Touchstone

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THEOLOGY SHAPING WITNESS

Ministry—Why Bother?

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Editorial

MINISTRY – WHY BOTHER?

In the pastoral year 2009-10, I served in supply capacity at my home congregation in Brantford, located in southwestern Ontario. It was satisfying to be able to "pay back" for the nurture in faith that I received there, but it also proved to be a challenging assignment. One surprise was the experience of leaving voice mail messages that were not returned. I was attempting to reach out to people who had been alienated from the congregation, some of whom were contemporary acquaintances of mine from our days as youths in the church. But when I invited them to give me a call back so that we could get together, I got few responses. It was as if I were a salesman of religion and not a pastor, someone to be kept at bay. Those nine months of supply work lead me to believe that pastoral ministry is a tougher gig today than it was when I left for the General Council Office in 1995.

This assessment was corroborated by a younger minister who reported on her experience in a learning circle; those recently ordained had dramatically different early experiences in the pastorate than those who started out fifteen or twenty years ago. My friend went on to describe her sense of apprehension about preaching on classical christological texts lest she be pigeon-holed as a fundamentalist or—worse—yelled at. She hungers for conversation about the theological differences and divergences obtaining among United Church folk. Surely we can speak respectfully with one another from the heart of our convictions, can't we? She laments that such dialogic conversation is hard to come by.

Moreover, outside the family of the church, one could mention the easy indifference of media commentators and the sharp-shooter atheism of Dawkins, Hitchens & co. to round things out. Pastoral ministry—in the congregational setting, in relations with colleagues and as situated in the larger society—is a daunting challenge. So what keeps us going? Why bother?

This is a time of widespread demoralization among serving ministers. Some even feel a sense of shame that the numerical decline of the church has been occurring on their watch. At the same time as formerly mainline churches are facing dispiriting amalgamations and

closures, the services of many immigrant and "show-time" congregations are crowded. We also see people of other religions gathering in proud throngs, sometimes erecting grandiose houses of worship. It is not a matter of self-pity if we wonder why such adversity has befallen us.

The answer offered to our predicament from the theological "left" is that the whole operation of mainline Protestantism, its "dogma" and stultifying worship, is out of date, and we ministers, carrying yesterday's vision and skill set, are obsolete. From the perspective of this critique, the church will die, needs to die, and deserves to die—but the spirituality of the Jesus movement will go on. As one recent speaker exclaimed, we need not to worship Jesus, but to get inside Jesus and see the world through his eyes.

From the theological "right," the answer is that we have drifted from the core of Christian faith. Congregations thrive when the saving work of Jesus is preached and believed. Received in believers' hearts, the redemptive work of Jesus Christ engenders transformed lives and behaviour. Gratitude and joy characterize the worship of those experiencing a new birth and generate acts of self-giving outreach to others.

These analyses of both left and right each may be seen to have relative credibility. One doesn't have to be theologically radical to know that too much of conventional worship is wordy and plodding, and that our churches are called to be mission stations not clubs. Nor does one have to be theologically evangelical to know that too many United Church preachers use the pulpit to propound insights derived from their own life journey and experience, rather than from the Scripture they have just read. Indeed, it is helpful to receive and understand critique from both left and right, because most of us minister to people who are scattered across the spectrum, some reading Jack Spong and some watching Huntley Street, and many just coasting on the hope that something stirring will happen on Sunday morning.

So, how shall we minister in such challenging times? What vision should guide us? I have always felt an attraction to those known as "evangelical liberals." They flourished throughout much of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth. Leading representatives of this approach were Anglican bishop Charles Gore in England and Presbyterian

professor James Denny in Scotland. Many of the founders of the United Church were evangelical liberals, Methodists like Nathaniel Burwash and Dwight Chown, and Presbyterians like George Pidgeon and Alfred Gandier.

Evangelical liberals were evangelical in the sense that almost all nineteenth century Protestants were. They held to the core of evangelical faith as articulated by the Reformers, namely, that we are saved by God's grace in Jesus Christ, and they held this conviction in contradistinction to the Church of Rome. They were liberal in being open to new learning and sought to integrate developments in biblical criticism and scientific discovery into their faith. They founded or supported institutions of higher learning in which theological study and studies in arts and science were regarded as complementary. They were committed to social as well as personal righteousness. Most were ecumenical in outlook, and some, like the far-seeing Principal Grant of Queen's, could imagine an ecumenism in which even Roman Catholicism would make its contribution.

Gary Dorrien, who is professor of social ethics at New York's Union Seminary, has written an impressive three-volume work, *The Making of American Liberal Theology.* In the first volume he puts the lie to the notion that liberal theology came to North America only when it was brought home by those who studied at German universities after the American Civil War. Dorrien regards theological liberalism as home-grown in America and describes it as the view that "theology should be based on reason and critically interpreted religious experience, not external authority." It is a "progressive Christian alternative to authority-based orthodoxies and atheistic secularism." It arose in the early nineteenth century out of "the attempt to create a progressive Christian alternative to established orthodoxies and a rising tide of rationalistic deism and atheism." [1]

Dorrien maintains that evangelical liberalism was the formative expression of theological liberalism in North America and carried it until about 1950. He sees the social gospel as standing on its shoulders.

What would the social gospel movement have been without its

[1] Gary Dorrien, "American Liberal Theology: Crisis, Irony, Decline, Renewal, Ambiguity," www.crosscurrents.org/dorrien200506.htm, 1,2.

> gospel-centered preaching and theology? . . . When the social gospellers spoke of the authority of Christian experience, they took for granted their own deep grounding in Bible study, family devotions, personal prayer and worship.[2]

After surveying the liberal scene today, including critical but largely favourable analyses of the contributions of (the "self-dramatizing") Spong and (the marketing master) Marcus Borg, Dorrien laments "the loss of the transcendental, biblical voice in liberal theology . . . Liberals often show more concern about the postmodern status of their perspective than about the relationship of their perspective to gospel faith."[3]

I find this lament interesting, since the Bible is frequently the target when a Protestant speaks about being free from "external authority." I hunch that Dorrien, when pushed, actually imagines a liberalism that accepts a critically interpreted Bible as authoritative in defining what it means to be Christian.

No formula can be a panacea for what ails us, but the vision of evangelical liberalism seems to me to be at the heart of the founding vision of the United Church. It is a worthy vision and could serve us well today.

The theme of this number of *Touchstone* is the challenge of ministry today. Rob Fennell sets the table with a thematic essay on the nature and purpose of ordained ministry, lifting up its dignity and worth. Then follow eight delicious courses prepared by serving ministers of the gospel, seven pastors and a church musician. They bring a variety of tastes to the palate and, in so doing, offer recipes reflecting the specific quality of their ministries.

In this number we also profile the ministry and influence of a consummate pastor, Wilbur Howard, who also became the first person of colour elected moderator of the United Church. Author Adam Kilner attends especially to the way that Howard used silence and charm to make his witness against racism. Our "From the Heart" column is contributed by Catherine MacLean who served on the Theology and Faith Committee that produced "Song of Faith," and who also was a United Church

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[2] Ibid., 12.
[3] Ibid., 12,13.

delegate to the Uniting General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. Our usual five book reviews complete the number.

It is noteworthy that the theme of ministry has been vital in recent official deliberations of the United Church. The 40th General Council adopted a "Statement on Paid Accountable Ministry" and directed the Theology and InterChurch/InterFaith Committee to "develop a statement on the subject of the ministry of the whole people (thus including laity) of The United Church of Canada with congregational consultation" and to report to the 41st General Council (2012) with the intention (of creating) a conclusive "Statement on Ministry." A revised version of the GC40 Statement was circulated across the Church for response before May 15, 2010.

It will be interesting to see whether our Church can move beyond the banality of "paid accountable ministry" in a conclusive (!) statement. Honouring the ministry of the whole people of God should not force us to characterize pastoral leadership in terms of money and supervision. By the way, as a part of its work, the Theology and InterChurch/InterFaith Committee is sponsoring a symposium on leadership and power at the October 2011 Annual Conference of Queen's School of Religion (October 17-18). A call for papers and workshops will be posted in January on the General Council website.

Last, I wish to alert readers to the themes of upcoming numbers. In May, *Touchstone* will celebrate the importance of the Bible in the church, thus marking the 400th anniversary of the publication of the King James Version of the Bible. In September , and in prospect of the General Council remit on the doctrine section of the Basis of Union, we will focus on the meaning of doctrine in various areas of ministry and witness. Then, in January 2012, our authors will tackle the phenomenon of "progressive Christianity."

Meanwhile, please let us know how you respond to the articles in this number.

Peter Wyatt

ON ORDAINED MINISTRY

Robert C. Fennell, Atlantic School of Theology

This is our comfort in the ministry, that ours is a divine office to which we have been divinely called . . .We exalt our calling, not to gain glory among men, or money, or satisfaction, or favour, but because people need to be assured that the words we speak are the words of God. This is no sinful pride. It is holy pride.[1]

The writings of Martin Luther may not be the first place United Church people look for inspiration these days. Yet there is something in his words, heard today amid the ferment about ministry, which provokes us to ask many questions about ordination. Since they are questions worthy of book-length treatment, preceded by several years of research, this little article will seek only to begin to address them. The structure of what follows employs a standard form of inquiry into any doctrine, one I often use in classrooms: what is its nature, and what is its purpose?

Once upon a time, the nature and purpose of ordained ministry were well understood. Ordained ministers were seen, and saw themselves, as shepherds and guides, leaders and organizers, inheritors and stewards of a tradition, and pastors with priestly roles. They were called upon to lead worship, preach the gospel, preside at the sacraments, organize meetings, visit the sick, comfort the grieving, teach the young, speak to schoolchildren, write for the local newspaper, represent the Church, and pray at public events. Such ministerial *functions* usually coincided fairly clearly with their *vocation* as well as their presumed personal *characteristics* (holiness and uprightness of life, honesty, integrity, plain speech, intelligence, ability with people, education, administrative knack, etc.) Ordained ministers were perceived as trustworthy servants of Christ's mission and therefore of the public good.

In this era, as Christendom fades, such clarity has been eroded. Film and television, so pervasive in contemporary North American culture, often portray clergy as everything from suspect, self-righteous prigs to irrelevant, inane buffoons, or erase them from the cultural landscape

[1] Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians* (1:1).

altogether.[2] Infinitely more serious, the revelations of abuse by clergy in several denominations have provoked wholly justified public outrage. Within the United Church itself, there is great confusion about the nature and purpose of ordained ministry.[3] Presenting oneself for ordination is sometimes misperceived as grasping after hierarchical domination over other persons. At other times, ordination is regarded as "nothing special" since, it is said, *all the baptized are ministers, after all.* We have rightly elevated the worth and dignity of lay ministry, but often at the cost of diminishing or defaming the worth and dignity of ordination. It is hardly surprising that theological schools are having difficulty in keeping enrolments robust, and settlement and search committees often struggle to find a pool of suitable candidates. There are simply fewer candidates for ordination. Furthermore, higher incidences of long-term disability, burnout, deep discouragement, and a sense of alienation are very worrisome.

What I want to suggest is that we find ways to restate the dignity and worth of ordained ministry within The United Church of Canada. By *dignity* I suppose I am reiterating Luther's comment at the top of this article about "holy pride": this is not a matter of accruing to oneself a special set of powers. Rather, it is the recognition that there is an office within the Church of Jesus Christ that is distinctive and effective within the mission that God is enacting in the world. *Worth* is also a carefully chosen term; in the midst of much uneasiness and discouragement among our ordained ministers, we ought to assure them that they are needed, wanted, and have a unique place in our Church. We need to say aloud that their dedication and public commitment to serve Christ's mission has earned our respect and appreciation. This is not to suggest that other forms of ministry have lesser dignity and worth. It is simply to say that it is right and good for us to continue to welcome and value ordination.

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[2] A small example of this latter point is the contrast between the high visibility of Father Francis Mulcahy, the chaplain on *M*A*S*H* (set in the Korean War), and the nearly complete invisibility of any chaplaincy services in 15 seasons of television's *ER* (set in a Chicago hospital).

[3] However, for a rather helpful and clarifying recent treatment of these issues, see the "Meaning of Ministry" report to General Council 40, available in the *Record of Proceedings* and online at http://gc40.united-church.ca/files/8_reportsB_665-808.pdf.

The nature of ordination

Let's turn our attention to the nature of ordained ministry. First, *ordination is rooted in the commission all Christians receive at baptism, and it takes shape within the array of gifts that the Holy Spirit sends into the whole Church.* All God's people receive the Holy Spirit and are invited to share in Christ's mission. Within that universal gifting, the ordained have a distinctive set of obligations for which they are prepared in a particular way. One commonly-understood sense of ordination is to be "set apart." It would be an error to suppose that this means "set above." All service that ordained ministers undertake in the United Church is best exercised collaboratively and accountably with the lay leaders, diaconal and music ministers with whom they serve.

So what is that specific role for which we set apart the ordained? It is one gift (albeit a multi-layered gift) that God gives for the good of the church and the world. Ordained ministers make a public and lifelong commitment to fulfill that role, in its many dimensions (see below). The vocation to ordained ministry is a call to exercise that particular multi-layered gift faithfully and within the range of gifts that the Holy Spirit gives the church. Paul wrote that the church is like a body, with many parts.[4] Each part is honoured, desired, needed, and profoundly valued – and none more than any other.[5] However, while all have Spirit-given gifts for the good of the whole, not all gifts are the same. In Paul's body metaphor, some of us are ears, some are eyes, and so me are hands. The distinctiveness of the gifts that the *Spirit* gives to the church through those who are ordained is something of which we cannot lose sight—just as we would not want to lose sight of the distinctive and important gifts of diaconal ministry or lay ministries.

It's quite all right for these forms of ministry to be different: there is no good reason to regard them all as identical. Not everyone in the Church is called to be a minister of Word, sacrament, and pastoral care, any more than everyone in a hospital is called to be a surgeon.[6] But we

[4] See 1 Corinthians 12:4-31 and Romans 12:3-8.

[5] "For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned" (Rom. 12:3).

[6] "For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function" (Rom. 12:4).

are grateful that there *are* surgeons! And that they are skilled, have been trained appropriately, make themselves available, are accountable for their work, and keep up to date in their training. Ordained ministry is much like this: it is one group of gifted persons, set apart—but set apart *for service* to and with many other gifted persons, for the sake of the whole Body and the world God loves.

Second, *ordained ministry is part of how God provides for the Church and creation, on the way toward the coming fullness of God's realm.* Ordained ministers take up their particular places and roles within the Church, as servants of Christ, in order to advance the mission of the Triune God. Their task is to fulfill, in all the ways they can, the purposes of God's realm: justice, joy, bread, and peace in abundance. The life, words, and actions of ordained ministers are intended to take their cue from the Trinity's own life of mutuality, love, and wholeness. Since Jesus' pattern of mission is to teach, heal, and liberate all people and all creation, ordained persons commit to making his ministry the pattern for their whole lives.

Third, *ordained ministry is a distinctive public commitment to a life-long calling with the intention of permanence.* Persons who seek ordination and receive the denomination's authorization to fulfill that office have experienced a distinctive sense of call. This is never a matter of securing a paycheque or wanting to be nice to people full-time. Many find the call to ordination to be irresistible: "If we deny it, God'll keep on calling like a mosquito buzzing in your ear on a warm summer 's night."[7] God's call to ordination, and the Church's collective discernment and recognition of it, is one with God's gracious calling throughout salvation history. God called Abram and Sarai to leave Ur and become forbears of a new nation; Moses and Miriam to lead God's people to freedom; Isaiah and Jeremiah to announce judgement and redemption; Peter and Mary to become disciples; Barnabas and Paul to become apostles to the gentiles; Julian of Norwich and John Wesley to proclaim God's love; Martin Luther King Jr. and Theresa of Calcutta to radical service in their contexts; and countless others. Every call that God extends is for the good of God's people, to bless, strengthen, challenge, and lift them up so that

[7] The Rev. Ali Smith (personal correspondence). Smith was ordained in 2007 and now serves in ministry with Forest Hill United Church, Fredericton, NB.

God's purposes may prosper. All God's people are called. [8] Ordained persons have particular calls that they find difficult to set aside.

The church takes care to recognize that call and invite persons into ordination only when they are fully prepared to undertake this distinctive kind of ministry within the whole church, and to do so for the rest of their lives or as long as they are fit to offer service. Under usual circumstances, ordained persons are formally in a permanent and accountable relationship with the whole church through the presbytery, district or synod, from the moment they become a candidate until they die.

The purpose of ordination

Next, let's consider the roles that ordained ministers take up. Broadly, the church ordains in order to respond to God's provision of such leaders, and to authorize and deploy competent leaders who will assist in the good ordering of the life and work of the whole body. As a result, there are high expectations of those who are ordained. Although there are moments when we speak and act as though the ordained are just the same as everyone else, in practice what is expected of them is not the same. In matters of conduct, speech, professional practice, and expertise, pastoral charges and other mission settings want and ask a great deal from ordained personnel. This arises not least because we believe that their gifts are different and distinctive. They are expected to be competent, multiply gifted, and trained in a number of areas. Following are some tasks that the Church expects of its ordained ministers, and some of the identities that intersect with those tasks.[9]

Steward of the Christian tradition. Upon ordination, one is no longer merely a proponent of one's own opinions, but a custodian of the whole church's witness. To be ordained to Word, sacrament, and pastoral care one takes up a broad range of responsibilities that are undertaken at the request of and on behalf of the whole church. Thus the pulpit, for example, is not a place for personal opinion, but a place to articulate the gospel of Jesus Christ and the challenge, joy, and healing that Christ

[8] "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of [the One] who called you out of darkness into . . . marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

[9] The following section does not deny the profound value of the service that other persons offer, in the church and beyond it, often in ways that overlap with the work of ordained ministers. It does offer, however, a sense of how comprehensive an ordained minister's work normally must be.

offers the world. To visit those under the care of the pastoral charge is not a job on a to-do list, but is a vocation to meet and pray with others as an agent of Christ's church, to comfort, strengthen, challenge, and encourage them. Discussion and oversight of the local pastoral charge's work is not just one more meeting to attend, but an opportunity to bring the wisdom of centuries of Christian reflection and practice to bear on current needs. This task of faithful stewardship is one of many reasons the church (not just the United Church) believes that several years of discernment, advanced education, testing, and supervised formation are necessary for the shaping of ordained personnel. The volume of demands, and the nature and breadth of their responsibilities, require of them substantial and sustained preparation.

Resident theologian. Ordained ministers are asked and expected to teach the Christian faith (not just their personal faith), as well as the mission and history of Christianity, in skilled and inspiring ways, and in a great variety of settings. We look to them to interpret the Bible within a framework that is consistent with United Church theology and coherent with the ecumenical Church. The ordained are called upon to analyze the times in which we live, and, with lay people, to discern options for faithful Christian responses to them. Responsive to the Great Commission,[10] they are asked to make disciples in Christ's name by practising, modelling, and instructing others in spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible reading, service to others, and keeping sabbath. Especially in the case of the sacraments, where the church specifically authorizes the ordained to preside, the church needs them to communicate a fullness of understanding, hope, and faith. At table and font, the keystone rituals of our communal life, God's people need care, good order, and informed teaching. The meaningfulness of our sacramental practices needs continual explanation and well-crafted liturgies, accompanied by skilful presiding and effective preaching. In connection with all these tasks, many identify with the model of a rabbi within a congregation. Indeed, like rabbis, ordained ministers need to be relied upon to have gifts for study and communication, and to be committed to ongoing learning in order to grow in theological wisdom. The guidance

[10] "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20a).

and witness of ordained ministers are meant to assist all church members in our growth in grace. For this reason the Reformed tradition refers to them as "teaching elders."

Leader. Skilled worship leadership is the most visible form of ordained work, including the writing of liturgies that are both innovative and consistent with the historic faith of the Church. Beyond the hour of worship, ordained persons must exercise, with great flexibility, a repertoire of leadership styles for a vast array of circumstances over the course of a lifetime in ministry. Such leadership needs to be fully informed by Biblical wisdom, the polity and ethos of the United Church, and clear theological understanding. Further, ordained ministers are called upon to exercise leadership by navigating conflict, tension, dissent, and outright hostility in congregational life and in other settings. Above all, ordained leadership must be exercised with, and demonstrate, a full awareness of the great love of God for all creation.

Exemplary pastoral caregiver. Ordained ministers are expected to be sensitive and capable providers of pastoral care. While most are not licensed counsellors, they actively support and encourage lay persons, including congregational lay leaders. Care for others is always a priority, integral to the sense of one's calling, and not a choice. In most settings in which they work, and at most times of the day and even night, the ordained are designated to be available on behalf of the whole church to bring comfort, prayer, and witness to God's love in times of distress or trauma. Given that persons are often extremely vulnerable at these times, the church must be assured that its ministry personnel are capable, judicious, and compassionate. Ordained ministers also know how to receive criticism (of themselves and others, of the congregation, of the whole church and Christianity in general) and how to deal with it responsibly.

Representative. Even within the Reformed tradition (where we are less likely to use the term), it is important to note the "priestly" function of ordained ministers. They represent, first, the church universal to the local church, reflecting the hopes, ideals, dreams, beliefs, stories, needs, and struggles of all members faithfully. Next, they represent Christ and Church to the wider world. The communities around us expect ordained ministers to speak and act on behalf of the church. This may mean

sometimes that the world ignores them, but just as often it means the world will look to them for help, a caring ear, and a trustworthy person committed to the common good. People in our communities may indeed look to the ordained to speak a word of hope and grace as though it really were coming from God. Funerals are a particularly poignant example. Given this public profile, some would speak of their self-understanding as the "resident holy woman/holy man" in a community. Finally, then, the ordained represent the Gospel itself, the good news about God's love and concern for all persons. Despite failings and frailties, these representative roles are always operative, and they call ordained ministers to the highest standards of practice and to mutual accountability.

Advocate. Ordained ministers are expected to speak up and to be proactive in support of individuals, families, and communities in difficult circumstances. They are to work for social justice and to animate others in that work, and to be skilled at social analysis. At times this requires research, sustained persuasion, and even adopting a stance of rebuke within the church community or outside it. Accordingly, ordained ministers often need to embrace a prophetic voice and role within and beyond the congregation.

A shared ministry

Thus ordained clergy never operate on the basis of their own authority: they are agents simultaneously of Christ, the church, and the congregation. The dignity and worth of ordained ministry, then, does not arise from some special power that attaches to it. The dignity and worth of ordained ministry arise in relation to the practice of ministry as a reflection of Jesus' own mission and ministry. Christians who say "yes" to their discipleship in any fulsome way deserve our respect and thanks. In response to the specific offering of the Spirit's gifts through ordained ministry, and in light of its own needs and expectations, the church commits to pray for its ministers, support them, love them, and pay them a living wage that responsibly provides for them and their dependents. These forms of support are expressions of the faith community's recognition that a minister's service is important enough that she or he

ought to be released from needing to earn money another way.[11] Such support is also a thank-offering to God in gratitude for God's provision of these leaders in our midst. For those who make the sacrifices necessary to serve the church as ordained ministers, who seek to embody a fullness of their Christian vocation for lower pay than most others with their education will earn, who place service to others at the highest premium for spending their life's energy, we give God thanks.

Not the Last Word

There is far more to be said on the matter of ordination, and ideally far more will be written and shared among United Church folk in these times of confusion about ministry. Among the outstanding issues are the question of ontological change, the question of how we will order the various expressions of ministry within the United Church, and the relationship among those expressions.

A story recently shared by a colleague captures a number of the dimensions of life in ordained ministry:

> I was working away in my little office in the house next to the church that we have shut down and moved out of. There was quite a commotion outside my window. I looked down and realized that one of the UCW groups was meeting that day. They were laughing at something with great gusto. When they came inside and met downstairs, the laughter and talking continued. I marvelled that they could do so given that their unit is about one quarter the numbers it used to be due to death and aging. The building they so lovingly kept up was closed and slated for demolition. Yet there they were making this great sociable noise. Then suddenly chanting started. As I opened the door, what came wafting up the stairs was the Lord's Prayer said in unison. It was so indescribably beautiful and powerful. I thought of the long line of people who had brought this prayer to them through almost two thousand years. This road that St. John's is on is filled with peril, pit falls, and even pratfalls. Yet somehow in the reciting of that prayer the confirmation that I have

[11] Notwithstanding Luther's remarks at the top of this article, ministers too need to pay their bills and save for retirement.

> been ordained to such a bizarre time as this had a powerful clarity for me. I serve them. God calls me to serve them through Word, Sacrament and Pastoral Care. Occasionally I get it right. Often I get it wrong. Things like that prayer winding up those stairs are the strings of steel throughout time that assure me the Spirit knows what She is doing, even if I don't. That was promised to me at ordination. And it changed me—forever.[12]

In the midst of complex and layered contexts, amid the rich faithfulness and many gifts generously shared by others (like the UCW in the story above), and despite the ambiguities of a life of service within a Church not always certain about the meaning of ordination, most ordained ministers find their calling to be deeply rewarding and life-giving. For most, it is a wonderful treasure to be able to serve in this way.

In the end, there is more to ordination than we can ever describe or assess (certainly not in a single article). There is something in ordination that flows from the heart of God and calls deeply. May God grant us grace to continue to discern this call within our church, and to respond with hope, gratitude, and joy.[13]

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[12] The Rev. Linda Yates (personal correspondence). Yates was ordained in 1999 and now serves in ministry with St. John's United Church, Halifax, NS.

[13] My thanks are extended to those friends and colleagues who contributed to this article by sharing their insights with me.

"THAT MY JOY MAY BE IN YOU"
by Hugh D. Reid

Ministry—why bother?

The first and easiest answer would be, because I can't help it. To expand is to describe something that flows of its own accord as a joyous, unreserved, and grateful response to what God has accomplished in Jesus Christ, for you and for me.

Ministry, at least Christian ministry, like Christian prayer, worship, faith, and love, is not something one does in the abstract or arbitrarily. It is not by force of will or a moral achievement. It is something one does *in response*—an unconstrained, spontaneous eruption, a song sung in full-throated ease to what has happened for you and for all creation. God has graciously acted in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and reconciled the world to God's own self; redemption is not a possibility but an accomplished reality through Jesus in the Holy Spirit and poured out upon all flesh. Those who are fortunate enough to be aware (*in me, in nobis)* of what has happened for them and for us (*pro me, pro nobis)* are simply compelled by joy to share, serve, and be a witness to this Good News.

In defining economics, people often speak of the fundamental principle of scarcity. Economics is the science of unlimited needs facing limited resources. In defining ministry, we must speak of abundance; the science of infinite grace given to finite reality.

I could not face the tasks of ministry if I thought about how much there was to do and how little time and ability I possess. I could not face the challenge of ministry if I thought about the current mountain of hostility, cynicism, and ignorance toward God's love and "organized" religion, and the deplorable, sinful, and unfaithful record of the church throughout history that has earned that antipathy. I could not face the heartbreak of ministry in confronting the pain and injustice faced by one member of my congregation, let alone the masses of those suffering on this earth, if I thought about how fragile and fallible are my efforts and how many cracks appear in the dyke when I place one tentative finger into one small leak. I could not face ministry if I saw it in terms of what needs to be done and my sinful self standing in the breach.

I can only face ministry from the foundation of what has been done and what is now unfolding through God's gracious activity at work in my

life and our world. From that foundation, in the face of all the tasks, challenges, and heartbreak of ministry, I count it all joy.

The church in North America may be confronted with declining numbers and aging congregations. Ministers in Canadian society may be met with increasing suspicion and the loss of the automatic respect and privileges we were once accorded, but this has little to do with what God has done and is doing. If we saddle ourselves with the task of perpetuating an institution, if our burden is to fill empty seats, attract the youth, or balance the budget, then we are pouring our time and energy, and stripping our stomach linings and nerve endings, in a cause not worthy of even our weak efforts. But if we set about sharing joy which is "the serious business of heaven" (C.S. Lewis) then we might begin to tap the energy of grace and the current of sharing a story larger than ourselves that is not borne on our shoulders but is the ground we dance on as announcers of peace and heralds of good news.

Have you ever thought what it means to be "*more* than conquerors." We're beyond the need to conquer anyone; that work has been done by the Prince of Peace. We're the dispensers of the peace dividend.

So we work from joy but we also work to joy. What God has accomplished *for* us in the resurrection of Jesus Christ has also been turned *to* us. Another joy of ministry is to share good news in word and deed and to see what happens when that reconciliation finally finds its way into someone's heart or connects with some community need or world event. It's not your job to make it real. It already is real. It's merely your gift and privilege to make it known, to work with grace as it works in you and seeks and works in others. To paraphrase Gerard Manley Hopkins, our privilege is to let Christ Easter in us, "be a dayspring to the dimness of us, be a crimson-cresseted east."[1]

This was brought home beautifully last June during a conference I attended at Princeton. Each evening, after the day's academic papers, we gathered for dinner and a more informal "table talk." Someone would share memories of a relationship or a personal journey.

The speaker the second evening was a thirtyish minister named Christian Andrews. His talk was titled, "What Has Basel To Do with Red Bank? How Barth's *Church Dogmatics* Shapes One Congregation."

[1] G.M. Hopkins, "The Wreck of the Deutschland."

Christian was obviously a gifted person, intelligent, articulate, inspired, who had been rejected by his denomination, bounced out of the formal process of ordination, but adopted by some members of the faculty at Princeton Theological Seminary where he had abandoned a PhD in homiletics. He returned not as a student but to read Karl Barth with one professor, mentor, and friend. He came as the after-dinner speaker to encourage the gathered academics and amateur theologians with the word that what they were doing was important because the abandoned and dispossessed were hungry for it on the streets of Red Bank.

Red Bank is a Borough in New Jersey that fell on hard times a few recessions ago. It was given the name "dead bank." It has the kind of problems endemic to urban centres with high youth unemployment and gang culture. The church that called Christian saw what his denomination could not—the fire in his bones for ministry. They asked him to join them in their ministry to the street-involved youth of Red Bank.

He met hostility and suspicion from the people to whom he was sent, people who could believe more easily in their rejection by the world and their insignificance to the world than they could believe in a God who loved them, but Christian was equipped with joy. He said, "in the face of their antagonism," he was sustained "by the truth about them they did not know." His task was not to coerce or to manipulate them into receiving this truth for he was more than a conqueror; he had only to patiently be for them until they could own for themselves the love and significance that was theirs. He has seen many lives transformed from the street to stability, from violence to community, from death to life as the redemption that has been accomplished took hold. Needless to say, Outreach Red Bank Church is a booming, growing place, "a multigenerational community of thankful people whose belief in God is something they would like to share with others in word and deed."[2]

That's ministry. A bother? No, it's a pleasure that flows from joy to joy.

[2] Outreach Red Bank Community Church. www.theorb.org.

MINISTRY: WHY BOTHER?

by Bruce Sanguin

Great question. Fifteen years ago I was asking it on a daily basis. I wrote a song and called it *Burn Out*. I had a dream in which I solemnly removed my gown and stole, folded them up neatly and packed them away with sadness, but immense relief. The problem wasn't with the people, who were great (mostly). But for some reason I was depressed. Most of the problem, to be honest, was with me. It took me the first 10 years of ministry to understand the cost of not bringing my unique self to the job.

The victim in me wants to blame the culture of The United Church of Canada. Here's my litany of complaints: postmodernist egalitarianism flattened excellence; doubt and ambiguity trumped conviction; the latest social cause coming out of the national office became confused with spiritual formation; the Mission and Service Fund's desperate and relentless marketing created a culture wherein local, contextual justice initiatives were framed as competition for mission dollars; and a liberal fundamentalism divided the world up into the evil empire and us good guys who were "speaking truth to power". (Can we give this phrase a rest for the next 50 years or so?). Add to this all of the traditional expectations of the clergy role and congregational life, and you can perhaps understand why I didn't want to bother with it all. But I was no victim. I lacked the courage to be myself.

Warren Bennis, an expert in corporate leadership, once said that to be a leader is to be oneself. I was trying to lead from somebody else's idea of the role of a minister. Why don't our seminaries have full time faculty positions in congregational leadership? It was as though I was playing a part in a play that some one else had written—and my soul was paying the price. Until our congregational leaders find the courage, the skills, and the support to be self-defined, emotionally intelligent leaders, aware of their own shadow energy, and the capacity to stay connected across real differences, all the spiritual practice in the world won't be enough. Add to these the critical management skills and organizational development theory that clergy are not taught, and we have a recipe for ineffective leadership.

Why this bias against teaching these skills and practices to our leaders? Or is our postmodernist rejection of the achievist modernist culture so absolute that we've thrown the leadership baby out with the bathwater?

Instead of retiring my vestments, I applied to a congregation in Vancouver. When I was interviewed for the call, I signaled as clearly as possible that I wanted to do church differently. I was finished playing the role. My intention was to show up with my authentic self—all my limitations, excellence, passion, weaknesses, gifts, bumbling, glory, love and failures of love, all my strength and wavering—and this is also what I most wanted from them as well. Together we would explore what it means to be "in Christ" and to proclaim and enact the Kin(g)dom of God with as much passion and authenticity as we could muster. We'd write a new script together that made room for our authentic voices.

We set about the work of culture-shifting: from the role of clergy as personal chaplain to the role of leader of leaders; from membership to discipleship; from clergy-centered ministry to ministry anywhere, anytime, by anybody; from a bureaucracy of command and control to a bureaucracy of trust (we transformed from a Board of thirty-five to nine in the first year, and from ten standing committees to three); from filling organizational slots to gift-based ministry flowing from people's creativity and passion..

These days I am experiencing on a daily basis what futurist, Barbara Marx Hubbard, calls "vocational arousal". This is grounded in an experience I had of mystical or unitive consciousness. My "awakening" happened on a silent retreat in Narragansett, Rhode Island, where I experienced myself to be the presence of a living universe in human form. I knew myself to be universe noticing itself through my embodied experience. After 13.7 billion years the cosmos was awakening to itself through me—and through all of us. My personal self existed within a much larger cosmic identity. The illusion of separation fell away. Spiritually, I experienced "God" as intimately involved in this evolving process of unity-within-differentiation. Spirit was also manifesting in, through, and as this evolutionary unfolding—which meant of course that Spirit is unfolding in, through, and as you, me, and our communities of

faith. The impulse to evolve, I contend, is essentially sacred—the presence of the Spirit yearning for greater freedom and fullness of being.

This has given rise to a theology that I call evolutionary Christian mysticism. I'm not an academic theologian, and I haven't had time to systematize this theology—although I find that it emerges Sunday after Sunday in the sermon and liturgy. (I highly recommend this way of *discovering* your theology, by the way. Sermon writing and liturgy preparation becomes a spiritual practice of creating the conditions whereby one can be continually surprised by what emerges). This has enabled me to live on the edge of the emerging future—tracking the "new thing" God is doing, rather than packaging pre-formed theology within the container of a liturgy and the sermon.

Theological adventure is a source of untapped vitality. It's liberating to remove the strait jacket of adhering to the illusion that somewhere out there exists a "correct" theology. Put forth some spectacularly bad theology and be corrected. It's not the end of the world. Am I the only one who finds it weird that you can walk in to most of our congregations on a Sunday morning, from Vancouver to St. John's, and hear essentially the same theology? We need to create space for the eccentric and the quirky.

At Canadian Memorial United Church we're creating a habitat for creative emergence—the "new thing" God is doing that can only be born through this particular constellation of souls. Teilhard de Chardin, the pioneer of evolutionary Christianity, repeatedly used the word "zesty" to describe his experience of Christ as the center, circumference, and driving force of the evolutionary process itself. Congregational ministry feels zesty to me at this point in my life. When we are consciously evolving together, our lives are being *real*-ized—made real by God's grace.

I'm the luckiest person in the world to have a vocation that allows me, and the community I serve, to explore the very edges of what it means to be in the heart and the mind of Christ for the 21st century. What are the practices, programs, and organizational processes inherent in evolutionary Christian mysticism? Did Paul's intuition of the Cosmic Christ, "in whom all things are held together," lay down a template for the emergence of a new 21st century theology? Is it possible that an evolutionary worldview and consciousness is emerging on our planet right now, with the capacity to validate, yet contextualize, traditional,

modernist, and postmodernist worldviews? It's a very exciting and hopeful time to be in ministry. In an evolutionary paradigm, profound crises evoke the intelligences necessary to meet the changing life conditions.

Today, our congregation is filled with spiritual leaders: lay people now offer virtually all of our spiritual formation programs. Some days I think that I truly am working myself out of a job. My role increasingly is to be a source of inspiration, encouragement, and allurement to this life in Christ. We have three students who have just completed or are completing theological studies. Four members have decided (simultaneously) to enter into a formal discernment process.

Why bother with ministry? For the sake of these souls who are hearing the call of the Christ in the midst of the apocalyptic predictions about the demise of the church. Maybe, once again, we're sticking our heads in a dark tomb looking for the Christ. And once again, an angel is there to meet us, asking why we've come to a tomb in search of the living Christ. The ever-rising One has gone ahead of us to Galilee—always one step ahead, calling us from an unformed future that needs us in order to be born.

MUSINGS ON MINISTRY – FROM THE TRENCHES

by Kate Crawford

I graduated from theological school nineteen years ago. You would think that by now I would have out grown all of my textbooks from those golden days of learning, but there are a couple I hold on to. I have just moved—for the seventh time—and unpacked again a book I cannot part with: Robert Hovda's *Strong, Loving and Wise: Presiding in Liturgy*.[19]

The invitation to reflect on why I or anyone s hould 'bother' with ministry has caused me to ponder this qu estion in a way that I don't do in the normal run of events. It seems to me that Hovda's title alone holds a clue as to what I think I'm doing in this amorphou s, exasperating, intensely fulfilling vocation. The simplest answer to the question of why I bother to be in ministry is that I feel called to offer my strength, love and wisdom to God's people for their use.

For the Sake of the Church

The first reasons to both er with ministry coalesce around the idea that ministry serves and strengt hens the church. In its simplest form, the church is a community, and communities need leaders. They need leaders to hold and proclaim a common visi on; they need lead ers to tell the founding stories and to dream the stories of what will be; they need leaders to represent them when th ey take their place among other communities.

In the United Church, we are passi onate about affirming everyone's gifts for ministry, sometimes to the p oint of not affirming particular gifts clearly enough. And while it is true that we ar e all mini sters to s ome degree, setting some people apart for certain ministries serves to strengthen the whole community.

Ordaining some to be leaders frees them to guard and preserve the essentials of what defi nes us as chur ch. Some would call t hat institutionalization, implying fossili zation of inspiration, a sort of enslavement of the Holy Spirit. Ho wever, some strong s keleton of focussed intention is neede d to support the flesh of good wil1 and effort sporadically offered by volunteers.

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[19] Robert Hovda, *Strong, Loving and Wise: Presiding in Liturgy.* (Liturgical Press, 1981).

Martin Luther wrote this about the obligation which our gifts impose upon us: "If there is anything in us, it is not our own; it is a gift of God. But if it is a gift of God, then it is entirely a debt one owes to love, that is, to the law of Christ. And if it is a debt owed to love, then I must serve others with it, not myself."[20] So, those of us with gifts for leadership "must serve others" with these gifts, because they were given for the whole community to use in us.

Henri Nouwen observes that one of the functions of Christian leaders is interpretation. Life is often hard, and God's presence is sometimes as difficult to discern as God's will. It is a gift to be able to speak of the goodness of God when others suffer, and to dispel some of the horrible theologies people have which make things worse. He goes on to say: Only he who is able to articulate his own experience can offer himself to others as a source of clarification. The Christian leader is, therefore, first of all, a man who is willing to put his own articulated faith at the disposal of those who ask his help. In this sense he is a servant of servants, because he is the first to enter the promised but dangerous land, the first to tell those who are afraid what he has seen, heard and touched.[21]

Our own comprehension of the reality of human suffering, and our willingness to speak of it within the context of a God of love, is a great source of hope. Loneliness, fear, grief—all of these can become their own isolated worlds in which a person easily can get lost. The minister can journey into that frightening place and proclaim the grace of God in such a way that light returns for the one who feels lost.

Ultimately, though, the place where the community is most strengthened, where the church is created and energized, and where ministry leadership is most exposed and essential is when we gather for worship. We *bother* to be in ministry in order to help God's people come into God's presence, to return thanks and praise, and to learn how to be Christ-shaped. William Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas captured this when they wrote: "In our worship, we retell and are held accountable to the story about what God is doing with us in Christ. All ministry can be

[20] Martin Luther, *Lecture on Galatians* 1519, quoted in Charles B. Cousar, *Galatians* in the series *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1982) 145.
[21] Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*. (Garden City: Image Books, 1979) 38.

evaluated by essentially liturgical criteria: How well does this act of ministry enable people to be with God?"[22]

For My Sake

Another group of reasons to 'bother' with ministry is entirely selfish (might as well call a spade a spade). I love what I do. With any work that one feels called to do, there is a deep sense of joy around the alignment of one's gifts with the demands of the job. So, whether you felt called to be a plumber, a business person or a stay-home parent, one of the reasons to do what you do would be the pure joy of it.

I often have had people say to me, "We cannot imagine doing what you do." This usually happens in response to worship leadership and funerals. From the "outside," these are high ritual moments, freighted with emotion and meaning. To lay people, these are likely the most opaque and mysterious facets of my work—of the pull-the-rabbit-out-of-the-hat variety. Yet it is exactly these two areas which give me the most satisfaction. They challenge all my gifts and put them in the service of others. When I am able to facilitate a meaningful experience of the grace of God so that God's people can shout "Glory!" I am most deeply fulfilled.

In a talk he gave for priests in 1988, Henri Nouwen, asked, "Who can take away suffering without entering it? The great illusion of leadership is to think that man can be led out of the desert by someone who has never been there."[23] Of course, Nouwen was the quintessential "wounded healer," who drew brilliantly on his own personal struggle to illumine the human condition. In a much smaller— and far less brilliant way—I appreciate how ministry forces me to confront my own weaknesses, to keep my feet in the emotional muck of daily life, and to be honest about my own vulnerabilities so that others may do the same. I think that I am a more honest person because I am in ministry.

[22] William Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas, "Ministry as More than a Helping Profession," in *The Christian Century*, March 15, 1989, 282-284.

[23] Still available under the title *Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry*.

For God's Sake

This is the best reason of all to bother with ministry—especially in this cynical and science-dazzled era. Our culture demands facts, proofs and evidence, and believes that it can have them. We have pushed mystery, wonder and awe to the very edges of our awareness.

All of us in professional ministry probably have experienced the awkward hesitation that comes after we reveal to a stranger our vocation. The assumption these days is that we must be credulous, anti-intellectual, socially conservative and trapped in a pre-Darwinian world-view. And yet the church persists. And faithful people continue to call forth leadership from their midst. When ordained clergy are not available, lay people will step in and do the best they can, with the gifts they have, as they have always done.

Thomas Oden points to the mystery at the heart of what we do: How odd that it is apparently not God's purpose to minister day by day to the world by direct revelation. Rather, the surprising fact is that God has chosen to minister to humanity through a scandalously visible community, the church, and to minister to the church through human agency, by calling ordinary, vulnerable, pride-prone persons into the ministry of word and sacrament. However vulnerable ministry may be to wretched distortions and abuses, curiously enough it seems to be God's own idea.[24]

The church is one of the precious places where we are intentional about teaching love, compassion and service. By putting my life at the disposal of God's people, I hope—and often pray—that my energies are being used in accordance with God's will, and as part of God's plan to let the kingdom come.

Conclusion

At the end of the day, each one of us faces a few simple questions: what am I good at? What do I like to do? How can I align myself with the Good? What do I want to accomplish in my life? "Lucky us," if our answers point to ministry—or to any vocation that brings us joy—and "lucky church" if our answers also strengthen the community of faith. May we also be "strong, loving and wise."

[24] Thomas Oden, *Pastoral Theology* (Harpur, 1994).

THE SONG I SING

by Judith Visser

Oh, it's no bother at all, really. It can be hard work, but I wouldn't call it a bother. More like a calling. And, as long as I continue to experience ministry as a calling, its legitimacy will not be in serious jeopardy. This is not to say that my vocational identity is never challenged. One cannot serve in ministry with a mainline church these days without having to navigate the realities of shifting demographics (you know—the Aging Congregation Syndrome), the postmodern re-viewing of organized religion, the disappearing act in our context by the Cultural Meta-Narrative . . . I could go on, but that might get discouraging.

In important ways, the question of whether ministry is worth the trouble has been addressed and answered (for the time being) by the various bodies and courts of our denomination. Institutionally, we have established an order of ministry and have articulated criteria and boundaries pertaining to the role and office. The process of discernment within the faith community ensures that the responsibility for recognizing a call to ordered ministry is shared. The rite of ordination expresses a covenant theology that lifts up the pastoral relationship within the context of the faith community: the one on whom hands are laid is called by God, ordained by the church.

The evidence that ordered ministry is still valued *within* and *by* the church offers powerful support to those of us who continue to don our stoles and lead graveside alleluias and construct bridges across the gaps between life text and scripture text. But it's not enough. Ultimately, the verb "to bother" lands in personal space, and each one of us who takes on the role of pastor must find whatever it takes to get up in the morning knowing that what we're about is not simply an exercise in poor stewardship, i.e., a waste of time.

Caroline A. Westerhoff says: "[A]s Christians we have heard and accepted the call into the grand and precarious quest of discipleship, and as disciples we are to become bold callers." [1] One might describe discipleship as the community's covenant call to ministry—the priesthood of all believers. But there is a ministry to which I, already a disciple, am further called: that of Word, sacrament, and pastoral care. While I have

[1] Caroline A. Westerhoff, *Calling: A Song for the Baptized* (New York: Church Publishing Inc., 2005) 5.

not yet doubted the authenticity of the call (in either guise), I have often wondered just how well I am living into it. Though I remain convinced that leadership in the local Christian assembly by ordained leaders is a valid form of ministry, I readily concede that there are days on which I question the efficacy of what I do as an ordained minister.

Most often those questioning times come when I find myself concentrating for too long on tasks that do not feel like Word, sacrament, or pastoral care. Perhaps one of the greatest frustrations of ministry-in-the-congregation is the intrusion of "administrivia"—all that necessary work of arranging and overseeing and contacting and planning. If these tasks must be part of my ministry, then they serve best as a thorn in my side to keep me dependent on grace! Sometimes it is self-doubt that gets in my way. Or fatigue. Or the discouragement of feeling isolated, unsupported, overextended. On those days, the question of "Why bother?" rears itself up from its miserable corner, yammering insistently like some desert demon out to derail me.

It's a good question, though. It keeps me honest. It brings me back to the *raison d'être* of ministry. It reminds me that I am in this business because it's God's business. It compels me to answer back. And here's what I sing to that demon.

I sing a song of sacrament. I sing the ballad of Jennifer and Rowen, two pre-schoolers who spontaneously joined me behind the communion table one Sunday, just as I was about to break the bread and fill the cup. Little Jennifer looked intently at the chunk of bread in my hand, then up at me, before bursting out, "I'm *really* hungry!" I leaned down and said, "Then you came to the right place! Would you like to break the bread in half?" She did, holding it up high in a grand gesture so everyone could see. Then I invited Rowen, on the other side of me, to pour the juice from the small crystal pitcher into the chalice I held for her. As she prepared to pour, she looked to me for reassurance as she asked, clearly, "*All* of it?" "Yes," I whispered, swallowing hard, "every last drop!" Bread for the journey, and the wine of arrival.

I sing a song of pastoral care. I sing the blues and some folk songs and a raucous rock-n-roll, because that's how it goes. That's how it goes when people are birthing babies and promising a lifetime and burying their dead. Life piles up and it can get so frantically busy, but it's *real*, and

there's nothing more satisfying and affirming than being authentic with another human being. Twentieth-century philosopher John Macmurray, who defined friendship as "[being] yourself for another person," insisted that "the uniqueness of Christ's gospel is that it makes friendship the heart of life, the absolute to which all else is relative."[2] To offer the ministry of caring presence is to be in the most sacred of places.

I sing a song of the Word. I sing the Story and the stories, a great hymn to joy because I do not sing alone. When I collaborate with a group of "sermon schemers," when we stand as seekers before the Other of the ancient texts, the word rises up in us and tumbles out and we speak of our lives and our encounters with the Living One. When the assembled worshipers open their songbooks on a Sunday morning and voices are lifted in hymns ancient and new, then the Word rises to the rafters and once again we find ourselves in the sanctuary of God. When the word of faith is murmured in prayer, or shouted in defiance before the powers, or spoken in blessing to the beloved— in all those times and more, it talks back to that insidious Botherer who skulks around pestering us with the question "Why bother?"

Here's what I say. I tell that demon that I bother because "I know holy when I see it."[3]

[2] John Macmurray, SCM Keynote Talk: "Ye Are My Friends" (1929) 5.
[3] A phrase used in a sermon by a classmate in the ACTS D.Min program, summer 2007.

WHY BOTHER WITH MUSIC MINISTRY?

by Patricia Wright

The United Church of Canada has marked its 85th birthday with celebrations and gatherings exploring topics such as emerging models of ministry, congregational renewal and leadership, congregational structures, interfaith/intercultural ministry, and care of our environment. Some of us despair for the future of Christianity and, in particular, our denomination. How do we minister to the young, to the old, to the poor and homeless, to the marginalized? We have had four regional "Worship Matters" conferences during which ordained and lay leaders explore and experience a variety of worship models. The enthusiasm and interest in such events shows that our worship remains central to our lives as Christians. However, when it comes to our music ministry—why bother? With so many other pressing issues, is music essential in our congregational lives?

Creation is inherently musical. All cultures have creation stories, and most begin with a sound.

> In Hindu belief, the silence before creation was broken when *om* was first pronounced. In Genesis, our creation story, we read over and over again the words, 'God said . . . and it was so.' The Gospel of John begins, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' . . . We, too, live in a universe initiated by sound.[1]

We know that the universe "hums"—the universe vibrates; all things animate and inanimate vibrate; our very beings vibrate. These vibrations are scientifically calculated and described—but what a miracle! What causes the music of the spheres? One might liken these vibrations, from the smallest string to the great chord of the universe, as movements of the Spirit of God.

Music permeates all God's creation and embraces all humanity. Music is rooted in and evolves from God's relationship with us and our relationship to God.[2]

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[1] Betty Lynn Schwab, "Reflection on Music—the Music of our Lives," in *Singing Faith Alive: A workbook for study and worship*, ed. Betty Lynn Schwab (The United Church of Canada, 2010) 10.

[2] "A Music Poem," in *Singing Faith Alive*, 42. Further indented and italicized quotations are from this poem.

Human song is universal. The most innate human expression across cultures and religions is song. We cry, moan, wail, murmur—and sing. Our own voices join the universal vibrations to sing nursery rhymes, to sing "Happy Birthday," to sing psalms, to sing the stories of our faith, to sing prayers, to sing petitions, to sing confessions, to sing laments, to sing in celebration—this is one of our most natural corporate responses to God's love and God's grace. One reads studies about the mental and physical benefits of regularly singing together. We should not be reticent when singing; we should sing as if our lives depend on it! As John Wesley exhorted, "Sing lustily and with a good courage." (*Select Hymns*, 1761)

People singing together must relate; we must offer the precious gift of ourselves but must become part of the whole. In song we enter into harmony with others not only in voice but also in spirit.

When we sing together, barriers and categories are transcended . . . Music united us as the body of Christ . . . When we sing our common heart song, we gain new compassion and mutual understanding.

Music in worship is biblical. Worship is our response to God. "Worship is a drama enacted with God. Sometimes worship may be experienced as a 'dance' by the leaders and faithful together. The liturgy and its music have precise and distinct roles in each part of this drama or dance."[3] Music has always been part of that drama. In Isaiah, we hear the chorus of angels and archangels around God's throne—*Holy, holy, holy,* they cry; this ancient song forms a central part of Jewish temple worship, the *Kadush*. As our Christian worship was, and is, based on temple worship, we hear the same words at the central part of our eucharistic prayer, the *Sanctus: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest!*

The Hebrew Scriptures are full of songs—the Psalms of David, the songs of Moses, Miriam, Hannah; one finds these all in our hymn books. In the gospels we hear the song of the angels when Jesus was born: *Gloria in excelsis Deo—Glory to God in the highest!* We read in Mark that after the Seder meal or Last Supper, Jesus and the disciples sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives.

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[3] Fred Graham, "Reflection on Music—Silence, Speech, Song: The Rhythm of Worship," in *Singing Faith Alive,* 24.

Our music is based in our Scriptures in song and with instruments. In the Psalms especially, we hear many references to all kinds of instruments—praise God on the timbrel, drums, clanging cymbals, pipes, bells, trumpets, guitars, theorbos, even the odd bagpipe; all creation joins to make a joyful noise to God.

We are a singing people. How we sing together and what we sing together, reflects our faith, our church, our union with fragile creation, our thoughts and feelings about one another and all humanity.

Music transcends human understanding of God. Our artistic offerings speak to our yearning to know God, to praise God, to reach and experience the mystery that is beyond our human understanding. Worship involves all our senses.[4] Our offerings in poetry, song, painting, stitching, drama, carving, and architecture are our responses to the unfathomable gifts of God. "Music speaks a language that can transcend the boundaries of words."[5]

Song connects us to the music of the universe and leads us into new creation.

Corporate song is the primary instrument in worship. In Paul's first letter to the community at Corinth, we hear the familiar description of the spiritual gifts—we are called to preach, to heal, to teach; why not to sing? But it is obvious. Everyone in the Christian community is called to sing! The human voice is the primary instrument in musical worship. Paul Westermeyer names the church musician as "cantor," leader of the peoples' song.[6] In our tradition we have the opportunity to listen to music presented by those who feel a special calling to offer their musical talents in singing or in playing instruments. However, in the worship hymns and responses, we all become the choir. All singing, whether in unison or harmony, high or low, on pitch or not, is an offering, a response to the gifts of God.

[4] Don E. Saliers, *Worship Come To Its Senses* (Abingdon Press, 1996).
[5] Nora Sanders, "Weekly reflection," March 27, 2009, in *Singing Faith Alive*, 1.
[6] Paul Westermeyer, *The Church Musician,* rev. ed. (Augsburg Fortress, 1998).

Music empowers us to listen for God's voice . . . Music reminds us that we are loved by God and made for God . . . When we sing together with one heart and voice, we ground ourselves in the spirit of, for, and with, the world.

Music is ministry. We are musical beings as part of a musical creation. We yearn to glimpse the mystery of God. We have inherited a tradition of singing and respond in corporate song to the gifts of God. Congregations have a responsibility to nurture their music ministries. What about our music leaders? Church music ministry, at its best, is a calling.

A music minister is called primarily to be a cantor, to lead the congregation's song.

A music minister is called to offer music in worship which moves worshippers to pray and to praise.

A music minister is called to offer music as comfort.

A music minister is called to offer music to the world outside as a marvellous gift from God.

A music minister is called to work with groups of singers and instrumentalists as all try to offer their best to God.

The church musician can feel music ministering when he hears voices raised in praise. She can feel music ministering when at the end of an anthem or a song, the silence is so profound that she knows that together all have experienced the grace of God.

One might imagine ancient worshippers in a variety of settings—whether a cave, a house, the shell of a gothic cathedral under construction—inspired to capture the surrounding vibrations and to begin to sing; to chant the Biblical stories and the Psalms on one note, gradually adding more notes and more voices.

Voices and instruments of all kinds proclaiming the words of Scripture and of poets—all to the glory of God! Is this not a vision of heaven? In our imperfect understanding of the grace of God, is this not one manifestation of the Spirit promised to us by Jesus?

We are called to lend our voices to the Singer and the Song. Thanks be to God!

Ministry—Why Bother?
by Adam Kilner

Because in ministry we see everyday people, creatures, interests, and objects redeemed by God. Recently I wanted to give children a short survey course on the gospels during children's time on Sunday morning, and so we played the original *Super Mario Bros.* video game (from the early 1980s) and quickly paralleled the story of Mario with the story of Jesus as an entry-point for children into the Gospel narrative. The story is that the Italian plumber Mario hears the call of *Princess Peach* (in the 1980s through to the mid-90s she was known as *Princess Toadstool*) through his bathtub drain, and somehow ends up warping through the pipes into the Mushroom Kingdom, ruled by Princess Peach's rarely-seen father. Mario's job, then, is to save the Mushroom Kingdom from evil – usually in the form of the evil Bowser and his goomba, koopa troopa, and flying fish cohorts. Mario moves from his mundane life as a plumber to a troubled world below to save it. In the same way, Jesus comes from beyond our world to save it. As that passage from the Gospel of John says: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

The difference between Mario and Jesus, however, is one small, but significant point. Jesus doesn't only come from another world (a world called *heaven*), but he also brings it along into our troubled world with him. Paradoxically, brings along the kingdom he left behind, to show the people, animals and other creatures, and even the inanimate objects of our world, what our world could look like if God were ruler.

As that old hymn from Colossians reads: For in [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Colossians 1:19-20)

I think that by "all things" the original singers actually meant "all things." That God is going to get back everything that belongs to God. This is one reason why I hear of churches holding animal blessings – the ritual, the ceremony, the celebration is a time for us to realize that Jesus Christ and his cross, are the glue that God uses to hold together all of creation. Jesus Christ is the focal point of all creation, and somehow, by the mystery of his blood-stained cross, all of creation – the fish, the

whales, the Leviathan of the deep, the algae, the seaweed, the rabbits, the rocks, the giraffes, the emus, the elephants, the kangaroos, the various elements on the period table, and even people from every language, racial or ethnic background, nation, and even orientation – gather together in harmony to see what God is doing in the mystery of our faith.

Back at children's time, when playing *Super Mario Bros.* it was marvelous to hear a 30-something in the congregation say, "I can't believe I'm playing video games in church!" In that exclamation is recognition from the world that God chooses to redeem, reconcile, harmonize everything in our world, both the humanly imaginable and unimaginable. It is because of the God who loves the world and everything in it that I choose, and love, ministry. Next time, if you ask me about presbytery meetings, you might get a different answer.

Heartbreaker

by Michael Wilson

As someone who entered ministry in my mid-twenties and having done little of significance besides going to school since I was 5 years old, I must confess that my initial answer to the question of "Ministry—Why Bother?" was . . . "Because I don't do anything else!" But this is hardly a compelling reason for someone whose vocational options in the Google world spread out as wide as the prairie sky.

I was led next to the glib query: what other job pays you for singing even though you aren't particularly good at it? True, lots of people get paid for doing things they aren't very good at (Hello, Winnipeg Blue Bombers), but ministry does allow one to pursue interests and passions outside marketable pressures and schemes.

I can go the practical route and speak of the ways I enjoy the most discretionary time of any comparable profession. Contrary to popular myth, ministry can be a gentle companion to family life, allowing for time to be bent and maneuvered around appointments, school concerts, and sick children. There is a certain liberty to grocery shopping on Mondays when the stores are all but empty or curling in the senior's afternoon league and thereby freeing an evening for other pursuits.

When asked by the unchurched about ministry I have responded with lists that often include love of people, lifelong learning, and that no two days are the same. These are very real pluses, but to suggest that these benefits form a basis for bothering with ministry would be disingenuous.

The one thing I think those who ask the question with a sincere curiosity need to know is this: ministry will break your heart. If you aren't prepared to have your heart broken, don't bother. Your professional standards and conduct won't prevent you from loving the people you are called to serve. Your care won't cause these people you love from dying. Your well prepared liturgies won't stop you from returning to your office after the funeral of a beloved parishioner and weeping uncontrollably. Your pastoral presence won't fix people whose brokenness often extends so much deeper than you imagine. Your leadership won't necessarily revive the church. Your visits won't lead to an increase in membership. Your passion won't bring justice and peace to as many places as you

would like. Your presence won't make up for the absences which people have endured for years.

So why bother with ministry? I start by offering the opportunity to witness to the hope that is the heart of Christian faith. As he sat in a prison cell, John the Baptist sent word through his companions to ask if Jesus was the one he had longed for, the one promised, the one who would usher in a new day. Jesus would not give a direct answer but he told the messengers that they had a responsibility to bear witness. Tell John what you see, that the blind recover their sight, the lame walk, lepers are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news announced to them. Is this, or is this not, what you were waiting for? John's disciples were asked to bear witness to the truth made evident in the goodness of God all about them.

This is ministry: in the midst of heartbreak, announcing that you have seen something renewing and restoring and reviving; listening as others tell you about the transformation God has worked in their lives; embodying what you have witnessed, and acting in human agency for God's realm; with others, building a community of people whose collective witness brings light into dark places. Needless to say, the vocation of ministry does not give one special access or exclusive rights to witness the wonder that God works in the world. But it offers the proverbial front row seat—a privilege that only can only be described as a gift of grace. No one deserves or earns the right to be so blessed. I believe this is true about ministry whether it is imagined as vocation or avocation. Though I exercise ministry as a minister of the church, God works in the world with reckless abandon, sowing seed as though there is an endless supply.

A friend of mine works as a prison chaplain and is daily exposed to depths of human suffering that those of us in pastoral ministry only experience on occasion. When I asked him how he would instinctively respond to the question, "Ministry—Why Bother?" his immediate response was to say that all ministry—administration, preaching, visiting—of the clergy and of the laity, within the church and outside of it, is always "touching pain with God's love for the sake of healing." I could not agree more.

I believe that the cross is a symbol that reveals the coming of a day when death is defeated and fear vanquished. It will be a day of a just peace and reconciliation throughout creation. It has been described as a peaceable kingdom and prayed prescriptively as "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." This is God's work, bringing about this new day. It is inevitable—the only thing that absolutely, positively, necessarily will come to be. And its coming poses a new question: Do we want to participate in the new thing that God is doing or not?

A few years ago I was privy to a discussion about the call to ministry. The resource person was a wise and gentle servant of the church who was nearing the end of a long career spent in theological education. Rather than answer our questions directly, he carefully wove his way, drawing our attention to the heart of the word "vocation," which shares a root with the word vocal. He then connected vocal with voice, song, and chant. With those words echoing in our ears he simply said, "One who is called to ministry is one who is en-chanted." As if you can't imagine singing any other song.

Why bother with ministry? In one word, enchantment. Because every day you have the opportunity to wake up and work for the hope and healing that God is bringing into the world. It is life in the front row of tomorrow's promise.

And the singing thing is fun too.

A VICARIOUS VOCATION? MAKING SENSE OF ORDAINED MINISTRY IN A POST-CHRISTENDOM CANADA

by Ross Lockhart

"Why do *you* do what you do and love what you love at work?" asked the young lawyer reclining in the chair beside me. The question took me by surprise, even though I had carefully scripted it that morning at the church office. I was sitting in a bank boardroom shepherding a bi-monthly lunch gathering of the congregation's downtown executives. The question was an attempt to have leaders in business, law, management and medicine articulate a sense of *vocation*. Somehow, in the rush of preparation, I never stopped to ask myself the question that I expected others to answer. Now I was pressed to articulate my understanding of this *vicarious vocation* we call ordained ministry.

George Pidgeon, the first Moderator of The United Church of Canada, defined the "Vicarious Life" as "the life which is given up to others and which finds itself in what they become thereby."[1] As servant leaders of the church, we live for others just as Jesus lived, died and lives again for us and for the sake of this broken world. Sadly, however, this living for the sake of others burns many out, especially in a post-Christendom Canada that no longer seems to care about the doctrinal claims of the Christian church. In fact, there are many in the guild struggling with loss, confusion and heartache who understandably ask, "Why bother? What difference is it going to make anyway?"

My first exposure to "denominational depression" was in the 1990s when first exploring a call to ordained ministry. I was surprised when "church people" responded with Titanic metaphors for the Body of Christ and said things like, "The church is dead and you're a smart young man. Why don't you try law or medicine instead?" Lovely. Swimming in a pool of negativity like this, one is forced early on to articulate why you "love what you love and do what you do" in ordained ministry. It requires one to figure out the ABCs of faithful service.

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[1] George Pidgeon, *The Vicarious Life* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1945) 2.

Adoption, Baptism and Call (ABC)

Where does the ordained life begin? Surely, it begins at the baptismal font. As Paul claims in Romans 8, we have been given a spirit of adoption as Christians that enables us to come to the baptismal font as children of a loving God whether we are 9 weeks or 99 years old. Our adoption through baptism in to Christ's death and resurrection provides fertile ground for the seed of God's call to grow and mature. Of course, God's call and the believer's response are different for every person. From the keen ears of Samuel and the wise interpretation of Eli to the reluctant response of Jonah and the regurgitating gift of a whale, God calls us to ministry. From the ruddy cheeked boy David to the unexpected visitation of Gabriel to Mary; from the deep fryer faith experience of Paul, to the slow cooker variety of "heart warming" revelation that John Wesley experienced, God calls us to ministry. Within the body of Christ, ordained leaders are set apart (not set above). Growing up with both ordained and diaconal leadership, I always had a clear sense that I was called to leadership based on word, sacrament and pastoral care. In service to the triune God, this three-fold pattern of pastoral leadership continues to help me understand what I "love what I love and do what I do" in this vicarious vocation.

Word

One of my greatest joys in ordained ministry is preaching. I love wrestling with texts on behalf of the congregation and making connections on a Sunday morning between God's story of salvation in Scripture and the stories of women, men and children who gather as part of our church family. One of the ways that I've (re)discovered a connection between God's story and our story is through the practice of testimony. We've softened the language to "Faith Sharing" and once a month invite a couple of church members to offer their testimony before the Scripture reading. A young mother who practices law was invited, in connection with the account of Abraham and Sarah entertaining angels unaware in Genesis 18, to offer her response to the question, "Where have you experienced God's hospitality?"

Her testimony that day was a reflection of her love of our church from growing up in the congregation to standing on the chancel steps on her wedding day. Then, in an unexpected and risky turn, she told us about her pregnancy with her second child. There were complications in her final months and tragically she delivered a still-born child. She was shocked at how cavalier her friends were about the death as she struggled emotionally with the loss. It was only in her local United Church that she found a warm and welcoming community that supported her grieving family. Her closing lines of testimony touched the congregation to the core, "I have never before spoken my still-born son's named aloud in this place, but it feels safe to do so." She went on to name her son into existence in the sanctuary and the whole church family was moved. We all heard the Word of God that day through the testimony of a faithful saint in our time and place.

Sacrament

Sacramental theology also plays a lively role in the ebb and flow of the vicarious vocation. Just last month at our Church Board meeting we were engaged in a time of sharing "good news" as elders were invited to share a celebratory word about the church's ministry in the last month. My wife, the Rev. Laura Lockhart, offered a reflection about conducting a communion service at a local nursing home. The residents were being wheeled into a multi-purpose room complete with couches, television, piano, resident bunny rabbit, and noisy hair salon next door. There was a new person, whom Laura did not recognize from previous visits, seated in the front row by the impromptu communion table.

"What's this all about?" asked the slightly confused resident. "I'm an ordained minister from the United Church and today we are celebrating Communion or the Lord's Supper," replied Laura. "What's Communion?" asked the newcomer. "Well, it's a remembrance of Jesus' last supper and a celebration of our resurrection faith."

"Well, is it a snack?" countered the resident. Laura was pressed for an answer. "A spiritual snack, sure." This seemed to placate the resident and the worship service started with prayers and hymns and a sermon that focused on God's presence throughout our entire lifetime. It was then time for communion, and Laura began with an invitation and a brief

liturgy. Laura recalled moving among the residents, assisted by a nurse, offering Communion by intinction.

Pausing in front of the inquisitive newcomer Laura asked, "Would you like Communion?" "Yes," she replied taking the wafer and dipping it into the cup. The sacrament awakened something deep within this woman who clearly struggled with memory for she seized Laura's forearm, looked clearly into her eyes and said, "Right now, I feel God's love right here—I feel loved. Thank you."

Pastoral Care

It was an unusually warm autumn day in Vancouver and I sat on a Starbucks patio that offered a quiet refuge from the hustle and bustle of Burrard Street. The man who sat across from me looked the image of success, with an Armani suit and confident body language honed over the years through executive leadership. Our conversation began with the broad strokes, safe topics that enabled him to relax and spiral down into the more deep and pressing issues. As we sat talking, his confident body language relaxed into a needy, more child-like posture. His finger traced the outline of a mermaid on his coffee cup, slowly, thoughtfully, reverently. "My company is in serious jeopardy," he confessed, "and my marriage is just hanging on by a thread." Our prayerful conversation continued on, and the hustle and bustle of the streetscape retreated around us. Even here, in post-Christendom Vancouver, pastoral care was being shared between minister and congregant. God is good—all the time.

Why do I love what I love and do what I do? Now I remember. I practise this ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral care in a skeptical and sin-sick world that Jesus died to save. I risk daily being a "fool for Christ" knowing that by prevenient grace, the triune God has already gone ahead to prepare the way. I live and strive to model a vicarious life in the hope that, in the dying and rising of our common life together, God may be glorified and the Kingdom may come.

FROM THE HEART—ABOUT THE HEART OF THE MATTER

SHIVER WITH CHANGE: MYSTERY, BEAUTY, HARD WORK

By Catherine MacLean

I felt the double bass as much as I heard it. The bow drew across the strings and the sound was alive. The music came from behind me, and it seemed to rise through the floor, the way dark creeps up trees after sunset. I shivered. It intoned, lingered, drew me in, repeated. Then the voices began: *Abana in Heaven*, *your will be done . . . Abana in heaven.*

It was Sunday morning. In words and melody from the Synod of the Nile in Egypt, our choir sang the Prayer of Jesus. Mystery, beauty, hard work: it was worship. Grief, wonder, justice, frustration, fear, forgiveness, courage and transformation sifted through the congregation in that stroke of bow on string. I know that because I am privileged to ask people about their souls, their loves, their voting, their addictions, their studies, their politics and their families. This privilege is my vocation—my day job, if you will—an expression of my faith.

Much of my religious life has been about mystery, beauty and hard work. I use the word "religious" intentionally and personally: it binds me, giving me perspective, ethics and purpose. *Abana in Heaven*, *your will be done* doesn't simply happen. Mystery keeps me wondering. Beauty reassures me. Hard work calls energy out of me, and energizes me.

Tides and truth

As a child I watched the tides in the Bay of Fundy. The waves came to the shoreline with shivering, relentless force. They drew across the beach, inching closer to the tide line, covering the shore and then releasing it hours later. I stood in a cottage window with my grandmother, Faith Dorothea, and contemplated the highest tides in the world. It occurred to us that alone in the face of such strength, we humans were insignificant; yet drawing breath from faith, we were a substantial witness to truth.

This is mystery: seeing myself in the matrix of the entire world, powerful and external as it is. Mystery goes deeper when I reflect on the personal connections across the externals. *Abana in Heaven* for instance: I heard that music at the General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches where my Bible Study group included Tharwad

Kades from the Synod of the Nile in Egypt. The shiver of Sunday's music reconnected me with his dilemma and joy in electing an executive leader from Lebanon who would share across political lines. Connections, personal and political, are graced by mystery, beauty and hard work.

Worship should take hard work. After all, the transformation of a region's politics from insular to outward focus takes hard work. The change of a family's frustration to forgiveness takes hard work. The conversion of a world's fear to faith takes hard work. Preparation for worship tests intellect and emotion because I will not take sacred moments for granted.

Ties that bind

The sugar maples on the Gaspé coast are brilliant in the early autumn. The manse in Tide Head, New Brunswick, faces those maples across the Restigouche River, and for five years I drew breath looking at that beauty from the perspective of my settlement charge. Natural beauty is only the beginning, however. People are the substance. One Saturday evening the front doorbell rang at the manse, which was unusual, as local people never used the front door. By the time I opened it with my dog at my side, my next-door neighbour had phoned, a car had stopped, and the RCMP officer who lived up the road had arrived. There were two men at my door, seeking *la presbytère*—the rectory and refuge. We found them refuge.

You can see that they took care of me, these neighbours, gently ensuring that I was safe, without meddling in my independence or ministry. Loving kindness balances connection and solitariness in the art of being a neighbour. It is hard work. Psychologists may call it differentiation, but I find a beauty in it, a respect for the person as is, and a desire to connect. Theologically it's the Trinity, the very nature of God relating and calling us to unite.

I left Tide Head and moved to Yellowknife. After the brilliant autumn reds it took me a long time to notice the quiet pink in the Canadian Shield. One autumn morning though, I walked out the back door of my new manse to the astonishment of pink rock glistening in the frost: sometimes faith speaks in a quiet conversation, a nuance of meaning, a glimpse of God, the shiver of a bow crossing strings. That

same night, the greens and reds of the northern lights took my br eath away. The whole sky was dancing: so metimes faith is a dance with the divine, figuring out how to follow as the rhythm changes.

There is a chill of bitterness in the church these days. The rhythm has changed. Worries about the purpose and futu re of the church and conflicting definitions of ministr y produce anxiety. Our convers ations about how to be faithful agents of change are cr itical. Yet trust ebbs and flows among colleagues, judicatories and congregations: finding trust is like hearing the pulse of music in a new dance, hip hop now instead of the tango. But I am confident: you can't see the moment when the Fundy tide changes direction, but you know that it should, and it will. The beauty of what we evoke, despit e this fretfulness, reminds me that the church has been this way before. We are not alone; we danc e in good company. Life is not found in bitterness: like the tide, bitterness needs to draw back. Like tears, it needs to subside. Then we can find the vulnerable shared sigh that will unite us as we draw breath together. *Abana in Heaven*, *your will be done . . .*

The religious and the bind

The waiter noticed the British cathedra l brochure on our tabl e. We were minding our own business over *blanquettes de veau*, happily engaged in flavour and s auce. He di sturbed my thoughts: "There's a *lot* of religion, isn't there? I mean from way back, from the Angles and the Saxons—they had rough lives and even they made time for religion."

"Are you religious at all?" he asked. "I suppose we are," I answered. "I am a United Church minister and my dining friend is an or ganist. You could say we ar e religious." The organist and I are bound together preparing beauty in Sunday wors hip, seeking perspective through mystery, doing the hard work of ethics and purpose.

Thirty years ago in classes at Ha rvard Divinity School, Wilfred Cantwell Smith told us that the nex t great religious ad venture, the next great cultural conflict, would arise between Christianity and Islam. We quietly bent our heads and took notes. This week on an airplane, I shut off my iPhone and noticed th at the man next to me was finishing his iPhone texts too—in Arabic. How do we prepare for a world we cannot foresee?

In the years preparing *A Song of Faith*, I heard a yearning for theology. Colleagues and congregations long to discuss dilemmas that confound us. Creating congregational principles for integrating interfaith families, for example, is a new challenge for our congregation: we have moved from the conversations about marriages to Roman Catholics to welcoming Baha'i couples and Muslim daughters. What am I learning? I am learning that our unity is truly based in diversity, that articulating difference is as vital as finding common ground. I am learning that we cannot foresee our call, the issues through which we will seek divine guidance. I am learning about making meaning in trust and community.

Mystery, beauty, hard work: back to Sunday morning. The Egyptian music was mysterious. The choir worked hard to learn foreign, difficult, evocative music and the song moved through the congregation with shivers of grief, wonder, justice, frustration, fear, forgiveness, courage and transformation. Toscha Turner, the bass player, drew beauty with her bow. She is a PhD candidate in ethno-musicology and only a month earlier she delivered a baby. We celebrated his baptism in a Ukrainian Catholic Church; together we called on God's grace and welcomed him into mystery, beauty, and the hard work of growing up, growing connections, growing in faith. The mystery of the complexity of Toscha's identity brought fullness to the beauty of her bowing. The beauty motivates our community's hard work to be an outward and visible sign of God's grace in all our realities.

Mystery and beauty are alive, like the pull of a bow across strings. Serving the church across the country, from sea to sea to sea, is my vocation. Seeking the intersection between intellect and heart is a pleasure. Witnessing the connections of scholarship and social movements is motivating. Answering the call, recited in song and rising up in shiver, is hard work. This faith binds me, through shiver and change. In the morning at the tide line I find a charcoal fire. There are fish and bread. And the One standing there says, "Come and have breakfast."

PROFILE

WILBUR HOWARD: A MINISTRY OF ELOQUENT SILENCE

by Adam Kilner

1912 was a leap year. How do I know? I didn't look it up on Wikipedia.org, nor any other online source. I went back to look over my notes on Wilbur Kenneth Howard, who was born on Thursday, February 29 of that year. A handful of years later Howard would begin his childhood and adolescent education at Brock Public School and then Bloor Collegiate, both in Toronto. He then attended Victoria College, graduating with a B.A. in 1938, followed by a B.D. from Emmanuel College in 1941. In 1969 he was awarded the D.D. *honoris causa* from Victoria University.

It was peculiar for a black man, even in Canada in those years, to wend his way through the education system the way Wilbur Howard did, for both his brother and father were railway porters. For people of colour, labouring jobs were the norm. Somehow, the stirrings of *vocatio* (calling) came to a young Wilbur in the form of a white family inviting him to church in the days when it took the arrival of a black man in a white congregation for the congregation to realize it was a segregated institution.

Wilbur Howard was ordained in 1941 by Toronto Conference. He was the first black person to graduate from Emmanuel College, the first black person to be ordained a minister in The United Church of Canada, and eventually the first (and only) black person to be elected moderator.

But, in the 1940s, it was a struggle to find a congregation willing to accept a black man as its minister. So, following his ordination in 1941, Wilbur began his ministry with the Boys' Work Board of Toronto, and from 1949 to 1953 he engaged in the same task in Manitoba. In 1954 he

became the editor for Sunday School Publications in Toronto. It was in 1963 that we can say that our beloved brother Wilbur Howard finally made it as a United Church minister. He became part of the ministry team with the Rev. Douglas Lapp at Dominion-Chalmers United Church in Ottawa in that year. A *Globe and Mail* article later reflected on the significance of his call there:

> "He didn't find a congregation until he was hired to join the pastoral team at Dominion-Chalmers United Church in Ottawa in 1963, more than 20 years after he was ordained . . . The "parochialness of Ontario" prevented Dr. Howard from having his own church ministry, [Rev. Douglas] Lapp said. "Ottawa was supposed to be an international city, but it was really a small town."[1]

Later, in 1971, Howard was called to Emmanuel United Church in Ottawa as pastor. This was his first and only solo ministry, one that would last until his retirement in 1980. A 1974 *United Church Observer* article described Howard's routine during that time:

> Dr. Howard lives simply. He gets up at six, takes a three— or four mile walk, then comes home for orange juice, whole wheat toast and coffee. He doesn't have to cook many evening meals for himself, for he is often invited to dinner in the homes of his flock. When he does have a free evening, he likes to write, listen to music, read or see a play or movie.[2]

It was at the mid-point of his ministry with Emmanuel United Church that Wilbur arrived at the 1974 General Council meeting in Guelph, Ontario, as a candidate for moderator. It was following the fifth ballot that the scrutineer chair, Mrs. J.M.S. Thomson of Toronto, reported:

> "It is my pleasure to announce to you that the Rev. Wilbur Howard . . ." She was drowned out by cheers. Dr. Howard was surrounded in the aisle and cheered to the front, where Dr. [Bruce] McLeod embraced him and draped him in his own black gown and the stole of office—but reminded him to return the gown.[3]

1 Sandra Martin, *The Globe and Mail*. 21 April 2001.
2 *The United Church Observer*. October 1974.
3 *The United Church Observer*. October 1974, 13.

After the announcement of his election as the Church's 26th Moderator, he told the commissioners a story about an early disappointment in ministry, a story reported by *The United Church Observer*:

> He was sent by the Ontario Religious Education Council to consult with a church committee in an Ontario city. The restaurant where he was directed for dinner refused to serve him because of his colour. The local chairman wrote after his visit: "Wilbur Howard may be all right, but there is no point in keeping him if he is not accepted."
> "Today," [Howard] said, "is a high moment of acceptance."[4]

Anne Squire, a lay member of Wilbur's congregation, and later a moderator in her own right (1986-1988), commented, "Everyone knew he meant acceptance not just as a moderator, but as a black moderator."[5] Howard would later tell the Montreal Gazette about his election as moderator: "It gives you a great deal of confidence in the church. You feel the support of people. You feel that, well, people are able to look for someone who may have a contribution, and they match the job with the man they want."[6] *The Observer* noted that Dr. Howard was not only the first black person to graduate from Emmanuel College, and be ordained as a minister, but also was "the first non-white to be chosen" and "the first bachelor" to serve as moderator, and the first to preside for three years.[7]

The Observer also recognized the impact of a thoroughly relational ministry. Wilbur connected with people:

> "Two sentences [Howard] said at Boys' Parliament stuck in my mind for years. They were responsible for my going into ministry," said the Rev. George Clifford, Cornwall, Ont., and Montreal and Ottawa Conference president.
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> "I was a young guy in Boys' Parliament and YPU in Manitoba when Wilbur was C.E. Secretary," says the Rev. R.S. (Bud) Harper, Saskatchewan Conference Executive Secretary. He spent a lot of time with us, and for a lot of us had a major influence. He's part of the reason I'm in the ministry."[8]

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4 *Montreal Gazette*. Friday, 23 August, 1974.
5 *Montreal Gazette*. Friday, 23 August, 1974.
6 *Montreal Gazette*. Friday, 23 August, 1974.
7 *The United Church Observer*. October 1974, 12.
8 *The United Church Observer*. October 1974, 13.

Wilbur Howard's congregational ministry continued during his time as moderator. He led worship two Sundays of every month at Emmanuel in Ottawa. Much of Howard's life outside the office of moderator is unknown to the public because he carried out his ministry with little fanfare. Yet his pastoral influence was more than prosaic. Anne Squire recalled the influence of Dr. Howard on the work she was doing on the role of women in the church:

> . . . He was my chief support and encourager as I entered into debate about the role of laypersons in the church and especially about the role of women. It was while he was Moderator that these two items were high on the agenda of the General Council. He knew, although not many others did, that I was one of the two persons who had written the document that went to the Calgary Council about the role of women in the church, including the need for inclusive language.

Wilbur drew on the Holy Spirit not only for his personal strength and self-control, but also for the inspiration of sisters and brothers in every ministry to which God called him. He was an instrument in God's hands to motivate diverse individuals to get involved with ministry and to really use the gifts and dreams that God had nurtured in their hearts.

The Very Reverend Doctor Wilbur Kenneth Howard retired from pastoral ministry in 1980, was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in the early 1990s, and moved into Chester Village, a retirement home, where he became unofficial chaplain.[9] In 1991 he received the Order of Ontario – Ontario's most prestigious honour for one of its citizens. Wilbur received this honour alongside another of our memorable moderators, Lois Wilson (first female Moderator, 1980-1982).

Wilbur died of Parkinson's disease on Tuesday, April 17, 2001, at Grace Hospital in Toronto. His gentle resistance to the systemic mentality of white privilege (and even supremacy) in church and society was remembered widely. The Toronto City Council "rose and observed a moment of silence in memory of the late Rt. Rev. Wilbur Howard."[10]

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9 Leslie Scrivener, *The Toronto Star.* 18 April 2001.

10 Jeffrey A. Abrams, *Letter from Acting City Clerk of Toronto to General Secretary Virginia Coleman,* 12 June 2001.

A Strategy of Prophetic Silence

The understated quality of Wilbur Howard's personality frequently surprised people. In her memorial tribute to Howard, Anne Squire noted:

> Wilbur Howard was an enigma: a very shy and diffident person who could hold audiences in the palm of his hand; a taciturn listener who would greet unwelcome questions with a deafening silence; a committee member to all appearances asleep in a meeting who could break through the posturing with an intervention with a cutting edge; a preacher who could change a solemn moment into a hilarious one with one of his famous one-liners.[11]

During his term as moderator, Wilbur visited South Africa and, as the October 1975 Observer commented, the authorities were surprised to find that the moderator of the United Church was a black man. Despite being the spiritual leader of half a million Christian people in Canada's largest Protestant denomination, *apartheid* conditions sometimes overruled respect and he experienced treatment as a *nigger,* eating restaurant meals at the back door. It is notable that he himself mentioned nothing of such humiliation.

Because Wilbur was engaged in ministry while the Civil Rights movement was bubbling in the United States, it is difficult to think of his public ministry without comparing it with that of Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks and others who were outspoken activists and became attractive subjects, as well as targets, of media attention. Wilbur Howard, on the other hand, seemed to be just quiet as if his skin colour, as a man of colour, was statement enough for anyone.

People around Wilbur usually did more of the talking than he did. He was a social justice advocate, but he did not speak often of social injustices. He seemed to believe that it was important for one's actions to speak for themselves. This isn't to say that he was completely silent, but rather that he was more interested in observing than in jumping to dramatic conclusions. But his prophetic toolbox was not empty, containing both silence and understatement, as well as his characteristic

11 Anne M. Squire, "A Tribute to the Very Reverend Wilbur K. Howard." A copy was sent to me by Dr. Squire with the handwritten note "for a Memorial Service at Emmanuel."

charm, often expressed in the form of humour. He had spiritual depth—a quiet, eloquent presence, like that of a simple prayer.

The silence was present publicly as Wilbur confronted the fact that no pastoral charge would accept him when he was ordained in 1941. The silence was present some twenty-odd years later when he was received into his first congregational ministry at Dominion-Chalmers. The silence was present as Howard declared his electoral success by saying, "Today is a high moment of acceptance," because he could have said so much more.[12]

A remarkable example of his charm and conciliatory nature is evident in the way he handled frustrations and anger at the 1974 General Council meeting: "New commissioners especially were upset when old hands blocked debate before it began, by procedural motions," and the air conditioning and microphones in the meeting hall weren't working. It took two hours to move through the registration line. Someone observed, "God must be at some other conference this week."[13] It seemed that the whole council was going down in flames. But "when council reconvened that afternoon, Dr. Howard asked for a time of quiet and prayer. 'Some of us are angry . . . some are anxious,' he prayed. 'Let the tension drip from our fingertips . . . Help us to be where we are.'"[14]

One person claimed that the prayer was "like soothing lotion on a sunburn" and that this prayer was the catalyst for a changed mood at the council. That was Dr. Howard's charm—the employment of his gentle gifts for the sake of keeping the good news of Jesus Christ at the centre of affairs in a world of impatience and prejudice.

Assessment

Did Wilbur Howard's leadership in the United Church cause attitudes to change? Did his leadership cause the floodgates to open for people of colour? About this, I don't know. But what really matters to me about Wilbur Howard's public ministry is that his gifts of quiet respect, understatement, charm and humour resulted in his own acceptance by white colleagues and congregants, and that his adoption of silence rather

12 *The United Church Observer*. October 1974, 12.
13 Ibid, 13.
14 Ibid.

than shouting as a strategy of advancement made him an effective leader in the Canada of his day, a Canada that was prejudiced against, if not hostile to, black folk.

At the end of September I was returning from an intercultural conference in the United States. In order to get the cheapest flight possible, my flights both there and back had three stops and took eight to ten hours. One stop on the way back was in Denver. When I got on the plane heading to Calgary my seatmate, a woman of about seventy, commented, "I'm just glad you made it through security!" to which I responded, "Well, I'm glad you made it through too!" At this time I was sporting a beard, and so wasn't surprised, but I was upset when she said, "Well, you're more likely not to have made it through security!" I was thinking of saying to her, "Are you saying that pastors are more likely to be terrorists?" But I kept my witty comments to myself. After all, I was in the United States, it was Saturday and I was preaching in the morning; I just didn't want to chance doing anything that would get me on a no-fly list.

Dr. Howard's ministry has made me reflective about the strategic uses of silence! Indeed, I have been reflecting on his peculiar use of silence, and his strangeness, and I am certain that there is a correlation between my silence on that plane and my extensive research on the man. I think what he has really done is remind privileged Caucasians that we people of colour—Asian, First Nations, Black, or Hispanic—are thinking human beings who seek to serve God, and that social justice isn't always a matter of who makes the most noise. A lot depends on the Spirit of God hovering above the waters of chaos.

A Sense of Legacy

The United Church places an image of Wilbur Howard on its website during Black History Month, as he is the most high-profile black member the Church has ever had. The reason I first started searching for information about him was because I saw his image on the website as well as his portrait on the Moderators Wall in the General Council Office. I thought to myself, *Wow, another black person in the United Church! That surely is a miracle!* Despite my excitement over his transformative

role in the Church, it seems to me that we have largely forgotten our dear brother.

Wilbur Howard's legacy for me, personally, is recognition that diversity in the local congregation is a gift of the Holy Spirit. In the Book of Acts, the Holy Spirit startles Jewish pilgrims from all over the Mediterranean by allowing them to hear Galilean Jews proclaim the good news of Jesus in their own local languages. The Holy Spirit makes a second move later in the book of Acts by pouring out the grace of redemption on Gentiles. Today we seem to think we can control the untamable Holy Spirit by offering "racial justice workshops" to people of every racial background to make sure they aren't racists, but that wasn't the strategy of Wilbur Howard. His strategy was one of steadying, gentle presence and quiet wisdom. His strategy as a child of grace was to be gracious, even to those who hate. His strategy was to offer prayer to the God who reconciles all things "by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." (Colossians 1:20) Wilbur Howard made the best out of almost impossible circumstances.

BOOK REVIEWS

The view from MURNEY TOWER: Salem Bland, the Late-Victorian Controversies, and the Search for a New Christianity.

Richard Allen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008) xxxvii, 524 pp. $80.00.

In an era that tends to declare a significant new insight as a paradigm shift or the latest technological change as one that will profoundly reshape human life—in other words, in an era that overuses superlatives—this work by Richard Allen genuinely deserves the term "great," or "magisterial." Two phenomena make this book great: (a) Allen's skill as a writer and the breadth of his scholarship, and (b) the insights and inspiration Salem Bland can provide to those who carry out congregational ministry in the twenty-first century.

Salem Bland (1859-1950) was a Methodist, later United Church, minister who sought to take seriously the challenges—intellectual, theological, and social—of his time. Unswervingly committed to Christianity, he also recognized that the "evangelical Christianity of mid-nineteenth-century Methodism" (xv) would not serve an age wrestling with "the impacts of evolution, the higher criticism of the Bible, the rise of sociology, historicism, and new thought" (xviii) as well as the social and political effects of Canada's rapid industrialization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As a pastoral minister, theological college professor, key figure in the social gospel in Canada, and (in his later years) columnist for *The Toronto Star*, Bland attracted admiration and opposition. This book looks at approximately the first half of Bland's life and is the first part of a two volume biography.

Allen's scholarship impresses. As a means of immersing himself in his subject matter, Allen read every work Bland had read that had informed Bland's development as a minister and a thinker. This approach was possible because Bland's extensive papers included thirty years of his annual "reading list." Allen also canvassed scholarly assessments of the economic, social, intellectual, and religious history of Canada during this period, as well as studies of Methodism and of the development of theology in mainline Protestantism during the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth.

The depth of Allen's research shows in his careful and thoughtful consideration of Bland's life and work and in the way Allen sets Bland in the context of his time. What makes this book particularly appealing is Allen's careful but creative approach to writing Bland's biography. On the basis of his life-long interest and research in Bland, and his knowledge of Bland's life via the latter's papers and other writings, Allen creatively "constructs" or "re-imagines" Bland's thoughts and approach in particular situations. As a result Bland and his contemporaries become marvellously alive and present to a reader. The book reads well! Biography was somewhat downplayed as a medium for presenting critical historical thought for much of the latter half of the twentieth century. Fortunately, Allen chose to ignore that earlier trend and to add this biography to other recent ones in Canadian religious history.

This book offers many gifts to Canadian historians, particularly to those interested in religious, social, or intellectual history. For ministry personnel of any denomination, it offers another gift. Bland began his ministry in the 1880s, when old certainties in theology, sociology, and history were giving way, and when Canada was experiencing immense political, social, and economic change. The path forward was uncertain. While deeply committed to what he understood to be the essentials of the Christian tradition, he tried to read the tenor of the times and to re-shape his inherited Christian tradition so it could speak to those changed times. Bland represents, in my view, a marvellous example of a minister with an active pastoral imagination, with the capacity to look at ministry, pastoral care (in the broadest sense of that term), and society in a time of profound change and to see how current understandings needed to be re-shaped. In that sense, Bland is a figure who can stimulate ministerial imaginations in the early twenty-first century. It is not, of course, that we should make his solutions ours, for we live in a very different time, a time of transition from modernity to post-modernity. It is Bland's approach, his *modus operandi*, that could stimulate our imaginations.

The book's Prologue includes Allen's thorough review of Canadian religious historiography over the past few decades. This section may prove rather eye-glazing for a general reader. That said, the opening and closing parts of the Prologue are crucial to read, for in those parts Allen outlines Bland's significance and sets Bland in the wider intellectual and

theological context of the era, information crucial for fully appreciating this account of Bland's life. At $80.00, this book is not cheap; fortunately, it is worth the price.

John H. Young,
Queen's Theological College,
Kingston, Ontario

Just Hospitality: God's Welcome in a World of Difference
Letty M. Russell (J. Shannon Clarkson and Kate M. Ott, eds. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

"I understand hospitality as the practice of God's welcome, embodied in our actions as we reach across difference to participate with God in bringing justice and healing to our world in crisis." So begins the recently published volume of Dr. Letty Russell's lecture notes and research on the subject of hospitality. Compiled and edited after her death in 2007, *Just Hospitality* weaves together Russell's scriptural interpretations, personal reflections, and vision for the unfolding mission of the Church.

From the outset, the author gleefully describes herself as a "misfit," perpetually on the margins of institutional Christianity. She identifies strongly with the inclusive approaches of feminist and post-colonial theologies. Yet, as an academic, she also identifies herself as an "outsider within"—someone who understands the perspective of the marginalized, who is nonetheless in a position to draw attention to situations of oppression and exclusion.

Historically, argues Russell, when the Church has called attention to difference it has resulted in oppression. During periods of imperialistic expansion, strangers to Christianity have been devalued and proselytized. She identifies this tendency with a perversion of the doctrine of election, fostered by scriptural misinterpretations. For example, Russell argues that an exclusivist misreading of Exodus and Joshua helped the church view itself not only as "chosen," but also as "conquering," seeking to suppress difference, rather than celebrate it.

Difference, however, cannot be suppressed; it must be liberated to provide opportunity for genuine encounter. Returning to scripture, Russell cites the biblical story of the Tower of Babel as an example of God's enriching "gift of difference" within creation. Subsequently, at Pentecost, God bestows another gift—understanding. Through Christ, the Spirit's gift is a new living unity that challenges the otherwise pale inclination toward uniformity with the colour of diverse culture, language and expression.

The major challenge facing the Church, according to Russell, is a lasting colonial mindset, which sees the other as "less than", or perhaps so different as to render one mute. Disciples of Christ, however, have a responsibility to embrace difference and recognize "the other" as a child of God. Crediting Rebecca Todd Peters, Russell calls the Church to acknowledge the inhospitality of its ancestors, to challenge its historical understanding of the Great Commission as a call to a global Christian empire, and to reach out in partnership with others. Any presumption of uniformity must be abandoned. The complexity of identity and difference is even greater in a globalized Church where cultures, languages and values overlap.

Russell speaks passionately and often about the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Africa and the hybrid challenges it presents. An HIV-positive woman in Ethiopia faces considerable exclusion, not only because of the stigma of infection, but because of systemic sexism, racism and classism. Russell asserts, "There will be no solution to poverty or to HIV/AIDS unless we begin to eliminate the patriarchal structures of domination that collude with poverty to multiply the oppression of countless women and families." The mechanism for doing so will not be the result of Western ingenuity, but active listening and shared experience.

With hope, the author describes the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians established in the 1980s as a forum for the free and safe exchange of ideas and personal reflection. Partnership with the Yale Divinity School Women's Initiative on HIV/AIDS in Africa resulted in mutual support, knowledge and experience. Russell holds this up as an example of how the Church can combat unhelpful and often paternalistic Western views she feels have dominated the response to HIV/AIDS in Africa.

Ultimately, calling on the Church to embrace human difference not as a challenge but as a gift, Russell proposes a new hermeneutic lens through which to view God's vision for all Creation. More than a cheery smile at the door, *Just Hospitality* is aware of power quotients, the perspective of the outsider, and God's unfolding promise. It moves beyond *caring* for the stranger, and seeks *solidarity* with those on the margins.

Just Hospitality is more than a compilation of the thoughts and notes of a loved and celebrated educator; it is a call to genuine and just living. With generosity and grace, Russell's concept of hospitality calls us beyond the dialectic of identity and otherness, toward the unity and liberty of Christ. As disciples, we are called not only to see Christ in everyone we meet, but to seek him even in those we don't yet know.

Andrew O'Neill,
Oak Bay Pastoral Charge, New Brunswick

Harvesting the Fruits: Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue

Cardinal Walter Kasper (New York and London: Continuum, 2009)

In this book Cardinal Kasper, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, "harvests the fruits" of more than forty years of ecumenical dialogues among Roman Catholics and some other western Christian traditions. He believes we have achieved "more than we could have imagined or dreamed forty years ago," while admitting that we are far from the goal of full Christian unity, and have reached only an intermediate stage. He focuses here on international bilateral dialogues of Roman Catholics with Reformed, Lutherans, Anglicans and Methodists, from 1967 to the present. The book is written from a Catholic perspective and does not deal with other significant dialogues, for example Anglican-Lutheran, Lutheran-Reformed, or the many other bilateral dialogues of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

Most of the documents referenced here are non-binding study papers meant to facilitate reception of dialogue results among the churches. Some are weightier than others and some are officially signed. For example, the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ)* was formally signed by the Catholic Church and the World Lutheran Federation in 1999. The World Methodist Council issued a *Statement of Association with the Joint Declaration* in 2006. Also, the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) has achieved major consensus, authoritatively endorsed, on many contentious doctrinal issues.

Kasper happily reports agreement among the Roman Catholic and all four of the dialogue partners on the "fundamentals of our common faith," including adherence to the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed. He notes confidently that "there is fundamental consensus about the Trinity . . . There is also consensus on Jesus Christ, God's Incarnate Son, our Lord and Saviour. What we share in faith is therefore much more than what divides us." (28) He does note briefly, however, that, since the Enlightenment, the binding character of the creeds, or some elements of them (e.g. the virginal conception of Christ) are called into question by some dialogue partners. Moreover, even the divinity and the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ are sometimes questioned. Here he acknowledges the more substantive divisions occurring within the churches, cutting across traditional denominational lines, i.e., the divisions among conservative evangelicals, liberals, liberationists, etc., who can be found represented in all the churches, even the Roman Catholic.

The most significant ecumenical breakthrough, as noted above, was surely the *JDDJ,* in which, after nearly 500 years, Lutherans and Roman Catholics agreed on salvation by grace alone and justification by faith. Thus the mutual condemnations of the Council of Trent and the Lutheran confessions are seen no longer to apply. Kasper considers this "a very important step on the road to full communion." (44) The Reformed-Catholic and ARCIC dialogues reached very similar conclusions.

Kasper points out that ecclesiology is the central issue in ecumenical dialogue today. He rejoices in the convergence (though not full agreement) that has developed among the dialogue partners regarding

scripture and tradition, ordination and episcopal ministry. Remarkably, even on the matter of "Petrine ministry" or universal primacy, some openness was found in all of the dialogues, and notable convergence among Roman Catholics and Anglicans. ARCIC could speak of "the need for a universal primacy exercised by the Bishop of Rome as a sign and safeguard of unity within a re-united Church." (134) Considerable disagreement remains, however, on what such a primacy would mean, especially regarding "infallibility."

A fundamental obstacle to unity surely arises from the Roman Catholic Church's insistence that "the Church of Christ subsists in (*subsit in)* the Catholic Church, i.e., the Church is concretely, fully, permanently and effectively realised in communion with the successor of Peter and the bishops in communion with him." (*Unitatis Redintegratio,* Vatican II) (153) This would seem to imply that the other churches should renounce their history as "churches" and recognize the Roman Catholic Church as the normative church. This is hardly softened by the recognition of John Paul II that the Word of God and sacraments and other gifts of grace are found in them, and that therefore "to the extent that these elements are found in other Christian communities the one Church of Christ is effectively present in them." (*Ut Unum Sint)* (154)

Kasper finally deals with complex issues around sacraments. He notes the mutual recognition of baptism in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and general agreement on the nature of baptism as a means of grace. Through baptism, the Catholic Church and "Christian communities" already enjoy a certain measure of ecclesial communion. On the eucharist, most notably, substantial agreement has been reached among Roman Catholics and Anglicans (through ARCIC) on the issue of real presence, and this has official acknowledgment by church authorities. The term "transubstantiation" has been deemed optional as a way of expressing that "in the power of the Holy Spirit the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ through the creative word." (ARCIC) (182) Considerable convergence about memorial and sacrifice exists among all the dialogue partners, though Lutherans, Reformed and Methodists continue to have various disagreements with the Roman Catholic doctrine of real presence and the practice of reservation of the eucharistic elements.

Kasper notes briefly that important differences remain among the churches on anthropological and ethical issues such as marriage and family, human sexuality and bioethics. (44) Indeed, it would seem to be less difficult to find convergence between Roman Catholic doctrine and various Protestant doctrinal orthodoxies than to resolve practical differences regarding birth control, abortion, homosexuality, women's ordination and clerical celibacy. Perhaps ecumenical dialogue needs now to shift decisively into these areas.

Meanwhile, this is a valuable, readable resource for anyone wishing to know the state of formal ecumenical relations between the Roman Catholic and other western churches.

Harold Wells
Emmanuel College, Toronto

The Political Dimension of Reconciliation: A Theological Analysis of Ways of Dealing with Guilt during the Transitions to Democracy in South-Africa and Germany

Ralf K. Wüstenberg (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009)

As more and more countries experience transitions from authoritarian political structures to democracy, the role that reconciliation plays in such political processes has become an issue of great debate. Over the past decade there has been a growing body of research into the roles that religion and theology play in shaping concepts of reconciliation in politics. Ralf K. Wüstenberg's recent work, *The Political Dimension of Reconciliation: A Theological Analysis of Ways of Dealing with Guilt during the Transitions to Democracy in South-Africa and Germany*, contributes to this burgeoning field of study.

Wüstenberg is Director of the Institute for Protestant Theology and Visiting Professor for Systematic Theology at the Free University in Berlin. *The Political Dimension of Reconciliation,* an English translation of his *habilitation* at the University of Heidelberg, attempts to combine

empirical research with systematic theology. The theological aspects focus on the role of guilt and reconciliation in political transitional processes, while the empirical study compares South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), that dealt with the legacy of apartheid, with East Germany's Investigation Commission of the German Parliament (EK), that dealt with human rights abuses that occurred between 1945 and the fall of the Berlin wall. These case studies were chosen because they challenge the traditional Western separation of theology and politics, and they provide Wüstenberg a forum to examine theological reconciliation in a political arena. Wüstenberg summarizes the book's guiding premise: "Do words like forgiveness, guilt, animosity, friendship, also occupy common ground with politics and theology when it comes to categories of reconciliation?" (xviii) In other words, is there any commonality between theological reconciliation and political reconciliation?

Wüstenberg divides his discussion into three distinct parts. Part One focuses on the methodological aspects of his study. He outlines both his case study approach (situating theology in political reality) and his interpretation of the relationship between theology and political reconciliation as a hermeneutical circle. Part Two deals with each case study in turn, with the explicit focus on examining the political language used to express reconciliation. (1) The first case study is the TRC, followed by theological observations named the "Theological Interlude." He then examines the EK, but curiously does not provide the same detailed theological analysis. The third and final part of the book provides an analysis of the theological implications of using religious language, like reconciliation, in a political arena, and the subsequent consequences for the life of the church.

To answer the question of whether concepts related to reconciliation possess the same meaning in the political realm and the theological realm, Wüstenberg focuses on concepts such as truth- telling, forgiveness and making amends, and contrasts them with biblical concepts of reconciliation. He also draws on Dietrich Bonhoeffer's work to consider a concept of justice that arises theologically.

Wüstenberg concludes that political reconciliation for nations experiencing transitions is distinct from theological reconciliation. "It can

be asserted that political reconciliation as the growing together of a nation does not appear to have a basic connection to theological reconciliation." (262) This leads into a discussion on how to reconstruct reconciliation in the political arena. For Wüstenberg, theology needs to make room for politics when it comes to atonement, guilt and reconciliation—that is, theological reconciliation cannot trump the formal structures of justice embedded in the political sphere. However, he claims that it is in interpersonal reconciliation that both national and theological reconciliation can come together. Curiously, Wüstenberg does not go on to make the corresponding argument that politics needs to make room for theological understandings of reconciliation. Instead, he is silent, for example, on the contribution that the theological concept of restorative justice might make if introduced into a formal system of justice.

As someone working in the area of religion and conflict resolution, I found Wüstenberg's argument thought-provoking, well researched and coherent. His book provides a sophisticated discussion of the interaction of theological and political concepts, and interestingly compares the well-known TRC with the little-known EK. At times the writing unhappily evidences its academic provenance as a *habilitationschrift*. Consequently, I would not recommend this book for inclusion in a course on religion and conflict resolution or for undergraduate students generally. Nonetheless, it makes an important contribution to the debate about the role theology, and specifically theological conceptions of reconciliation, can play in countries experiencing transitions to democracy.

Megan Shore
King's University College, The University of Western Ontario

The Tao of Liberation: Exploring the Ecology of Transformation
Mark Hathaway and Leonardo Boff, foreword by Fritjof Capra (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2009)

Leonardo Boff is a well-known Brazilian liberation theologian who has written more than one hundred books on subjects ranging from eco-

justice to critical examinations of the Roman Catholic Church. Mark Hathaway is a Canadian author and educator who researches interconnections among ecology, economics, social justice, spirituality, and cosmology. Together they have extended Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics*, a study in which the cosmic principle of order that provides the common ground of the cosmos, known as "Tao," serves as a lens to examine scientific, economic and ecological practices in the current era. The agenda of this present book is to help readers recognize a cosmic imperative for balance and life-giving thought and work in both local and global enterprises.

This book is a challenging read. It is not only technically difficult for those with little scientific background, but also content-heavy. The authors begin with an inventory of crises facing existence in the 21st century, including the pathology of global systems of governance and economics, ecological and gender issues, and the overall paralysis of the world's people and systems to recognize the need for change. At the core of mass ennui, claim the authors, is a loss or a misunderstanding of cosmological reality that constantly exerts creative force to reassert balance in a world that is running out of time. Subsequently, the authors also describe the interrelatedness of all life in the world at every stratum, from the subatomic to the cosmic.

Much of this examination paints fabulous pictures for the imagination, as the mind behind the reading eye is brought to bear on a concept of evolution that is not "bloody of tooth and claw." Instead, it involves subtle interconnections of cooperation and intimacy, as if parts of creation are "in love" with other parts. The authors describe the way in which electrons, once making contact, remain forever imprinted and somehow "attached" to one another, even if they never "meet again." They also articulate a somewhat Jungian concept of memory, suggesting that rather than being an internal storage mechanism, the brain "tunes in" to an external source consisting of resonating "morphic fields," where memory is stored on a subatomic level in eternity. They tell us that the bulk of existence is "nothing," a great vacuum that is the most powerful force in the universe, and that some subatomic events do not actually exist until one "looks" at them. Boff and Hathaway are telling us, in great

detail, that which the astronomer James Jeans said eighty years ago: "The universe begins to look more like a great thought than a great machine."

At first glance, a Christian reader might be taken aback by the rather thin biblical references, or wonder why the authors did not orient their work to a concept coherent with Judaeo-Christian traditions, such as Wisdom. However, by using the Buddhist concept of the Tao as a unifying principle, the authors have chosen to appeal to the broadest possible audience. Christians can recognize in the text theological concepts such as creation out of nothing (*creatio nihilo*), the omnipresence of the divine (providence), the suffering nature of the divine (*kenosis*), the understanding of human purpose, and eschatology, as well as many concepts congruent with Christian faith.

There are times when the authors seem to miss their own mark. For instance, they understand the story of the Great Flood as meant to bring us to the realization that humanity must learn to live peacefully, rather than exploitatively, with the earth, and warn that there will be no ark to rescue us in the future. They might have been able to make a better connection with their own point of departure: all forms of existence are interconnected and interdependent, part of a great whole that is affected by human decision and action. In addition, the anthropology of the book (humans are essentially "good") seems naive in view of the historical reality that the first third of the book describes in depressing detail. As one reads that societies closer to agriculture and marginal living tend to more peaceful ways of life, for instance, one may wonder about the development of the Aztectlan culture, the Apache warrior traditions, and the Japanese ninjutsu martial arts.

In the end, though, the insightful reader will have no trouble finding parallels, information, and insight that will encourage fresh visions of nature, human nature and God. Reading this book might not change one's life, but it might very well change the way in which one sees humans in relationship to the world.

David Zub,
Tottenham/ Rich Hill Pastoral Charge, Ontario

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Editorial inquiries
Touchstone
c/o Emmanuel College
75 Queen's Park Crescent E
Toronto ON M5S 1K7
Phone: (416) 546-9088
Email: peter.wyatt@utoronto.ca

Subscriptions
Touchstone
4094 Tomken Rd.
Mississauga, ON L4W 1J5
Phone: (905) 273-9505
Email: revjohn.hogman@bellnet.ca

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Touchstone hopes to encourage theological dialogue through using these insert pages to publish reader's comments on articles in each prior number. Here are two communications, the first in response to the profile of the late Kenneth Hamilton (Sept. 2010), from Andrew O'Neill, and the other in response to an article in the January 2010 number, from John Buttars.

Until recently, I knew Kenneth Hamilton only as the author of an excellent critique of Paul Tillich's *Systematic Theology*, which I found very helpful in my research on the great 20th century theologian. John McTavish's reminiscences of Hamilton in the September issue of *Touchstone* were compelling and personal. I envy those who had the chance to know such an apparently delightful and devoted pastor, scholar and educator. Hamilton's passion for the Gospel shines through both his criticisms of Tillich's system building, and the respectful tone with which he concludes his arguments in *The System and the Gospel* (1963).

Many found fault with Tillich's correlation of philosophy and religion, ontology and theology. Hamilton's unique contribution was to highlight Tillich's departure from the historical traditions of Christian theology, arguing that his systematic and apologetic approach confines and overwhelms the *kerygma* of the Gospel. Indeed, Tillich makes few references to scripture or the Church Fathers in the *Systematic Theology*, takes great liberty interpreting the doctrines of the Church Councils, and employs frequently impenetrable philosophical language and concepts.

And yet, there are other perspectives to consider. Though he clearly borrows from the tradition of German Idealism, Tillich in no way intends a "synthesis" of philosophy and theology, or to circumscribe God through systematization. He insists at the outset of the *Systematic Theology* that philosophy is only capable of helping theology to pose the deepest questions of existence, and that both are ultimately insufficient to describe God and God's revelation.

We also might take a step further back than Tillich. Since the first publication of Hamilton's critique, scholarship on German Idealism has undergone significant transformation. Critical translations and authoritative commentary among English-speaking philosophers has reinvigorated the formerly sclerotic view of the history of thought from Kant to Hegel. Of particular note is the reconsideration of Hegel's dialectic, which has been impoverished by being reduced to mere "synthesis."

As a result, our understanding of Tillich's use of dialectic, particularly as demonstrated in the method of correlation, warrants reconsideration. Correlation is a broad term that Tillich employs to accomplish two very different tasks: to describe the *essential* basis of the relationship between divine Creator and creature; and to describe the *existential* means by which humanity is reconciled with the Creator. Equivocation in the *Systematic Theology* sometimes causes confusion, but ultimately the method of correlation is a lens—a way of seeing that what lies at the foundation of our being is also what is revealed to us by God, and what is lifted up at the last through the history of salvation.

For Hamilton in the 1960s, and for many since, the very idea of a theological system is foolish—at odds with the mystery and spontaneity of God. However, we should also note that one of the central features of Tillich's approach is his refusal to put limits on God. Concepts like Being and non-being, ultimate concern, and Spiritual Presence, give other language to our theology, but purposefully avoid complete comprehension. Tillich is no more guilty of

theological hubris than any of us who trade easily in the language of transcendence, resurrection, and even God. In fact, the human inability to comprehend revelation is at the heart of Tillich's approach.

I remain inspired by Hamilton's example of wrestling with Tillich's *Systematic Theology* even though he found it wanting. Surely to engage with and attempt to repair such a monumental work is a tribute to his skill and spirit. With many others, I am indebted to Hamilton for the quality of his critique, and his passion for theology.

Andrew O'Neill

For as long as I was in active ministry, I squirmed over Remembrance Day. I wanted to honour the men and women who had sacrificed so much. I hated. . .and hate. . .militarism and have a somewhat adverse reaction to too boisterous militarism, although I love Canada dearly.

Now that I am retired and can attend other churches, I understand more clearly why I got so much criticism on the way I handled Remembrance Day. One United Church service I attended was really a Legion service and others have been milder versions. And I say this not to disparage the Legion, only to acknowledge my sense of the separation of church and state. For instance, I am not particularly comfortable with flags in the sanctuary. Several months ago, I agreed to lead worship in St. Marks' United in Dundas, only to have my heart fall when I realized it would be the Sunday before Remembrance Day. Susanne VanderLugt's article on the tradition of the art of dying came as a godsend. And the people of St. Mark's did something that sent shivers up and down my spine. The bell choir played The Last Post and Reveille on the hand bells. It was beautiful and even though I am not totally comfortable singing O Canada in a worship service, I sang it with feeling and deep gratitude. It was amazing to me how the change of a musical instrument altered how the same notes were heard in my spirit.

In the sermon, I relied heavily on Susanne VanderLugt's article and it had a deep effect on the listeners. I would not even know how many had heard of the art of dying tradition but the listeners included more than one family dealing with critical illness plus an older woman wearing a silver cross given to her after her husband's death in World War II.

Thank you for publishing this article and even more to Susanne for bringing it to our attention.

John Buttars

Contributors

Kate Crawford serves First-St. Andrew's United Church in London and is enjoying learning a new city with Sophie the Wonderdog.

Rob Fennell teaches theology at the Atlantic School of Theology, is the father of two boys and recently became a Scout leader.

Adam Kilner recently graduated from Emmanuel College, was ordained and settled on the Bentley-Blackfalds Pastoral Charge in Alberta.

Ross Lockhart serves West Vancouver United Church and recently completed his D. Min. at McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago.

Catherine MacLean serves St. Paul's United Church in Edmonton and was a United Church delegate to the Uniting General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

Hugh Reid serves Kingsway-Lambton United Church in Toronto and, in moments of respite, is an avid golfer.

Bruce Sanguin serves Canadian Memorial United Church in Vancouver and recently authored *If Darwin Prayed: Prayers for Evolutionary Mystics.*

Judith Visser serves St. Andrew's United Church in Sudbury, is president of Manitou Conference, and enjoys spending holidays with her grandchildren.

Michael Wilson serves Charleswood United Church in Winnipeg and also teaches homiletics at the University of Winnipeg.

Patricia Wright is Director of Music at Metropolitan United Church in Toronto and an adjunct Professor of Organ at Emmanuel College and the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music.