Wilson of Hillsburgh, who spearheaded the attendance of several family members. Alex was unfailing in his consistent provision of information and photos for the historic displays. Middle brother, John Wilson, fortunately living much closer by, was not deterred from attending the dinner in spite of a recent hip replacement. He was accompanied by his wife, Barb, son Paul, a columnist with the Hamilton Spectator and daughter and son-in-law, Joanne and David Patterson. Another cousin, Margaret (Wilson) Caven drove in with her husband, Stan from St. Catharine's to attend the 10:30 service.

The first Rector to serve back in 1931, The Reverend John M. Cameron, was represented by his two sons, John and Fred. John and his wife, Jane drove in from MacTier while Fred arrived from Oshawa. Both provided

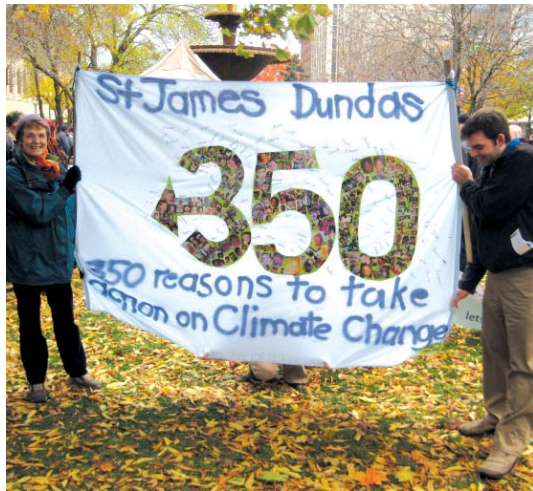


items for the historic displays including the sterling silver private communion set given to The Reverend Cameron by the parish of the Church of the Epiphany upon his departure in 1940.

Two other founding families of note were the Sargants and the

McKims. Bill Sargent and his wife, Ann from Burlington and Alan Sargent and his wife, Connie from London participated throughout the whole weekend. Meredith McKim of Oakville and his brother, Ralph McKim of Pontypool attended the dinner celebration. In spite of, or perhaps because

of the various distances travelled by former parishioners and family members, the energy felt throughout the weekend was an engaging and uplifting experience to help launch us into the next one hundred years.



Dundas churches take part in EcoWalk

SUE CARSON
ST. JAMES DUNDAS

As part of the 350.org campaign and to support KAIROS initiatives a number of Dundas churches took part in an EcoWalk on October 18. St. James, Dundas is one of 6 churches that initiated Ecowham—the Eco Churches of West Hamilton. Future joint events are being planned by Ecowham. On a beautiful Sunday afternoon we walked and prayed at 4 of the local churches as a visual example to show the community that we care about Climate

Change. The parishioners of St. James had provided photos of the "children that they love" which were used to make up the banner—a reminder that Climate Change will affect the children of tomorrow and it is for them we need to change our life style so they will have a future as beautiful as ours today. The banner was then carried in downtown Hamilton on October 24 at 3.50 PM as part of the 350.org parade. The Reverend Bill Mous also led a 350 bell ringing campaign that morning.



■ Patricia Ing and Haydn Griffith-Jones celebrate Christian Marriage at St. George's Guelph. Both Patricia and Haydn are in their 70s.



■ On Saturday October 24, the International Day of Climate Action, members of St. George's Georgetown and the wider community gathered to ring the bells 350 times.

What the Spirit says to the Churches

» CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

One could say that the New Testament is really about Jesus in the Gospels and the Holy Spirit in Acts through Revelation. Certainly there is commentary on the Holy Spirit in the stories of Pentecost, but the overall struggle of the Apostles, as recorded in the Bible, and of churches to this day is to come to terms with Jesus. We do not concern ourselves as much with the Holy Spirit. Our church is "Christian."

Do we need to become more spiritual? C. S. Lewis's *Till We Have Faces* is a 1956 retelling of the Greek myth of Cupid and Psyche in which the ugly sister asks, "How can the gods meet us face to face till we have faces?" The title is so resonant because it alludes to the Roman Paul's eloquent letter: "For now we see in a mirror, dimly; but then we will see face to face." Two thousand years later, few followers of Christ have developed the spirituality of faith, hope and love that could enable them to "see face to face" and to "know fully," let alone to become spiritual leaders.

Why are so many people leaving the church in our time? One clue is in their criticism that we are too religious and not spiritual enough. Another is the worldwide change humanity is experiencing, change as enormous as that experienced by the contemporaries of Johann Gutenberg and Martin Luther. If the Reformation led to national churches and democratic governments, what we are witnessing is a technological revolution that makes all aspects of life global. With the inventions of the atomic bomb and instant communica-

tion technologies, people can see evil everywhere, even in churches. We see how our religion is complicit in Western society's violent domination of non-European peoples and their land, water and energy sources. All Western institutions, including the religious, share a great guilt.

Yet still we long for the churches that grew out of Luther's time. Some deny the significance to our church of the technological revolution and cling to old-fashioned certainties. Others simply stay home on Sundays, adopting private spiritual practices that retain a credible level of integrity and showing up (and shutting up) for high holidays and special family services. Some create a pseudo-spirituality independent of any religion, a grab bag of new age trivia. Many simply turn to the worship of money and power, an empty secularism made tolerable by addictions. Extremists exploit the terrorism that can emerge on the fringes of any religion. A remnant tries to reinvent the church and its theology for this new age.

We who stay in a mainstream church, both loyal conservatives and loyal progressives, might do well to face together the non-churched who regard us as pious nuts. We see the church as holy and our commitment as to marriage, yet we can't ignore that the great majority of society rejects our institution as the face of Western imperialism. We need to learn both the humility to admit our woefully limited spirituality in the past and also the wisdom to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to us in the present.

Might the Holy Spirit be uniquely active in our time? Contemporary spiritual heroes are very loosely allied with churches (U2), belong to non-Christian religions (the Dalai Lama) or are active Christians (Archbishop Tutu). The Holy Spirit might not recognize these religious distinctions, might say instead, "Me? I'm spiritual but not religious." That line again! An irritant irritates precisely because it contains a difficult truth. It seems necessary for us to put on the face of spirituality as well as of religion in order to do God's will. In doing so, we can hope to preserve or at least reinvent our religion. The Trinity, after all, is not the Father, the Son and the Anglican Church.

Humanity has moved beyond tribalism and nationalism to create a United Nations. We now have international courts and financial institutions. We realize that we can address environmental crises only by working together. Surely the world's religions can come together as well. Three times, former Pope John Paul II invited the leaders of the world's religions to Assisi to pray for peace. Perhaps out of such initiatives will develop a United Spirit Church that moves beyond sectarianism.

Augustine wrote: "This is what you should think, if you wish to see God: 'God is Love.' What face has love? What form has it? What height? What feet? What hands? No one can say. Yet it has feet, for they lead to the Church; it has hands, for they care for the poor; it has eyes, for through them the needy one is known."

The short sweet season

» CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Advent, with its stark and apocalyptic readings, invites us to look at ourselves and our world in a way that the Incarnation can and will address. It is a time in which we hear some of the best known and best loved words ever written—texts like: "Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low", "The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple", "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, rejoice!", "for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth, and he shall be the one of peace." We also will hear these words: "People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken."

Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.' Advent is a time of warning and being alert, in order to embrace the earth shattering power of God coming into our world. Advent is a time when we do things differently—we adopt a colour—blue—which we only use during Advent. We often will, in our communities, read together to study together—in a short season which provides us all with an opportunity to learn and to grow. I would encourage parishes to use these four Sundays for something new or dif-

ferent—move the furniture, try some Lutheran Eucharistic forms, learn some new hymns, incorporate the lighting of an advent wreath, or a Jesse tree, or the gathering of special gifts for those less fortunate than ourselves.

So, in the midst of all of this, it is still difficult to 'keep' Advent—the world (and many of the people with whom we worship) are completely immersed into Christmas by the time Advent begins. From shopping to parties to concerts and all of the other diversions of the Christmas season, it is tough to hold a line in church. People want to sing Christmas carols during the early days of December, because they are hearing them on the radio and in the malls. In our parishes, I believe that we need to model a mood of prayerful waiting and watching. We need to savour the December stillness (in the air if not around us!) and keep this procession of Sundays with their comforting, at times disturbing, and forward looking readings. We need to be gentle with ourselves and with others—lighting wreaths, singing the hymns of Advent, and looking forward to the coming of Jesus. There will be Christmas enough—the season of Christmas stretches way into January—for us all to enjoy and sing about.

Advent—a short and sweet season—one of gentle and deliberate preparation and longing! Savour it! Enjoy it!

There is another kingdom

» CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

He joined the community of John in proclaiming, inhabiting and enacting the kingdom of God, and he invites us to the same work as it continues in our time. With that in mind, I wonder if we might re-imagine Advent as the season dedicated to remaining still enough to notice where and how that kingdom is eking its holy way into history now, and here.

In Does God Have a Big Toe?, Marc Gellman wonders if Moses was the only shepherd to walk past the burning bush, or just the only shepherd who stood still long enough to notice that it was not consumed. I wonder what might happen if we used Advent to practice the kind of readiness that stillness makes possible—an alert and noticing kind of readiness tuned to the frequency of the kingdom of God. I wonder if we have the wherewithal to stay put, to inhabit the present long enough to discover that the present is the garden to which God has entrusted the seeds of the future, in which buds of that future are showing. I wonder if we can come to understand that as we tend the garden of the present, the planting of God will make itself known to us. In the parable of the sower, Jesus suggests that the seeds of the kingdom are scattered across the landscape of the present with a kind of reckless abandon. I wonder if, in this Advent, we might begin to discover the truth of that parable, might stay still long enough to notice how many seeds of justice, courage, compassion, love and truth are already beginning to grow.

Much more than we might imagine depends on our willingness and capacity to practice this Advent the kind of still-

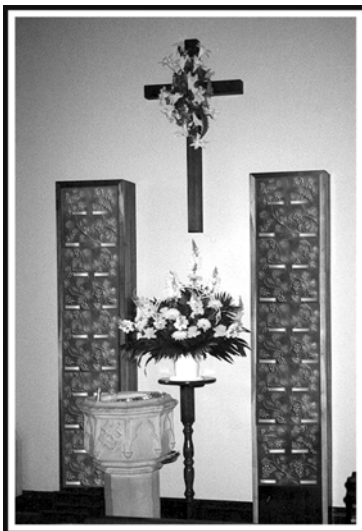
ness that fosters such noticing. In both Mark and Matthew, the inaugural proclamation of Jesus' public ministry is a call to repentance, to a thoroughgoing transformation of heart and mind and intention. It is possible for us to contemplate such a transformation because of the proximity of an alternative to the kingdom of greed and fear that dominates the public life of Judea. "The kingdom of God is at hand," says Jesus, "repent, and believe the good news."

The world desperately needs us to know that there is another kingdom, a living alternative to the kingdom of greed and fear that dominates the public life of our society. In Romans, we hear that "the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God." In a world of environmental degradation, catastrophic climate change, and a demonic compulsion to consume and waste the resources of earth at an ever-accelerating rate, the turning of humankind away from the kingdom of fear and greed is not a matter of spiritual abstraction.

Paradoxically, the urgency of earth's current predicament invites the disciples of Jesus not to frantic action but to stillness. Advent invites that stillness, too; "Don't just do something; stand there." Stand still and notice that God is already initiating an alternative, and that signs of that alternative surround us, not least in the waters of our baptism and the bread and wine by which Jesus nourishes us out of the heart of his own being. There is no half-time pep talk in our faith that exhorts us, "Let's go get the kingdom." There is no blueprint for us to fashion that kingdom on our own. There is only the passionate prayer that Jesus taught us, "Your kingdom come".

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The Niagara Anglican

The official publication of the Anglican Diocese of Niagara is published ten times a year from September to June by The Dunham Group in Hamilton, Ontario.

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Proofreading: Bryan Stopps

Submissions

We welcome letters from our readers. All submissions must include the full name and contact information of the author. The newspaper reserves the right to edit submissions. Submissions must be received one month prior to the newspaper's publication date.

Subscriptions

Yearly subscriptions cost \$15.00. For new subscriptions or to make changes to your existing subscription, please contact your parish.

The Diocese of Niagara

The Diocese lies at the western end of Lake Ontario, and is defined roughly by the Niagara Escarpment from the Niagara River in the east to the Dundas Valley in the West and north to Shelburne, Mt. Forest and Orangeville.

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PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

■ Congratulations to Bishop Michael Bird who celebrates his 25th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood on December 12.

■ Congratulations to Canon Muriel Hornby, Honorary Assistant at All Saints, Erin, who celebrated her 25th anniversary of ordination on

November 18.

■ Deepest sympathy to the Crosthwait family on the death of Phillip Crosthwait, O.N., a long time and faithful member of St. Saviour's Church, Queenston. A Memorial Eucharist was held at his parish church on November 10.

■ The Reverend Robert Conway has been appointed priest in charge, part time, at All Saints Church, Ridgeway, effective November 1.

■ The Reverend Laura Marie Piotrowicz has been appointed honorary assistant at St. John's Church, Ancaster, (November 1 to Easter).

■ Canon Sharyn Hall has been appointed Chaplain to the Diocesan Mother's Union. The installation will take place in early 2010.

■ Lay Reader's license renewed for Nancy Wyatt, at All Saints, Dain City, Welland, effective October 1.

Advent in 1918 | A Deepening Love



FRANCEAN CAMPBELL
CHRIST'S CHURCH CATHEDRAL

There were two more families Alicia was to visit, and she was exhausted. Could she once again face the sight of sick mothers tending to their children, alone, in the awful heat of Newport? She had to. Already the bodies were being stacked, waiting for who knows what—there was no burial space left in the public cemeteries—and no one strong enough to lift and dig even if there were room.

In the first house Alicia rinsed a cloth in what little water was left in the stove reservoir and gently stroked the forehead of the poor black woman. She'd seen her only a few days ago, too young for so many kids, but with her own mother, at least, to help. And now, aged and wizened, her mother gone with the rest, and no husband, it was only a matter of time. Alicia did

what she could, wished desperately that she could do more, wished for the skies to open up and wash away the misery and the filth.

They were saying that this was the most serious influenza on record—anywhere. As if the aftermath of the Great War had not been enough. Alicia had not been at all keen on coming to this awful place. Arkansas was a long way from home in Toronto; no one could understand why Austin insisted on packing up his little family and taking them so far from their roots. Something to do with post-war economics, the lumber business, Austin's qualifications—but Alicia had to admit that it was she who had brought pressure on Austin not to let his name stand for overseas service; he had been so keen to go. She had even pulled strings to keep him at home—and succeeded. As an officer in the Grenadiers, he was needed to remain in Canada to train recruits and cadets. One thing was certain, she loved him, had been married only four years, had a little girl, and she wanted him with her, always.

The second, and last house for the day, was no better—but in its pitiful

way, it was easier. There was no one left alive. Alicia had not seen death before. Her father had protected her from such sights, though he had not hesitated to take her with him on his hospital rounds from time to time. When she was about four she had seen the little babies, their umbilical cords tied in a knot, and wanted to know where they had come from. And once, when she was six, he had led her through a surgery and there, standing in a pail in a corner was an amputated leg. Alicia had wondered how the man would walk without his leg.

Home at last, Alicia checked on Mary Alicia, drank a little water, hoped idly that Austin would soon appear—the epidemic had taken its toll of workers at the mill; Austin had doubled up on the work frequently; thank God there had not been any accidents so far. She fell asleep. It was some hours before Alicia came to, shivering, head aching, and Austin by her side, looking worried. "You are ill, my darling". It had been all too much, and inevitable. All those visits to the homes of the

black families of Newport, no doctor, nurses, just the odd relative or passerby. Austin pitched in, looked after Mary Alicia, prepared a meal, and did the household tasks. Alicia's fever had mounted, her face flushed; from time to time she tried to speak, making no sense. Austin resorted to long distance telephone—rare, expensive, with noisy static—to Alicia's father in Toronto and learned what to do for her.

In God's own time Alicia recovered. The epidemic raged on, leaving a weak and devastated population worldwide. It was some weeks later, close to Christmas, that Austin and Alicia reflected that their love had deepened; the trials of the past months had enriched their lives and bound them as one. As Mary Alicia slept, the two stood at the foot of her bed, gave thanks to God, and sang together: "Drink to me only with thine eyes, and I will pledge with mine, Or leave a kiss within the cup And I'll not ask for wine..."

Thinly veiled, Austin and Alicia were my parents, Mary Alicia was my sister.

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New PWRDF CD has roots in Niagara

CAROLYN VANDERLIP
DIOCESAN PWRDF COORDINATOR

One Voice is the magical new double CD set created to raise funds for The Primate's World Relief and Development Fund. A number of the featured artists are from our very own diocese—The Three Cantors, Stan Rogers, St John's Elora Choir, and the Hamilton Children's Choir. This might be because the idea for the One Voice CD, a national initiative of PWRDF, was born right here in Niagara!

It was after a speaking engagement at St John's Ancaster that Debra

Pickfield, at that time a PWRDF staff member, and Canon David Pickett, rector at St John's, got talking about PWRDF's upcoming 50th anniversary. As a member of the Three Cantors, David's thoughts naturally turned to music, and the idea for a 50th anniversary CD began to take shape.

That seedling was planted and took root, and has grown into an amazing double CD set of celebration and inspiration, featuring top Canadian artists like Bruce Cockburn, Blue Rodeo, Serena Ryder, Oscar Peterson, Chor Leoni Men's

Choir, Elektra Women's Choir, the Vancouver Chamber Choir, and many more. All of the artists donated tracks in support of the work of PWRDF.

One Voice makes a perfect Christmas gift! It's available to parishes in cases of 10 by contacting PWRDF at 416-924-9199 ext 216. Order forms may be downloaded at www.pwrdf50.org/one-voice-cd. Individual CDs may be purchased at St John's Ancaster, at the diocesan offices, or through Augsburg Fortress bookstore (Telephone 416-924-1332).

'Tis the season for hospitality



RICK JONES
ARCHDEACON, RECTOR, ST. PAUL'S WESTDALE

The Advent and Christmas season is one of the few times that people outside the church actually take some interest in us and our activities. It is a great opportunity for us to follow the Christ Child into the world and practice the spiritual discipline of hospitality.

One of the things that strikes me about our new Vision for our diocese is that it calls us to shift our focus, as Terry DeForest noted in a Speaker's Corner comment, "It feels like the centre of gravity is shifting from us in the Church to those around us in the community." I agree, the Vision can radically reorient our focus to the world and people that God loves outside our communities.

What if our focus this season was not inward looking to our needs, but outward looking to the needs of our neighbours? Advent and Christmas are times that the community around us gives us permission to engage with them in creative ways. "Outsiders" come to our bazaars, and some of our services. What if we practiced hospitality and very intentionally looked at all our events and services from the point of view of the stranger?

Think about our activities, our spaces and our rituals from the point of view of a valued guest. We have a wonderful opportunity here to build relationships. Is everyone at our bazaars and other events wearing a name tag and prepared to talk to the guest in our midst, to really show some

interest in them as persons? Could we risk asking people about what, if anything, the church could offer them? Do we have our welcome literature customized and ready to be handed out, inviting people to services, and other programmes of the church?

When people do come to our services, do we have greeters specially trained to welcome them, orienting them to the building, and the liturgy, and making them feel at home? Do we ever plan services to make them user friendly for a visitor? It isn't that hard to treat people as valued guests and use the same skills we employ in our homes to make people feel at ease in our churches. These are only a few of the practical things we can be thinking about.

What makes this the spiritual discipline of hospitality and not just church business as usual? The answer is in the focus and intentionality of the action. If our focus is truly on the needs of the visitor, or the stranger in our midst, and not on what we can get from them (bums in pews and dollars on plates) we will be following Christ in unconditional hospitality. The discipline in this is to be intentional in our caring for others, to be prepared, to think it through ahead of time, so that our ministry will be excellent and worthy of Christ.

We do have a great opportunity in this Advent and Christmas season to build new relationships, to really care for our neighbours, to engage them in conversations that are open ended. The kind that find common ground in children, and work, and real life concerns, the kind of conversations that lead to the beginnings of friendship, and at some point down the road, to conversations of faith.

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