



# Niagara Anglican

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## Let us welcome the newly baptized

ELEANOR JOHNSTON  
ST. THOMAS' CHURCH, ST. CATHARINES

Some people cry at weddings; I cry at baptisms. Looking at the young parents so loving and proud, so worried and exhausted, their infant so small and innocent, I hope they feel blessed by God and welcomed into the church. The ancient rituals are powerful and simple. As the sponsors name the child, we recall that naming is a primal act of creation. Witnessing the sign of the cross made with holy water on the child's forehead, seeing the light of Christ handed to the parents, we are drawn in willingly to pledging support for the young family and restating our own baptismal vows.

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## Raising the bar

NISSA BASBAUM  
RECTOR, TRANSFIGURATION ST. CATHARINES

As holidays go, the time which Robin, Ben, Rebekah and I spent at the cottage in August was pretty much the norm. While shorter than what we might have preferred, this brevity of time was offset by the incredible weather we had. There was one catch, though, that made this vacation quite different from previous ones.

This year, we had Oliver with us; that is, Oliver, our relatively newly acquired dog, who sits in our window at home and barks at just about anything or anyone who dares to cross his path. Do you have any idea how many squirrels, birds, geese, ducks, seagulls, chipmunks and heaven knows what other wildlife there are on any given day at the cottage?

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## Rediscovering Baptismal Ministry

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

**Editorial note:** This article is the address that Michael Thompson gave at the Trinity College Convocation, last spring. It is particularly important and timely as our bishop continues to press forward with a new diocesan vision and a move toward excellence in ministry.

In April I received a phone call from Bishop Michael, alerting me to a call he had received from someone who attended worship the previous Sunday—Easter Day, at St. Jude's. That Sunday, two of the children of the parish had retrieved a white stole and wooden "Alleluia" from under the altar, where they had been resting since the beginning of Lent.

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■ Sarah Noiseux (St. Thomas, St. Catharines), Jeremy Kennedy (St. Luke's, Burlington), Emily Johnson (St. Christopher's, Burlington), Justin Michael (St. Matthias, Guelph), Lenox Daley (All Saints, Hamilton), Tricia Manning (Holy Trinity, Fonthill) and Andrew Garland (St. Paul's, Caledonia) in the midst of the Wonderland that is the Niagara Youth Conference!

## Reflections on the Niagara Youth Conference

“This time we're not giving up. Let's make it last forever. Screaming 'Hallelujah!'. We're going to make it last forever.”

"Hallelujah" by Paramore

Kate Smyth, St. James Dundas

When thinking about what to write about this past NYC, 2009, I thought about trying to describe it with a song. I thought that the lyrics of Hallelujah were amazingly appropriate to NYC. When you are there, there is a feeling in the air - you can let out your problems, relieve your stress, let go of your fears,

and accomplish anything in the world; knowing that you have people to support you. This community of faith gives you the strength to not give up on your life, to go out there and make a difference—grow, love, and live to the fullest. But there is also the feeling that you don't want it to end, you just want to keep NYC going on forever, without fail and without loss and stress. This NYC had two themes: the first one was Alice in Wonderland which was representative of the magical world that each delegate finds in the peace, safety and beauty of the NYC community. The underlying theme (for Alice and the delegates) was the concept of the Johari Window which is a framework for understanding what you know and don't know about yourself, and what other people know

and don't know about you. It was like a journey that you took with yourself; instead of learning about other people and how they work with life, it was about your mental, physical capabilities, your emotional weaknesses and strengths, your faith and spiritual health. We even built a labyrinth together, learning co-operation and then intense respect as we walked the whole thing in Spirit-filled silence.

The staff outdid themselves making sure that everything was done with excellence and care. The activities taught me more about myself than anything else that I've ever experienced. The friendships and love that infused the week are irreplaceable and magical. NYC 2009 was my last year as a delegate, and the strength and

courage that NYC has given me will follow me for the rest of my life.

Cam Buttrum, Church of the Resurrection Hamilton

The past four years at NYC have been the best experiences I have ever had. It is a community that can change you to the core of your soul in just a matter of minutes... no seconds. Since the first I've attended, NYC has been and will always be my haven and my home. I have met the best people there and I will never forget what they taught me about my world and myself. Each time I've gone back, I feel like something that has been missing for the rest of the year has finally come back to me.

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## The origins of orthodoxy

COLIN CAMPBELL  
DIOCESE OF NIAGARA

In the current conflict in the Anglican Church, there is a great deal of agreement on two fundamental issues: Who Jesus is and what His Gospel is. We all believe that God, in Jesus Christ, fulfilled the image of Himself, which is in all people. We agree further that Jesus established the Kingdom of God, where all are commanded to love God and other human beings as themselves. In this Kingdom, a right relation (justice) is to prevail. There is to be no preference for "Jew nor Greek, bond

nor free, male nor female." We know these truths by reading our Bibles, not from studying Church tradition, where past Christians have flagrantly ignored them. No literalist or Biblical scholar could deny the Two Great Commandments and remain a Christian. The current confusion is similar to the situation, which caused the canon of Scripture to be fixed in the first place. At that time, many believed that possessing reason and the Holy Spirit was all that was needed to live a Christian life. Spiritual elitism developed, which, in turn, had to be dealt with by the creation of

a new type of authority. Irenaeus rose to the occasion and developed orthodoxy as the test of faith, based on only four of the many Gospels circulating at the time. These defined Christianity, in terms of the life of Jesus as the Logos of God. Irenaeus realized that when the Spirit is uncoupled from the New Testament Jesus, it is only too easy to add new teachings to the revealed faith. Jesus told us how to discern the true from the false. He said, "By their fruit shall you know them." It was unfortunate that the need to develop orthodoxy largely replaced Jesus' spiritual test with a dogmatic one.

This produced a theological perplexity and spiritual anaemia, which are still with us. The standard of Christian life should be to show the fruit of the Spirit, as lived by Jesus, according to the testimony of the canonical Gospels.

The Gospel witness is that Jesus attracted people by performing spiritual healings and by teaching "with authority." His followers did the same. Irenaeus, writing in the second century, stated, "We heal the sick by laying hands on them, and drive out demons."

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# Opportunity Knocks 24-7 | So what are we going to do about it?



**ANDY KALBFLEISCH**  
MISSION STRATEGY COMMITTEE

We have a Vision in the Diocese of Niagara. It will succeed or it will fail. Through careful discernment and reflective prayer we have asked and continue to ask for God's help to make it a reality. But in the end it is up to us, after all it is our Vision. We will make it a reality if we listen to what the spirit whispers in our ears and in our hearts and then act upon it. Permission has been given to take intelligent risks, with-

out the fear of failure, in the search for new and innovative ways of doing ministry that will reach out to others and invite them to journey with us. It is what we are called to do. Or we can choose to ignore these whispers and sit idly by waiting for someone else to do it.

Maybe the Vision is just a wake-up call to remind us all of our responsibility, not just as a church, but for each and every one of us, collectively and individually, to be missional and to invite people, who have yet to hear the Gospel message, to become followers of Jesus. It has been easy, in our busy lives, to sit back and leave all of that 'churchy' stuff for our church leaders to deal with—the clergy and the structured hierarchy; wardens, corporations, diocesan staff and so on. But now it is time for us to engage—

the status quo is no longer good enough.

We hear comments like: 'the Vision is great, but if only we had the proper resources we could get on with it'. So what resources did the early church have before Constantine? Did they have international hierarchical leadership models with multiple layers of staffing or investments in buildings and property? What resources are we talking about to help us now—more staff to tell us what to do and how to do it, more money at the parish and diocese level? Does mission follow money or does money follow mission? Do we have to wait for money before we can do mission? I rather think not, but that often seems to be the case. Lack of financial resources can become an excuse for inaction—it's not in the budget so we will have to wait until next

year to see if we can find the funding. However, if we look at opportunities entrepreneurially, we might find that all we need is an investment of time and creative, spirit-guided thinking to get started. This can be done on an individual basis or through the formation of small groups with specific goals in mind, be they social justice or alternative worship communities.

I saw an article in a newspaper the other day that decried the decline of British society featuring the picture of a well dressed British woman passed out on the floor after an evening at a pub. It should come as no small shock that similar situations equally occur in Canada, perhaps on our very doorsteps. The photo spoke of despair and loneliness, anxiety and depression, hitting bottom. All too often

this is a regular occurrence for many people today. They don't or can't see their value in a society that often celebrates the instant pleasures of consumption; whether it be alcohol, drugs, flashy cars, up to date clothing styles and accessories or exotic holidays. Their situations are real and we, as followers of Jesus, are called to help them.

Reaching out to those in difficulty that we encounter in our daily lives with loving service on a one to one basis could be the starting point of a new beginning for them and for us. Of course our help may be resisted, perhaps even rejected, but that is the risk that we must take if we are to be encouraged to live the Vision.

Opportunity knocks 24-7, so what are you going to do about it?

# Bishop's Vision | Cursillo is prepared to meet the challenge

**ANN GROSE**  
LAY DIRECTOR, NIAGARA ANGLICAN CURSILLO

Our diocesan Bishop, Michael Bird has given us all a challenge in his vision of "excellence in ministry". He is challenging us to live the Gospel, spread the Gospel and enrich our own and other people's lives through the Gospel in ways that are meaningful and relevant today. He is urging us to be "passionate" about Jesus Christ and discipleship, "passionate" about enriching our world with the good news of God's love through Jesus Christ! Bishop Michael is challenging us to have "Passionate Spirituality"! Wow, how wonderful is that!

The vision is magnificent and worthy of infinite effort, but how do we start to make this vision a reality in our lives and in the lives of others? I think there is really only one place to start, and that is in our own hearts!

We need to believe in the vision for one thing. What does "excellence in ministry" suggest to you and to me? We also need to understand what "passionate spirituality" represents to each one of us.

There are many ways available to help and aid us in our faith journey. One of these is the movement called Cursillo. Cursillo has been part of this Diocese for over twenty-five years and meets regularly with the bishop to discern how we can continue to be relevant and part of his pastoral plan for the Diocese.

A short course in Christianity, Cursillo offers participants "a time apart to rest awhile" and be refreshed, renewed and re-energized. It is an opportunity for each person to reassess their Christian journey. The course takes place over three days at a lovely conference facility,

and consists of talks and discussions on subjects such as "what is my ideal in life?"; "how to live a life of faith"; "Christian community and what that means"; "obstacles we meet on our journey"; "why do we have the sacraments and what do they mean to us"; "what does it mean to be faithful to God"; "how do we persevere and encourage one another", and other equally challenging and interesting topics! There are Worship services each day, and opportunities for quiet times, walks in the beautiful grounds, good food and fellowship.

The Cursillo course is an excellent forum to explore what Christ is calling us to be and to do. Excellence in Ministry! Passionate Spirituality! Perhaps in the process of a Cursillo weekend you may discover yourself looking at these areas with new and enhanced vision!

## The next two Cursillo courses are being held on:

- November 5-8, 2009 at Mount Mary Conference Centre, Ancaster
- April 22-25, 2010 at Mount Mary Conference Centre, Ancaster

## Any queries, please contact:

- Nancy Harris, Lay Director  
Phone: 905-465-3985 (Oakville)
- Rev. Susan Wells, Spiritual Director  
Phone: 905-547-8851 (Hamilton)

Application forms are available on our website [www.niagaracursillo.org](http://www.niagaracursillo.org).

## Ultreya

Periodically Cursillo Niagara holds a get-together called an Ultreya (Spanish for "onward and upward"). The Ultreya consists of a speaker who shares a recent story of how God is working

in his/her life, followed by a time of discussion, and singing. Fellowship and a social time continue with a pot luck supper. The next Ultreya will be held on Sunday, November 22 at The Church of the Nativity, King Street, Hamilton beginning at 3:30 p.m. and finishing around 5:00 p.m. after which will be the Pot Luck Supper. All are invited to attend (you do not have to have attended a Cursillo weekend).

P.S. In the Hamilton flood a few weeks ago, some of Cursillo's supplies used on the Weekends were water damaged including an overhead projector which was beyond repair! If anyone has a good, working projector they do not need any more that they could donate to Cursillo we would be very grateful.

Please contact Laurie McDowell, Weekend Chairperson, 905-871-3468 (Fort Erie). Thank you very much!

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# Reflections on the Niagara Youth Conference

The faces, cabins, and all of Canterbury Hills hold something of me that I willingly give back every time I have to leave, for my experiences are not just mine, but are part of all of those who have attended NYC in the past, present, and future. I can even remember my first thought arriving at my first Niagara Youth Conference: What a bunch of weird people! For you see when I first caught a glimpse of NYC, it was everyone who had been there before. Running, jumping, and screaming for people I have never heard of or seen. All I could think of was why were they acting like they haven't seen each other in years and like this was a huge family reunion. I wondered if I would feel that way, too. Well after the first day at NYC I finally realized why it seemed like a giant reunion because it was! Everyone there had become so close to one

another that they were more like a giant family. That first night I cried, not of sadness but of pure and utter happiness. I had finally found a place where I felt something that no words can explain. I had finally found a place that can't be replaced or replicated. After that first year I felt like I finally had what I was looking for. And the next year I ran, jumped, and screamed for my family, my NYC family. I even hugged new comers as well because our family just got a little bigger and better. This year might have been my last year as I'm going to university/college next year. But to me, I never really left because all I got and gave are still in Canterbury. And when my own children go to NYC I will feel even more connected to it because I will have then passed something onto my children I can never explain. Forever and ever I will remember NYC

and how it changed me. Writing this down has gotten me crying and I feel no shame in admitting it. For I have found the one thing everyone in this world needs, and that is a place like NYC.

## Dean Sutton-Greenhalgh, All Saints Hamilton

NYC 2009 was an experience I will always remember. It was my sixth and last year at NYC as a delegate and it was sad to leave. Through the six NYCs that I attended I felt a spiritual growth in myself that is so immense that I don't think words could fully describe it. I also felt a social growth in myself. My first year at NYC I was awfully shy but overwhelmed. I knew about two or three people, but by the end of the week I had many new friends. Now years later, from my first to my sixth year I have seen many new and old faces.

NYC clearly has touched many other lives, from the delegates attending their first year or their sixth year, all the way to the staff that have been with NYC for many years of their lives. I plan to personally try out for staff next NYC because I have found a great spiritual home at the end of August every year. NYC has changed my life forever.

## Emma Smith, St. Christopher's Burlington

Though I have been going to Niagara Youth Conference since 2005, the week never ceases to amaze me; in fact it's usually the highlight of my entire year! Every summer I get to see old friends, and meet new ones. It's always a wonderful end to the summer and an even better beginning to new friendships for the years to come. I always have a difficult time explaining to my non-Anglican friends just what NYC is.

The best way I've found to describe it is "spiritual retreat"—it's a place where not only those with faith, but those without can meet together and celebrate their similarities, differences and beliefs. NYC is always an excellent Spirit-filled adventure; full of laughs, hugs, tears, soul-searching, thinking and most of all, love. I don't think there are many other places on this world that are filled with as much love as this special week. Niagara Youth Conference is a unique and truly remarkable week that can not be filled by anything else in this world; so much so, that when my delegate years are up I would be more than ecstatic to go back as a member of the Staff—who I thank so much—so I can give to others the experience that every year seems to shape me. Again, to all those on staff and everyone who made this year as refreshing as always, a big THANK YOU.

# Follow your bliss



**JACK COX**  
RECTOR, ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST WINONA

When I first met Alison, she was a single mother with a daughter finishing University. She loved photography and camping (two of my passions) and when I introduced her to fishing, she was hooked. As we spent time together pursuing the perfect photo or the biggest fish, I learned that she had studied Communication Arts, worked as a newspaper photographer/engraver, and in the Bell Canada engineering department, then took early retirement to raise a family. To help ends meet she started a business as a professional seamstress. Her photography skills were such that I have spent the succeeding years trying to touch the hem of her garment. On those occasions (rare though they be) when she has out fished me, I have claimed 'guide status'. We were married in the fall of 2005.

Alison's career had been primarily as a mother and now she was looking for a new career. It wasn't about a job, a steady pay check. It was about using her skills in creating something of beauty, and of making a contribution to others. It was about finding gainful and meaningful employment and giving back. At the age of 55, starting all over is never easy, and starting with those goals was more than a little daunting. As we talked about possibilities, I kept remembering an answer Joseph Campbell had given someone who wanted to know how to pick a career in which she would be happy. His advice was simple. "Follow your bliss." Bliss was that which excited you, that which energized you, that about which you were enthusiastic (an interesting word whose Greek root means 'in god').

Through all our discussions, through a full year with Employment Ontario, Alison stitched and sewed. She made table runners, wall hangings and place mats, embroidered napkins and towels—all as gifts and thank yous. There were always 2 or 3 quilts on the go. Then one day she returned from a quilting show and spoke animatedly of a mid-sized long arm quilting machine she had seen.

Let me briefly explain "longarming". Most people who quilt enjoy doing the top—all the patch work part. But they often don't want to do all the final quilting—the quilting that cov-

ers the whole quilt and finishes it. So they take the top to a 'longarmer' who attaches the batting and the back to the top and then quilts the whole thing on a long arm machine. I describe the long arm as a sewing machine that is slightly smaller than the Apollo Shuttle.

I could see in Alison's enthusiasm and animation a strong suggestion of bliss. This is something she loves to do. It is creative, and adds a significant piece of beauty to the finished quilt. There is certainly a market—all the long arm quilters within 300 miles (ups... 480 Kilometers) are booked up 3-9 months ahead.

So I really encouraged Alison to look seriously at starting a long arm business. It took a couple of months to work through some of the immediate reasons it wasn't possible—like, there's no room. With some creative re-organizing of furniture, measuring a spare bed room, and talking to the manufacturer, we decided it was, at least physically, possible. A trip to my friendly bank, and we found it was, at least theoretically, financially possible. 12 successive visits to the bank later and the loan was approved.

On December 9 2008, the slightly down-sized Apollo arrived. It took all day for the technician to assemble the machine and walk Alison through "the basics". I had been at the office that day and when I arrived home, knowing from Alison's description that the machine was really big, I looked in the room and gasped, "Holy crap that's huge!" (Sometimes even clergy get creative in their expletives.)

Now came the learning curve. How do you get this huge machine to do the delicate, often intricate, patterns you want on a quilt? She needed practice. Start with simple and cheap bed linen. Then she moved to a couple of her own quilts that were waiting for the final longarming. Not enough. So she volunteered through her quilting guilds (belongs to 3) to long arm cuddle quilts (quilts made by members and given as gifts by the guild to charities they support—usually women and children's charities). To date, Alison has quilted close to 75 cuddle quilts. I think she's the cuddle quilt queen of South Western Ontario.

At the end of April, the Halton Guild, of which Alison is a member,

held a huge quilting show at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Hamilton—nearly 3000 visitors on the weekend. As Vendor Coordinator for the show, Alison was in contact with over 75 businesses, all involved in quilting. Among those was Quilts of Valour Canada (QoV). QoV is a volunteer organization which distributes quilts made specifically to be distributed through the Canadian Forces Chaplaincy to soldiers injured in the service of their country. QoV representatives were present at the show and Alison had a number of conversations with them. As a serving member of the Canadian Forces, married to a retired member (who out ranks her, by the way), and the mother of a son presently serving in the Canadian Forces, Alison has a keen interest in the concerns and issues of the Forces. She volunteered to be the local contact person and representative for quilts for QoV in Southwestern Ontario. Her responsibilities are to assist people in setting up projects to make quilts, to bind them, to find somebody who will quilt them, and to collect them and send them on to the coordinator in Ottawa. Her responsibilities extend to finding sponsorships of \$100.00, or more, which will be used to assist in the purchase of batting and supplies. To date she has collected 11 completed quilts (one of which she made herself) and has 4 quilts to longarm.

In these financially difficult times, it's not easy to find a job, even harder to find the right career. But Joseph Campbell's advice still holds true. "Follow your bliss." It doesn't happen quickly or easily. Just finding out what your bliss is can take a lot of time and reflection. I believe Alison found hers. She's enjoying the longarming, making her own quilts, working on behalf of QoV, and waiting for that horde of quilters who would really like their quilts finished without a 3-6 month wait. When she was looking for a name for her business, she settled on, "Sew, what else?"

If you'd like to contact Alison about getting those completed quilt tops out of the closet and on to your beds, the possibility of doing a Quilt of Valour, or engaging some people in your parish for a Quilt of Valour project you can contact her by phone; 905-385-2014.

# A new Creed?



**MICHAEL BURSLEM**  
ST. GEORGE'S, GUELPH

Tolstoy, through Levin in Anna Karenin, wondered whether those who don't call themselves Christian were not equally God's beloved children as himself, but concluded that it was a mystery, which humans should never delve into. Not satisfied with that, I've decided that they are. From my reading of the Gospels and Paul's epistles, God's New Creation included both Jew and Gentile, in fact everyone who lived in the earth, past, present and future. That, I believe, is the Good News, which the disciples were commissioned to proclaim. Our response should be firstly, to acknowledge, with thanks, what God has done for us through Jesus Christ; and secondly, to live holy lives. Sadly, this message has been changed by mis-applying the word faith as the means to enter God's New Creation, with the result that humanity has been divided into Christians and non-Christians. We used to call non-Christians heathen or pagans, who needed to be 'saved,' but now I believe that God has already done the saving, and we should just accept them as his children, our brothers and sisters.

I've summarized all this in a statement. Written in point form, it starts with God, then goes onto us, human beings, and finally deals with our response to God and to one another.

## God

■ *Allah Achbar!* (The sound we wake up to in the Middle East.) God is great. Actually 'great' in English does not convey the true meaning, as much as the superlative, God is the greatest. It really means that God is awesome, majestic.

■ God is one, the only one. (Christians may use metaphors as Father, Son and Spirit, but we still believe God is one.)

■ God is a person, not a thing.

■ God's character is infinitely good and kind. He is so merciful that he has already forgiven us, even before we ask him to.

## Human beings

■ We are created in the image of God. We share his personhood. His spirit lives in us.

■ However, we have fallen far short from our potential. (Christians call this the Fall. It means that in spite of our having his spirit in us, we are as unlike God as day is to night. We do the things we know we should not do, and we do not do the things we know we should, and we have messed up in a big way. Left on our own we can never be reconciled with such an awesome and majestic God.)

■ But God has done what we could not, nor can, nor will ever be able to do for ourselves; he has made the reconciliation himself. He loves us so much that in spite of our messing up he has

restored us to our former state. (To appreciate this we need eyes of faith, not just our natural eyes, for with our natural eyes there is nothing to distinguish us from the animal kingdom, of which we are a part.)

■ This life is so short, compared with the history of this planet, but we believe that when we die we shall go to be with God, to see him face to face. He will certainly judge us for our failings in this life, but his love will never, ever, be diminished.

## How then should we respond to what God has done for us?

■ We should first surrender ourselves to God; our lives and everything we think we own (it is actually his anyway.) We must become his servants, remembering that his service is perfect freedom.

■ We should take responsibility for our own actions, and not put the blame for them on our circumstances or other people. We should tell God where we have failed him.

■ If we have hurt our fellow humans we should tell them too, and try to make amends.

■ We should love them, acknowledging them to be brothers and sisters, because God loves them too.

■ If we see their failure we should never judge them. That is God's prerogative, not ours. We should instead be catalysts to restore them to their full potential. God does the work of restoration, not us, but he may use us in the process.

■ Our love must, however, be tough. (This is where I have real problems as a pacifist. *What caliber gun would Jesus use?* was the title of a cartoon in the New York Times that set me thinking.)

As a Christian I do believe that God was in Jesus, a man born in a stable who died on a cross, and that through him, somehow, the world has been reconciled to God. However, I also believe that Christians err if they think themselves to be the only beneficiaries of God's love. It is because so many Christians do think this that I have deliberately left his name from the "creed." He did teach that religion was not the way to God; he was. But he was not a self assertive man. God gave his stamp of approval on his ministry by raising him from the dead. But let us not for ever be arguing over the means by which God has reconciled us to himself, but rejoice in the fact that he has. It is a *fait accompli*. *Kheilas!*

Is this too radical? Too inclusive? Perhaps it should change the way we take the Gospel to foreign lands. Any idea as this may be too gushy for Evangelicals, as it was once for me when I was an Evangelical. But it's where I believe I now stand. I could, though, be dead wrong, and Evangelicals would say dead, as I once would have said of someone who produced such a statement. However, that was before the Same-Sex debate in the Anglican Church. I now believe that the God whom we worship is by far greater than the God of the Bible.

# Christ Church offers journey in silence

**BARRY RANDLE**  
RECTOR, CHRIST CHURCH FLAMBOROUGH

The stories of our faith remind us of the importance of silence. God says: 'Be still and know that I am God.' Elijah hears the voice of God in silent stillness on a mountain peak. Jesus tells us to go into a closet and shut the door to pray. And Jesus shows us that it is necessary, from time to time, to go into the wilderness, to remove ourselves from the distractions of daily life, in order to hear God's message for our lives.

We understand and appreciate our need for silence during those quiet moments we experience in our daily lives. Many of us are just now returning from the annual summer exodus from southern Ontario. Often, our vacations include activities like camping, or hiking—searching for moments of peace and quiet in our very busy lives. For those of us who stayed closer to home, perhaps we had the opportunity to sit under the stars and enjoy the peaceful stillness of a summer evening in our own backyard.

But when it comes to time of prayer, either privately or in fellowship with others; when it comes to a community gathering for worship, we're not sure how to proceed.

This Fall at Christ Church we are offering you a chance to experience silence. *If You Have Ears, Listen!* is an opportunity to explore and practice the spirituality of silence. On Wednesday evenings each month, September through November, we will be offering three week sessions devoted to learning about, and experiencing, silence in your personal prayers and in worship. There will be a one week

break between each session. Everyone is welcome to attend all or any of the sessions.

These sessions begin Wednesday, September 16 with: *Don't just do something, sit there!* as we begin to examine the use of silence, and ways to come to silence. We'll explore chanting (it's not just for monks) and learn to walk in silence (like hobbits). Contemplation and meditation will help us listen quietly and allow scripture to speak to us. As Fall moves on we hope to discover that coming to silence isn't always quiet, through the use of drumming.

With the approach of Advent, we'll work together to plan a Contemplative Eucharist—don't worry, it's not completely silent! That particular worship experience will be open to anyone who wants to share with us in a unique evening of Advent Preparation.

Beginning in October, during our second session, the church will be open one hour before we gather, for those who want to practice some of what we have learned, or for anyone who simply wishes to come to church and pray.

The only cost is your time—approximately 1.5 hours on Wednesday evening, although you may wish to contribute to our weekly refreshment breaks. And no, we don't plan to eat in silence.

If you are interested, need more information, or would like to register, please call the church office at 905-627-4045. Please leave your name and number if no one is available to answer. We just might be in the church, enjoying the stillness, and listening.



## St James Dundas | Eating locally

**BEATRICE EKWA EKOKO**  
**SUE CARSON**  
ST. JAMES DUNDAS

Eating locally produced food is an act of stewardship. That's the message attendees heard at a Brunch at St. James, Dundas on August 8 and the event was a reminder of the call to protect and honour the Earth and the bounty it produces—a call that resounds across all faiths and religions worldwide. Greening Sacred Spaces and Environment Hamilton initiated the Brunch and the event was attended by 70 people many from other churches and faiths.

Over pancakes, sausages, muffins and blueberries, participants were made aware of the hunger that resides

in the very heart of our community and the measures that are being taken by some local groups to help alleviate a worsening situation.

Bill Wilcox of West Highland Baptist Church demonstrated that growing a beautiful vegetable garden on church grounds and giving the produce to the hungry is a good use of space. He challenged others to do the same.

Karen Burson spoke eloquently about the need for healthy food for children to grow properly; Environment Hamilton's eat local project is involved with building effective and equitable food systems through institutional purchasing.

Tapestry Bistro's Sam Robertson impressed upon the audience Ham-

ilton's amazing amount of resources already in place for procuring locally grown food.

Don McLean of Environment Hamilton, who wrapped up the event said we must get to a level of greenhouse gases that provide safety for the planet.

Mr. McLean's invitation for participants to join the worldwide Day of Climate Action on Oct. 24—an event that is part of the 350.org campaign to get levels of carbon in the atmosphere down to a safe level of 350 parts per million—was also a call to action to all attendees. For more information about the 350.org campaign and Hamilton's involvement, call Environment Hamilton at 905-549-0900.

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# What we do or who we are?



**IAN DINGWALL**  
RETIRED ARCHDEACON OF NIAGARA

Some time ago I happened upon a TV panel discussion (three panelists plus the moderator) that was dealing with the theme: human sexuality. The three panelists were, I guessed only, what most of us would call "straight" in terms of their sexual orientation.

One was a psychologist who said at the conclusion of her presentation that as far as her own sexuality was concerned she would not wish to be defined by her sexuality preference but simply as a human being. The others nodded their agreement - I did too.

The discussion imprinted itself on me but so did lethargy and in the subsequent few weeks I put it on hold. One day, however, listening to the car radio there blurted out a commercial advertising jewelry and then we were informed by the owner of the store: "Buy a diamond from us and let that gem define your personality!"

Well that pushed my subconscious into visibility and I was hooked with the ultimate question: How are WE defined as being human? It may be important here to identify what we mean by 'being defined'. For me, it suggests that we confront other questions:

- How are we shaped or molded, formed and conditioned to be the kind of person that we seem to be?
- What is it that's fundamental in this creative process?

How would you answer? By education, by profession or work, by physical attractiveness, by intelligence or knowledge, by acquired possessions, by family, by children?

The radio commercial seemed pretty sure of itself—simply buy an expensive diamond brooch and, automatically, that will define you. Or will it?

Considering the matter, your mind fills up with all sorts of influences and pressures and gospels that tell you what you ought to be about. Some are good, others not so good. We come then (at least, I do!) to ask the question which ought to be fundamental to our thinking as Christian disciples—How does the church, the Gospel and God fit into all this? We certainly need to affirm that this is what Church ought to be about. We are members of the Faith Community—called Church. We gather as such weekly to identify ourselves with this Community. We worship and as community we hear the Word, receive the Sacrament and share the fellowship week by week. We allow ourselves to be absorbed

by the spirit of the Holy One in his purpose for Creation.

What are we doing? We are being conditioned and shaped as children of God. We are neighbours to each other and all people.

Sharing the Word, preaching and hearing the Word—digging into our corporate Christian memory begins once more to shape us in the never to be completed process of becoming God-like. It really doesn't matter what Sunday we may remember, because there is sameness. Perhaps the Word shared is the Parable of the Pharisee and the Taxman: if you like, it is the Good Guy—Bad Guy. Now be honest, if you were on the Parish Council Nominating Committee for the Annual Vestry, who would you choose: The guy who tithed or who prayed; the one exemplifying in his religious duties or the one who was the lowliest of creatures—a tax man? It boils down to this: a choice between Appearance and Substance. How often have I had to reproach myself for voting on appearance? The Word we share declares very simply that our character is formed by Grace. We don't do things to merit God's love and acceptance—we don't have to. Each one of us is a "somebody" (We don't need Midas), simply because God is God and each person is his creation. We do not have to "do" anything—simply accept ourselves and others as God's gifts of grace.

Here's a story. Seymour dies and went to heaven where he was greeted at the Gate by God who said to him, "Seymour, you are hungry." Seymour replied, "I am." So God opened a can of tuna, put some on a piece of bread and they shared their meal. Seymour could see down below to Hell where the occupants too were sharing a meal together and he was quick to observe that their menu contained all the elements of a Feast—caviar, steak, lobster, wines. Seymour kept silence. It went on in the same way for several days—God opening the can of tuna and Seymour looked wistfully at the Hellish banquet. Finally Seymour said, "God, I wish you to know how grateful I am to be here in heaven with you and to share this daily repast. I know this is my reward for a life of faithful service. But I look at Hell and their Banquet Fare and, frankly, I just don't get it. God replied, "Let's be honest! It doesn't pay to cook a full meal for just 2 people."

Isn't that what we do or achieve in life that's of the essence. It is who we are, who we wish to become, what kind of spirituality we use to nurture in ourselves and others. Jesus began teaching Parables because he looked to some folks who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt. That's what Jesus continues to do as we gather 2000 years later—in faith community to hear the Word and allow ourselves to be shaped and defined by it.

## PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

- Canon Nissa Basbaum has submitted her resignation as Co-Rector of Church of the Transfiguration, St. Catharines, effective November 28, 2009. Nissa has accepted the position of Dean in the Diocese of Kooteney and Incumbent of the Cathedral of St. Michael and All Angels in Kelowna, working under the direction of Bishop John Privett.
- The Reverend Christopher Snow, from St. John's, Newfoundland, has accepted the appointment to be rector of Grace Church, Milton, effective November 1, 2009. We welcome Christopher and his wife, Bryn, to the Diocese of Niagara.

- The Reverend Joanne Beacon will transfer Canonical Residence to the Diocese of Saskatchewan effective September 28 and has accepted a chaplaincy position with the Federal Penitentiary.
- Congratulations to the Reverend Matthew Griffin (Curate at Christ's Church Cathedral) and Lesley Griffin who welcomed their son, Owen Gregory, on September 3, weighing 7 pounds 1 ounce. Everyone doing well!
- The Venerable Earl N. Clark passed away on Friday, August 28, 2009 at the age of 90. The service was held on Tuesday, September 8 at Christ's Church Cathedral. Earl Clark

was ordained in 1942 by the Rt. Reverend Lewis Broughall, Bishop of Niagara, and served in the Diocese of Niagara from 1942 until his retirement in 1985.

- The Reverend Suzanne Craven has accepted the three year appointment to the Senate of McMaster University effective September 1.
- Congratulations to Archdeacon Ian Dingwall and Mrs. Dorothy Dingwall who celebrated their 50th Wedding Anniversary on July 4.
- Permission to administer the chalice: Holly Lloyd, Peter Boettcher and Kyle Wilkinson at St. Paul's Church, Shelburne, effective September 1.

# Why do congregations fight?



**MARNI NANCEKIVELL**  
DIRECTOR OF TRANSITIONAL MINISTRIES

I grew up "on the Mountain" in the city of Hamilton. Although the community in which I lived wasn't a huge city, by standards of communities such as Toronto, Vancouver or Montreal, it was nevertheless a city; with buses and various shopping districts. Both of my parents were born in Hamilton too. City people, born and bred. So it was with some surprise that I found myself this past summer with a new hobby. I became a cyber-farmer.

A cyber-farmer is a person who plays a "game" of farming. I played mine through the "social networking site", Facebook. While I use Facebook primarily for playing Scrabble-like word games, every day I receive invitations to take part in quizzes, and other games. Rarely do I do so. But there was something about the game "Farmville" that was wholesome and simple. I launched into a world of cartoon crops and farm creatures. At first, I played mostly with a family friend, and then I discovered others who were playing Farmville. We give one another "gifts" of vegetables and animals, and sometimes even "lend a hand" on one another's farms. It is a simple, soothing game. I intend to continue playing Farmville, by cyber-Shangri-La.

The other day, though I asked myself why I find Farmville so compelling? Is it because I have some rural roots, in my Dad's family? I think not. I am well aware that this is but a game. There is no sweat involved, little financial risk, no early days and late nights, no seed catalogues or back breaking labour. What Farmville does give me, however is a sense of belonging. There is a community of "neighbours" around me on my cyber-farm. We chat back and forth on this "social networking site". There is no competition—even in the friendly way of my "Scrabble" games. Farmville is a place where I can relax and be myself,

play and putter. Farmville, although it exists only in the imagination, is a safe and healthy place.

Does the church where you worship give you that sense of acceptance and belonging? As a Rector of some sixteen years experience, and as a Diocesan Officer who specializes in accompanying parishes in Transition, I have served personally in five Interim placements in the past five years, I have yet to find a congregation that thinks that they are anything other than welcoming. I am aware that although we "desire" to be friendly, welcoming places, the reality is that churches are not always successful in that attempt. Certainly, I have witnessed parishes where there is generosity, caring and compassion, extended both within the community, and to others. That is the hallmark of a vibrant, alive Christian community. Sadly, I have also seen congregations characterized by pettiness and exclusiveness, wherein the communication is chiefly "gossip", and the atmosphere that of toxicity.

The Reverend Molly Dale Smith in her book: Transitional Ministry: A Time for Opportunity reminds us that conflict in churches is frequently experienced. The conflict can be about almost anything: painting the parlour, the length of the sermons, the size of the budget.

### Why do we fight?

- Some reasons for our conflicts?
- Consumer Attitude: Many in our culture carry with them a deeply held sense of entitlement. We want it all, and we want it now.
- Competitive Culture: I'll bet you've seen the bumper sticker: "The one with the most toys when he dies wins?" Our culture too frequently teaches that winning is everything. Even in Churchland, people tend to pick sides around an issue rather than engage in life-giving conversation where tensions are explored and discussed.
- Revenge: Yes even in church, payback is frequently a motivator. Whether it is about leadership or about dollars, although people mask revenge, there are those who seek it.
- Controllers: In every human community there are those who have high

control needs, because these folk are convinced that they're the only ones who can make things go right. The control may be seen wearing the race of manipulation or the misrepresentation of facts.

- Stress: We all react differently to stress in our lives. Sometimes, individuals under stress might revert to childish behaviours, transferring emotions from previous experiences in their lives. Smith writes that the Controllers tend to dominate. The stressed out individuals want to avoid.

- Poor Stewardship: In a healthy congregation an endowment or gift of property honours the intention of the donor. In an unhealthy community the temptation to ignore or distort the intent of the gift is sometimes overwhelming.

- It's all about me! When we get stuck in conflict, we all too frequently focus on the Small Picture and not on the Big Picture. Too often we lose sight of our call to worship God. We may get caught up on advancing our cause; whether it is about a Book of Worship, a style of music, the use of vestment. These things become for some, an end in themselves.

- Genuine Differences: Not all conflict is destructive. There are situations in which real conflict occurs and there can be several ways of approaching a legitimate issue. In a healthy community, frequently people seek to find several ways of dealing with an issue such as worship, giving people options as to how best fill their spiritual needs.

In the Diocese of Niagara, we are exploring a pathway of health in our Diocesan vision. Truly healthy congregations are not neglectful of the core spiritual disciplines of prayer, the study of scripture and living within the creative tensions of Christian community. They seem to grasp that conflict is more about healthy relationships than it is about problems. I wish you peace, and I wish you health.

.....  
Parts of this article are inspired by the Reverend Molly Dale Smith's new work: Transitional Ministry: A Time for Opportunity. It contains the reflections of twelve experience interim pastors who write on the issues faced in transitional ministry.

## EVENTS

### Community Chicken Dinner

St. Paul's, Dunnville  
Continuous servings from 5-7 PM. Proceeds to charity. Just drop in for dinner!  
Cost: \$12.00 per person  
October 2, 5:00 PM

### Flea Market and Rummage Sale

St. Columba, St. Catharines  
Gently used items and clothing offered for sale. Now this is where you will find some real attic treasures at bargain prices!  
October 3, 8:30 AM - 11:30 AM

### Harvest and Discovery Sunday

St. Cuthbert's, Oakville  
Join us for worship as the church is beautifully decorated with the harvest. Discovery Sunday follows each service with an opportunity for all to witness some of the many ministries, groups and activities underway in our parish.  
October 4, 8:00 AM and 10:00 AM

### Blessing of the Pets

St. Columba, St. Catharines  
Wish to have your pet blessed? All species are welcome!  
October 4, 9:15 AM

### Annual Bishop's Company Dinner

Diocese of Niagara Synod Office, Hamilton  
The annual Bishop's Company dinner is on Monday, October 5 at the Burlington Convention Centre at 6:15 pm. Join the Bishop's Company today!  
October 5

### The Three Cantors

St. James, St. Catharines

Reception to follow performance.  
Cost: \$25.00 per person  
October 14, 7:00 PM

### Doors Open

Holy Trinity (Chippawa), Niagara Falls  
The Binational Tourism Alliance sponsors this event every fall. Please visit their website at [www.doorsopenniagara.com](http://www.doorsopenniagara.com) for full details.  
October 17 and October 18

### Fall Treasures' Sale

Holy Trinity (Chippawa), Niagara Falls  
On October 17 we will have a treasures' sale, bake table, preserves, etc. Lunch consisting of Oktoberfest sausage.  
October 17, 9:00 PM - 1:00 PM

### Choral Evensong

St. Cuthbert's, Oakville  
Traditional Evensong with prayers for healing in honour of St. Luke the Physician.  
October 18, 7:00 PM

### Fall Market

St. John's, Ridgemount  
Great deals on clothing, books, furniture and baked goods. You name it, we have it. Also, enjoy a wonderful lunch with chili, soup, sandwiches, beverages and deserts.  
October 24, 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM

### 100th Anniversary Congregational Dinner

The Church of the Epiphany, Oakville  
Current and former parishioners come and celebrate 100 years of Anglican Worship in Bronte Saturday night with a special church catered dinner. Historical displays and keynote address. Special

anniversary services on Sunday October 25 with guest preacher, the Venerable Michael Patterson, Archdeacon of the Diocese of Niagara.  
Cost: \$25.00 per person  
October 24, 5:30 PM

### Social Night

St. Columba, St. Catharines  
Another night of fun, cards, laughter, snacks and prizes. Couples and singles welcome.  
Cost: \$2.00 per person  
October 24, 7:00 PM

### Bishop Bird's Visit

St. James and St. Brendan, Port Colborne  
Bishop Bird will be joining other dignitaries for the ringing of our church bells in the 350 program concerning climate change.  
October 24, 12:00 PM - 2:00 PM

### Murder Mystery Dinner Theatre

St. Alban the Martyr, Glen Williams  
Please join us for an evening of intrigue at St. Alban's Parish Hall for a Murder Mystery Dinner Theatre. Details to follow.  
Cost: TBA  
October 24

### Parish Breakfast

St. Columba, St. Catharines  
Come one and all to dine with parish family members from the 'other' service. Light, fluffy scrambled eggs and fresh fruit on the menu!  
Cost: Free will offering  
October 25, 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM

### Fall Card Party

St. John's, Ancaster  
Hot lunch, cards, prizes. Tickets can be purchased at the office.  
Cost: \$13.00 per person  
October 30, 12:00 PM

### Niagara Leadership Conference

Diocesan Program Department, Hamilton  
A multi-phase leadership development program to empower parish leaders and potential leaders by developing their skills, tools and competencies. The initial weekend conference is followed by a six week (one evening a week) training program; the planning, implementing and evaluation of a parish project, and closes with a four week final training session. More details and applications may be obtained from Christyn Perkons at the Synod Office. Applications must be accompanied by a parish recommendation and registrations are limited to three people per parish.  
Cost: \$100 per person  
October 30, 7:00 PM - November 1, 3:30 PM

### Centering Prayer

St. Elizabeth's, Burlington  
A workshop on the method of Centering Prayer developed by Father Thomas Keating. The workshop will be led by Peter Catt of Contemplative Outreach Ontario. This event is open to everyone. Please call the parish at 905-637-6335 to reserve a spot.  
Cost: Free will offering  
October 31, 9:30 AM - 1:00 PM

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1 >>

# Let us welcome the newly baptized

This is a service that is more profound and moving each time it is experienced.

Family and friends of the couple attend the baptism at their invitation. My concern focuses on such people at the baptism who attend church only when they feel obliged: they often appear very uncomfortable and suspicious. From their perspective, the rite must seem archaic and strange and must reinforce their decision to avoid church-going whenever possible. Why so? Let's look at what baptism can mean to those with limited church experience.

An obstetrics nurse told me that when she cared for a newborn who seemed unlikely to survive more than a few hours, she quietly baptized the dying infant. Why? She was unable or unwilling to explain but her husband, an atheist, disparagingly said that she believed that the unbaptized go to hell and that by performing a few gestures and speaking a few words, she was able to save a dying child to eternal happiness in heaven. He shrugged as he added that such a baby born on a shift when there was no Christian nurse in the delivery room was out of luck. To him God seemed careless and cruel.

The nurse's superstitious belief system was based on the concept of original sin: the naturally corrupt soul can be rescued from hell only by Christ's sacrifice and the church's rites and sacraments. Non-baptized are heathen, inevitably damned. This belief, so contrary to the open welcome given by both Jesus and Paul to Gentiles is, in our time of ecumenical and inter-faith respect, now downplayed by mainstream Christian churches. We talk in terms of original blessing, a concept that makes sense to anyone who has looked into the eyes of a newborn. Our God is of love and life.

But what do we say that baptism means? The opening words of "The Ministration of Holy Baptism to Children" in the Canadian Book of Common Prayer present the old belief in original sin: "DEARLY beloved in Christ, seeing that God willeth all men to be saved from the fault and corruption of the nature which they inherit, as well as from the actual sins which they commit, and that our Saviour Christ saith, None can enter into the kingdom of God, except he be born anew of Water and of the Holy Spirit..." In other words, the naturally corrupt infant needs the church's intervention to save it.

The Book of Alternative Services presents a more humble and positive rite, yet it also retains some of the concept of original sin. For instance, the parents and sponsors pledge, on behalf of the infant, to "renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God," to "renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God" and to "renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God." These evils are powerful forces we need to renounce, but why are they addressed in the context of a rite focused on an innocent child?

What goes through the minds of the nominal Christians who swell our congregations on baptism Sundays? The young parents are so overwhelmed that, even after baptism preparation, they may not care that their understanding of their vows is at best vague. The family members and friends, whose motivation ranges from sincere to superficial, are there to support the young couple, perhaps sharing a sense that it's a good idea to "get the kid done." Most won't be seen in church again until the next baptism, marriage or funeral because what we ask them to say they believe seems either incomprehensible or negative.

What does "renounce" mean, after all, in this self-indulgent age?

And how many Anglican churches further ensure that these visitors feel excluded by announcing that only some may receive Communion following the baptism? Our tradition is that only baptized Christians are invited to the Lord's Supper. Even as we try to "Draw the circle wide," congratulating ourselves that our liturgies are more welcoming than in our past and less exclusive than Roman Catholics still are, from the point of view of the unchurched we remain as gracious as a "No Trespassing" sign. The word "communion" suggests "union with" and "common." Communion is not communion if anyone is turned away.

Baptism is a deeply spiritual rite to committed Christians. But do we not feel sad when we see, on the faces of so many young parents, an aloof disdain indicating that our church has alienated them further, that their future involvement with us will be minimal? Church attendance is shrinking, perhaps because we shut people out with our reluctance to make our services welcoming. We can avoid this loss by moving more quickly, less fearfully, to make our Baptism Rite fully inclusive.

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## 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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# The origins of orthodoxy

We even raise the dead, many of whom are still alive among us and completely healthy." Tertullian wrote that Christians contributed money to support orphans, and brought food, medicine, and companionship to prisoners forced to work in mines. They even bought coffins for the poor, whose corpses would otherwise lie unburied, beyond the city walls. Such generosity attracted scores of converts to join Christian groups.

It was perhaps inevitable that spiritual pride would develop in such an unstructured environment. When some insisted on a second baptism to initiate the spiritual elite, Irenaeus wrote his five volume protest, *Refutation and Overthrow of Falsely So-Called Knowledge*. Irenaeus was certainly not opposed to visions, signs, and wonders. Without them, as he was fully aware, Christianity would never have begun. All the disciples, Paul, and John of Patmos received visions. The problem was to discern which charisms were genuinely from the Holy Spirit. Irenaeus' solution was to forge the orthodox faith, based on a Scriptural canon. Thus, he began the process, which led to the Council of Niceae.

The development of the Creed as a test of faith was a radical shift from the

perspective of Jesus. A Christian was known, less by bearing "fruit," than by accepting the dogma of the Church. After Niceae, the role of the laity was drastically reduced and the role of the clergy was greatly increased. Eventually, signs and wonders disappeared as a regular feature of Church life and healing became centred on shrines. No doubt, Irenaeus would have been shocked by the results of his endeavors. He had no desire to suppress the charismatic life of a Christian. His intent was to establish criteria for spiritual discernment and to prevent excesses, such as adding new teaching to the faith revealed to the Apostles. Unfortunately, building on existing ideas is all too human, and the institutional Church was guilty of it. In time, this led to indulgences and the Protestant Reformation. The Protestants simplified the clutter of doctrine but the test of faith was still adherence to dogma, in this case to justification by faith. The reformers were dispensationalists and did not return to the charisma of the early Church.

Jesus would have agreed with Plato, who pointed out that opinion is not knowledge. A boy may believe that two plus two adds up to five because his father

told him so, and a girl may believe that the answer is four because her mother told her so. Plato would have commented that neither of them really knew what two plus two added up to. Both only knew what their father and mother had told them. When dogma is made the test of faith, Christians are less likely to know Jesus in the power of the Spirit, and more likely to know only what the Church or the Bible say about Him. This has given us two groups with divergent attitudes to the Bible, neither of which have the viewpoint of Irenaeus. One group read it as a rulebook. The other rejects anything that seems to contradict modern social and scientific opinion.

The solution to our current malaise is to return to the Christianity that was taught by Jesus and practiced by Christians for the first two centuries. We shall find what that is by reading our Bibles. Nothing should be added, and visions, signs, and wonders are still valid for today, modern science notwithstanding. Jesus expected His followers to experience a fullness of life, which transcends following rules blindly, on the one hand, and suppressing unfamiliar spiritual experience on the other. We have changes to make and work to do!

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1 »

# Raising the bar

Enough to make us crazy during the month of July just thinking about what it was going to be like having to control him with all of these animals lurking in the neighborhood; not to mention the wild thunderstorms that are the norm at least once or twice a holiday season.

Forewarned is forearmed, they say, so prior to leaving St. Catharines, Rebekah and I went to the local pet store in hopes of snagging a salesperson who might be able to recommend some solutions to the nasty problems we were anticipating. First, we looked at the various options of "controlling" dog-collars. Besides suggestions that these don't always work because the dog is often cleverer than the collar, their price tag for a mere three weeks, we decided, was exorbitant. Next, we were shown the "rolling treat ball," with the suggestion that perhaps if we gave Oliver half of his normal food intake in the morning, then took him for a walk and put the remaining half of his kibbles in this contraption when the jaunt was over, the combination of the walk and the search for any treats dribbling from the ball would tire him out each day. The price tag on this option: about seven dollars. Sounded good to us. We nabbed it and brought it to the cottage, praying fervently that our expectations of just how bad Oliver was going to be would be over-blown and, failing that, that a walk and the rolling ball would be enough to occupy and exhaust him. Hope springs eternal!

Well, Oliver proved all of us wrong. We didn't need the treat ball and we certainly didn't need the fancy dog collar. His behavior at the cottage was in complete contrast to his antics at home and, except for some occasional barking at a passing chipmunk, he was quite the quiet little soul. In fact, when we tried to encourage him to bark at the geese to get them away from our property Oliver, of course, responded as if he had lost his vocal chords. He even slept peacefully through the only thunderstorm we had!

Expectations. We all have them, and isn't it often the way that these expectations are quite low and frequently flummoxed by the situations and people around us? In our case, Oliver acted completely out of character, considering us glibly, as if to say, "What in the world were you fussing about?"

In a number of ways, this story about our dog exemplifies the approach that many of us take towards life in general. We fuss about it, often worrying quite needlessly about all of the possible negative outcomes of every move we are about to make. We respond to life in somewhat the same way we would respond to the pieces on a chess board, looking ahead towards the next piece and the one after that, trying to make sure that what we're about to do won't leave us ultimately bumped right off the board. As a result, we plan for the worst outcome and, because we do this, too often,

we lower our expectations of what is possible; in other words, we lower our expectations about life. Admittedly, Oliver had given us plenty of reasons to believe that our pessimistic outlook about his behavior was in keeping with his historic conduct. And, yet, he surprised us, didn't he?

A long time ago, both of my children suggested to me that being optimistic and taking a positive approach to life was somewhat of a dicey option because this left too many opportunities for disappointment. On the other hand, pessimism, they said, meant that the only way was up, providing a much greater possibility for a satisfactory outcome. Wow! I thought at the time, how much more realistic can you get?

Undoubtedly, as we wend our way through life, each of us should maintain some element of this sort of realism. Yet, when Jesus said to his followers, "do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will wear..." he might have uttered these words because people like us were being a wee bit too cautious and realistic about their future. It just may be that he would want us to raise the bar a notch or two with respect to our expectations; to incorporate a little more idealism into how we believe the divine thread will ultimately weave its way through our lives.

As faithful followers, our approach to life should be one that is pregnant with too many possibilities rather than barren with too few dreams.

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# Rediscovering Baptismal Ministry

Each Sunday, children carry symbols of our common life—cross, candle, scriptures—from the chancel out into the hall where they gather for Sunday School. On Easter Day, those symbols were the wooden “alleluia” and the white stole, which I placed around the shoulders of one child. “And”, I said, “Make sure that if someone else wears it, get back. It belongs to us all.”

At the offertory, sure enough, a different child wore the stole back into the assembly, removed it quite solemnly from her shoulders, and placed it on the altar. The Sunday School coordinator informed me later that the stole had been treated with respect and had been a source of delight. The call to my bishop was to complain about this desecration.

The ministry of the ordained in our church has sometimes, like that stole, been set a little too far apart, has been endowed with more of a particular kind of holiness than is healthy or life-giving either for the ordained or for the church. In such cases, the ministry of the baptized, the foundation for all the ministries of the church, has been overlooked or neglected, and the ministry of the ordained has become, in many instances, a vicarious exercise of the ministry conferred in baptism.

For example, all too often we hear those seeking ordination, or those around them, talking about “going

into the ministry”—or even more worrisome—“going into the church”. As if, in the former instance, there were no ministry conferred in baptism, or in the latter, there were no members of the church except bishops, deacons and priests. Harold Munn, the Rector of Christ Church, Edmonton, where I served as Assistant Curate, once said to me, “I feel like the president of a model train club in which I’m the only one interested in trains.”

Among the factors that have weakened our understanding and practice of baptismal ministry, three come easily to mind. The first is that we haven’t given the Body of Christ, the body constituted by baptism, much of anything to do. The community of the baptized, called to be followers of the way of Jesus in service to the mission of God, has instead been invited to understand our relationship with God primarily in terms either of therapy—God looking after us—or of rewards and punishments for particular beliefs or behaviours. If the ministry of the baptized is to thrive, it will need a more mature purpose than the childish preoccupations with being looked after, gaining approval, and avoiding punishment. It will need to be nourished by ordained leaders whose primary focus is the engagement of the community of the baptized in the mission of God.

The second factor undermining the ministry conferred in baptism is a

set of relationships in congregations in which a small group—ordained leaders and key lay leaders—plays the role of producer, and everyone else the role of consumer. Like any club, this “religion club” is based on the producers making available an attractive product for consumption. Successful religion clubs are actually quite common; they depend on the willingness of the consumers to delegate the ministry conferred in baptism to professionals and gifted amateurs, and on the producers to offer a product that pleases the consumers. They tend to become homogeneous communities appealing to this or that market segment.

The third factor undermining the ministry conferred in baptism is what we measure, because what we measure is what we reward. We measure three things—how many people come to church on Sundays, how many people participate in the internal activities of the institution, and how much money they give to support the institution. Leaders quite naturally focus, then, on getting people to come to church, on getting people to participate in church activities, and on getting people to give money for church activities.

We measure what Reggie McNeal calls “attractual” activities, the institution attracting people and their money. Or, from another perspective, we measure only activities related to

the first of the five promises of the Baptismal Covenant—to continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers. There are four others—resisting evil/repenting of sin; proclaiming Christ in word and action; seeking and serving Christ in neighbours; working for justice, peace, and human dignity. For the most part, we make no attempt to measure our effectiveness in fostering lives that enact these promises.

In his December, 2003 Hobart Lecture at St. John’s Cathedral in New York City, Archbishop Michael Peers suggested that ordained ministries refract the ministry conferred in baptism—that those who inhabit the office of bishop, deacon and priest help us to distinguish and nurture the episcopal, diaconal and priestly elements of baptismal ministry. The bishop is not alone in her or his interest in the wider picture of the church—it belongs to all the baptized to care for the church’s interconnectedness. The priest is not alone in attending to the dimensions of the holy in the world—the holy is a focus of wonder and awe for all the baptized. And the deacon is not alone in serving—serving is a vocation held in common by the whole community of the baptized for the sake of the world.

Some of those graduating this evening will serve as ordained lead-

ers in the community of the baptized. It would help very much if we could think of your leadership as fostering in that community a growing capacity for the ministry conferred in baptism and summarized in the Baptismal Covenant, as refracting the light of that ministry into service to the mission of God.

It would help if we could think of mission as God’s initiative, what David Bosch calls “God turning to the world in love”, and ministry as the church’s response to and participation in that mission initiative.

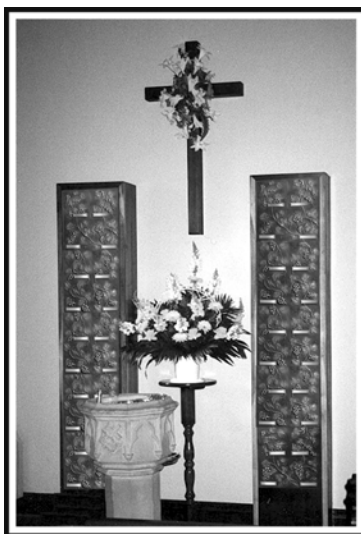
These things would help because they would renew a sense of serious intent to baptism—it would dignify the Body of Christ with a challenging vocation in response to real need in the world.

These things would help because they would begin the turn away from the toxic minut of in which producers and consumers unwittingly conspire to replace the church with religion clubs.

These things would help because they would cause our eyes to look where God is looking—at a world both beautiful and wounded—and to conspire with God to savour and steward the beauty and to tend and heal the wounds, to find a way of counting what counts—disciples following the way of Jesus into the world to serve with courage and compassion.

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