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Chopping Down the Christmas Tree

Josephine Williams Murphy

Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice;  
let the sea and what fills it resound;  
let the plains be joyful and all that is in them!  
Then shall all the trees of the forest exult  
before the Lord, for he comes;  
for he comes to rule the earth.  
He shall rule the world with justice  
and the peoples with his constancy.

Psalms 96



# Amid the darkness, hold fast to light of hope: pope

By Cindy Wooden

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Christian hope is not the same as being optimistic about the future, but is knowing that whatever dark or frightening things are going on in one’s life, God is there offering protection and light, Pope Francis said.

Holding his general audience in the Vatican audience hall decorated with Nativity scenes and Christmas ornaments from the state of Queretaro, Mexico, Pope Francis announced Dec. 7 that he was beginning a series of audience talks about hope. Especially during Advent and in preparation for Christmas, he

urged people to read the second half of the Book of Isaiah, “the great prophet of Advent, the great messenger of hope.” The audience began with a reading of Isaiah 40, which starts: “Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God.” When the prophet was writing, the pope explained, the people of

Israel were in exile, they had “lost everything — their homeland, freedom, dignity and even their trust in God. They felt abandoned and without hope.” Isaiah not only proclaims God’s love and fidelity, but calls on those who still have faith to offer consolation to others and help them “reopen their hearts to faith.”

The desert — literally and figuratively — “is a difficult place to live, but it is precisely the place where one can walk to return not only to one’s homeland, but to God, return to hoping and smiling,” the pope said. “When we are in darkness and difficulty, it’s hard to smile.

“Hope teaches us to smile,” the pope said. “One of the first things that happens to people who withdraw from God is that they are people without smiles. They might be able to laugh out loud — tell one joke after another and laugh — but their smile is missing.” “When we are with a baby, a smile comes spontaneously because a baby is hope,” he said. “We smile even if it’s a bad day because we see hope.”

Hope does not come with power or wealth, but with trusting in God, the pope said. It is knowing that

“God, with his love, walks with us. I hope because God is alongside me. And this is something all of us can say. I have hope because God walks with me, he walks alongside me and holds my hand.”

The key players in the Christmas story, he said, prove that “history is not made by the powerful, but by God together with his little ones, those small and simple people whom we find around Jesus, who is about to be born: Zachariah and Elizabeth, who are old and marked by sterility; Mary, the young virgin engaged to Joseph; the shepherds, who were despised and counted for nothing.”

They had hope, the pope said, and they turned the dark and twisted paths of life around them into “a highway on which to walk toward the glory of the Lord.”

“There’s no denying that there is a crisis of faith in the world today,” he said. “People say, ‘I believe in God. I’m Christian.’ ‘I belong to that faith.’ But their lives are far from being Christian, far from God! Religion, faith has turned into an expression.”

Those who believe must convert, constantly turning their hearts to God and “following that path toward him. He awaits us.”



CNS/Paul Haring

**GENERAL AUDIENCE — Pope Francis greets people as he arrives for his general audience in Paul VI hall at the Vatican Dec. 7. At his audience the pope began a new series of talks about hope. He noted that hope is not the same as optimism.**

## ‘Loving Tree’ helps parish reach out to homebound members

By Loretta Nemeth

LORAIN, Ohio (CNS) — Each year in the days before Christmas, St. Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Parish connects with its homebound parishioners in a special way through what they call the St. Nicholas Loving Tree.

Different from a Giving Tree, in which people choose a name of someone, usually in need, from the bough of a Christmas tree for whom to buy a gift, the Loving Tree offers corporal works of mercy. Participants then visit the person whose name they have chosen in and around the northern Ohio city of Lorain.

Parishioner Gerrie Sandor, who co-ordinates the project, explained the origin of the project to Horizons, the newspaper of the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Parma.

“My friend Anne Squires and I started visiting the sick in July 2001. At the time, there were 35 parishioners on the homebound list from St. Nicholas Parish as well as St. Michael Parish in Lorain,” she said. St. Michael Parish closed in 2003.

“There were too many (people) for us to visit alone, so we called on our fellow parishioners to help,” she continued.

Twelve parishioners heeded the call. They formed five teams with two or three volunteers each.

“We rotated the schedule so that every homebound person on the list was visited by a different team each month,” Sandor said.

“After a few years, as the list grew shorter and it was getting harder to find volunteers, we decided to just do something for St. Nicholas Day,” she said.

So in 2005, Sandor and Squires started the St. Nicholas Loving Tree to mark the traditional Dec. 6 feast day.

“On it we placed the names of the homebound parishioners. Along with the name, there was a note asking each participant to take a name off the tree and to visit the person with a little gift and to let the shut-in know he is loved and not forgotten,” Sandor explained.

Each shut-in also is visited at Easter and given a loaf of *pascha*, a traditional sweet bread baked for the holiday, Sandor added. The parishioners also remembered with greeting cards throughout the year.

The number of shut-ins has varied each year, but can number as many as 20.

“It’s worked out very well; it’s been a blessing to our parish,” Sandor said.

St. Nicholas’ pastor, Rev. Nick Rachford, said he was grateful to the two laywomen for starting the work of “mercy in the parish.”

“This has been a truly inspiring apostolate for me to witness,” he said. “Each year, I look at the tree placed at one of the church entrances and see the names of those I visit to bring the divine

eucharist each month. I know them all and I hear their com-

ments of appreciation when they have received a visit and a small

gift from one of their fellow parishioners.”



CNS/Debbie Hill

**BETHLEHEM BUSINESS PICKS UP THIS CHRISTMAS — Palestinians walk past a shop selling Christmas decorations Dec. 5 near Manger Square in Bethlehem, West Bank. After two Christmas seasons in which the political reality had overtaken holiday cheer, people seem primed to finally feel some merri- ment in Bethlehem.**

## Black pro-life leaders hold rally outside Planned Parenthood

WASHINGTON (CNS) — African-Americans make up just under 13 per cent of the U.S. population, but “they represent over 30 per cent of all abortions,” said Alveda King, an evangelist and director of Civil Rights for the Unborn.

King, who is the niece of slain civil rights leader Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., was one of several African-American leaders and other pro-life advocates from the District of Columbia, Maryland and Northern Virginia who held a prayer rally Dec. 3 outside Planned Parenthood’s new facility in

Washington.

The nearly \$20 million, 27,000-square-foot facility, which opened in September, also is administrative headquarters for Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington. It is located in a semi-industrial area in the city’s Northeast quadrant.

“Planned Parenthood has built a profitable enterprise largely on aborting black babies,” said King, who is director of Priests for Life’s African-American outreach, recently renamed Civil Rights for the Unborn. “This is even more troubling when you

consider that they receive over half a billion dollars a year from the federal government.”

The rally’s organizers noted that Planned Parenthood, founded by Margaret Sanger, celebrated its 100th anniversary Oct. 16, which led to the rally-goers uniting under the banner “100 No More.”

A new release announcing the prayer rally said that Sanger’s focus on African-Americans through what she called “The Negro Project,” an effort she said was aimed at helping blacks gain better access to birth control services, has given rise to “an abor-

tion culture that targets African-Americans.”

“In 100 years, Planned Parenthood has aborted over seven million babies,” said Rev. Nathaniel Thomas, senior pastor of Forestville New Redeemer Baptist Church in District Heights, Maryland. “One out of every three of those babies happens to be black. Enough is enough. We are going to pray for mothers and fathers and the unborn babies. We are also going to pray for the Planned Parenthood staff that they see the value of every life, especially the life of the unborn.”



# World is turning a blind eye to refugee crisis

By Michael Swan  
The Catholic Register

TORONTO (CCN) — As the world focuses most of its attention on Syria, East Africa and its nine million refugees — 26 per cent of the world’s refugee population — is facing another wave of failed states, civil wars and ethnic cleansing.

Jesuit Father Endashaw Debrework, director of Jesuit Refugee Service operations in East Africa, has taken on the task of speaking up for these silenced, forgotten refugees.

“To be a voice for the voiceless. I begin from there,” Debrework told The Catholic Register during a brief visit to Toronto. “There are forgotten crises in the world today, not only in eastern Africa but also in Latin America, Asia.”

That’s not to suggest that the Syrian crisis isn’t real or is unworthy of the world’s attention. The JRS delivers education, health services, counselling and other care to displaced Syrians inside Syria as well as programming in refugee communities and camps in Lebanon and Jordan.

“However, I also insist there are other crises which equally need attention,” Debrework said.

The Ethiopian Jesuit is unsure that the refugee system, already working at over capacity, can take any more. He is calling on the international community to do more, particularly in situations where the national government has failed.

“These are situations that need maximum attention to bring a lasting solution,” he said.

While irresponsible and even criminal governments in South Sudan and Eritrea complain about outside interference in their internal affairs, the rest of the world is content to look the other way.

“I would like to mention a word that Pope Francis uses,” Debrework said. “We in the international community seem to use the ‘principle of indifference.’ That is a sin, morally speaking.

“We are seeing people die — millions and thousands of people dying in South Sudan, Eritrea and Syria. What is the role of the international community? What have they done? What have you done so far to stop this death, these crimes? We have lost so much.”

He believes the world has been too timid and too slow to invoke a United Nations doctrine called “Responsibility to Protect.”

First developed by Canadian diplomats after the Rwandan genocide of 1994 and the Srebrenica massacres of 1995, the doctrine was endorsed by every member state in 2005. It mandates the world community and especially the United Nations must intervene — militarily if necessary — whenever a government either fails to protect its own citizens or becomes a danger to them.

“We have the moral responsibility to care for the other person,” said Debrework. “This is where the challenge has been. The international community has not been aggressively involved in interfering in some dictatorial regimes. It is high time for the international community — it should and must interfere to save



Michael Swan

**REFUGEE CRISIS —** Young girls in a refugee camp in the Ethiopian border town of Dollo Ado. They are some of the nine million refugees in east Africa who have been forgotten by much of the world.

the lives of millions of people in Eastern Africa and beyond.”

While the JRS worries about the long-term refugees in its care, the Catholic NGO is also seeing thousands upon thousands of new refugees being created by events unfolding in Africa:

— A United Nations team of investigators reported Dec. 1 that South Sudan risks a Rwanda-like disaster, with widespread ethnic cleansing already underway. Both government and rebel forces are employing rape, starvation and burning villages as the civil war gears up for the dry season. On Nov. 21 Japanese troops with a mandate from the UN landed in Juba, South Sudan’s capital. By mid-December the Japanese should have 350 peacekeepers stationed in the country.

— Relatively stable Ethiopia, the largest host to refugees in Africa, has been in a state of emergency since October and the government claims to have arrested more than 11,000 people since the Oromo region exploded in protest against the government in Addis Ababa.

— Kenya’s populist president Uhuru Kenyatta has vowed to shut the country’s refugee camps, home to 300,000 Somalis, on the grounds they are aiding and hiding Somali Al-Shabaab militants who have staged attacks at a Nairobi shopping mall and a university five-hours drive east of Nairobi.

Even without these new crises, Debrework fears the relief system is already near its breaking point. At a recent visit to a JRS-run school in South Sudan, he witnessed a student fainting.

“I asked the teacher what happened. He said, this child has not eaten. I felt enormously powerless, helpless,” Debrework said.

Lecturing and preaching while on tour in Canada and the United States, Debrework has highlighted the work the Jesuits do in the Ethiopian border town of Dollo Ado. The tiny desert community within sight of the Ethiopian-Somali border is host to five government-controlled refugee camps with a total population in excess of 250,000.

Currently active in two of the camps, the JRS is the one agency that runs a full range of services aimed at every part of the refugee population.

“Our services there are unique

and special,” Debrework said. “We deal with children. We deal with women. We deal with gangs. We deal with people with special needs. We deal with elderly people. So it is an inclusive service

## Reconciliation: actions must follow words

By Myron Rogal

SASKATOON — Phil Fontaine spoke on the meaning of reconciliation Nov. 30 at St. Thomas More College in Saskatoon.

As someone who has devoted his life to pursuing reconciliation, Fontaine exudes his life’s passion of building reconciliation across North America and more foundationally, in his own life. Having served as national chief of the Assembly of First Nations for three terms, his call to bring people together in understanding and action has been recognized with 16 honorary doctorates and a host of other awards.

Dr. Terrence Downey, president of St. Thomas More College, said the event was a “historic evening.” Fontaine’s public lecture was hosted by the Chair in Indigenous Spirituality and Reconciliation at St. Thomas More College, the first public event organized by this chair.

The message of the evening was crystallized in the preamble, which focused on the necessity of recognizing and working through our burdens together as peoples.

The first burden requiring acknowledgment is that of the wrong that has been committed. Second, there is the burden of guilt borne by the institutions that inflicted the harm. Healing begins with our words in admitting liability and taking steps toward reconciliation. Fontaine gave examples of both individual and collective actions that are leading toward healing.

Another step forward took place in 2009 when Pope Benedict XVI acknowledged the harm caused by the residential schools. Fontaine was one of the representatives invited to the Vatican for the meeting with the pontiff.

On a personal level, Fontaine shared stories about Archbishop Emeritus James Weisgerber being adopted into Fontaine’s family. He spoke with delight of the enthusiasm of his grandson when “Uncle Jimmy” sent him a gift.

Words that are sincere must flow into action, and according to Fontaine this action can be measured for institutions. In looking at history, institutions can examine what they have done and not done in committing or enabling harm toward indigenous peoples.

Once harm has been recognized and admitted, reconciliation can begin. For instance, if we refused to hire indigenous people in the past we can change our policy to begin to reverse that harm. Another example would be if we taught history with a colonizing worldview, we can teach history now with an opposite view.

Fontaine cautioned against not following words with actions, and pointed to the federal government’s recent decision on pipelines as an example.

Another dimension of reconciliation is within indigenous communities, where the lead must be taken from inside.

Acknowledging that there is much work to be done with the Indian Act, Fontaine pointed to the act as the only legislation in Canada directed at a specific race.

It is vital to understand Canada for what it was, what it is, who we are now, and why we behaved the way we did, Fontaine said.

One way of coming to understand ourselves was presented as the “ultimate expression of reconciliation” — this idea being to “fix our origin story.” Canada began as a nation of British origin, as presented by the British Empire. In the 1950s and 1960s, French nationalists began to question that

that we give to refugees.”

Increasingly, the JRS is dealing with young people who have little memory of life outside the camps — children and teenagers who grew up in refugee camps over the last seven years. For this group, the JRS runs sports and recreation programs that provide an outlet for teenage energy and schools that teach everything from English to practical trades.

“These schools are really a beacon of hope for whoever is attending these classes. They are thinking, ‘I am building my future.’ Because they can’t see at the moment their future. The only way we can help them to see their future is through these various education facilities we are trying to provide,” said Debrework.

UNHCR surveys of the refugee population globally have found that the average refugee today spends a total of 17 years displaced from their homes before they can either return or finally settle in a new home. It often takes years before a displaced person is registered as a refugee, let alone eligible for resettlement.

Long-term refugees, whether in camps or in cities such as

— PROCESSING, page 5



Fred Cattroll

**Phil Fontaine**

He noted that the Constitution does not need to change for this to take place. Rather, similar to the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, it could be passed as a federal bill. Fontaine suggested that participants contact their MPs about the idea.

Fontaine’s address ended with him highlighting the pain that all people have suffered, and the desired intention to restore relationships for all people affected by this hurt.

As the floor was opened for questions, Fontaine highlighted how crucial it is to build on hope and look to stories of success. Examples cited, included increasingly high enrolment of indigenous students in post-secondary institutions, indigenous peoples being represented in many levels of politics, and the over 40,000 businesses in Canada owned and managed by indigenous individuals.



# Atlantic bishops issue pastoral letter on euthanasia

By Deborah Gyapong

OTTAWA (CCN) — In light of the new laws concerning physician assisted death and euthanasia, the bishops of Atlantic Canada, following the pastoral direction and example of Pope Francis, have issued a pastoral letter on Nov. 27, the First Sunday of Advent,

emphasizing the pastoral accompaniment of Catholics and their reception of the sacraments of reconciliation, holy communion and the anointing of the sick. Their letter stands in sharp contrast to that of the bishops of Alberta and the Northwest Territories (NWT) released last September that also highlighted

accompaniment and pastoral care, but clearly lays out the teaching on proper disposition for the reception of sacraments.

“The Sacrament of Penance is for the forgiveness of past sins, not the ones that have yet to be committed, and yet the Catechism reminds us that by ways known to God alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance” (CCC, no. 2283), the Atlantic bishops’ letter says. “The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is for strengthening and accompanying someone in a vulnerable and suffering state. It presupposes one’s desire to follow Christ even in his passion, suffering and death; it is an expression of trust and dependence on God in difficult circumstances” (CCC, no. 1520-3). “The reception of Holy Communion as one approaches the end of this life can assist a person in growing

in their union with Christ,” the letter says. “This last Communion, called Viaticum, has a particular significance and importance as the seed of eternal life and the power of resurrection” (CCC, no. 1524). Those words contrast with those of the Alberta and N.W.T. document that says: “In our day a priest may encounter a penitent who has officially requested physician-assisted suicide or euthanasia. The penitent has not yet been killed nor has he/she committed suicide, but he or she has initiated the process, which is already a grave matter.” “If the penitent does not rescind this request, he or she will be killed,” they write. “They are in this objective state of sin, which is gravely disordered. They have incited and officially arranged for someone to kill them.” The Alberta and N.W.T. bishops, however, write that those facing euthanasia may not be “aware euthanasia is a grave sin” and their freedom may be “impaired through depression, drugs, or pressure from others.” Edmundston Bishop Claude Champagne, the past president of the Atlantic Episcopal Assembly, said the Alberta and N.W.T. bishops’ pastoral letter had come out in September prior to the Cana-

dian Conference of Catholic Bishops annual plenary. “It was not expressing the vision of all the Canadian bishops,” Champagne said in an interview.” The Atlantic bishops decided to follow more the model of Quebec bishops, who have stressed pastoral care instead of doctrine to ensure Catholics will feel welcomed, Champagne said. “Our concern is pastoral accompaniment,” said Champagne. “Pope Francis is our model.” “We try not to condemn or to judge, but try to approach people to express the Catholic vision, but at the same time we try to journey with the people,” the bishop said. However, differences in approach are not doctrinal, Champagne said. “We share the same vision of life and death,” he said. “We are all Catholics.” He noted how Pope Francis in The Joy of Love (*Amoris Laetitia*) affirms the Catholic vision while recognizing “there are people who are not yet there.” “We will welcome them, try to understand and journey with them,” he said. “We believe that all priests, deacons and lay ministers, particularly those who care for the sick and vulnerable every day, at home, in hospices and in hospitals, need to be compassionate expressions and effective sacraments of this mercy of God in all that they do and whomever they encounter,” the letter says. “Euthanasia and assisted suicide may be legal, but they do not reflect our Christian view of life, suffering and death. The Gospel is a message of good news and hope in the face of pain and suffering.” The goal of pastoral care is to communicate Christ’s compassion, healing love and his mercy, the letter says. “Furthermore, we must take into account the suffering person’s emotional, family and faith context when responding to their specific requests for the reception of the Sacrament of Penance and the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, the reception of Holy Communion and the celebration of a Christian Funeral.”



Michael Swan

CONSCIENCE RIGHTS FOR DOCTORS — Protesters gather outside Queen’s Park Nov. 30 to defend conscience rights for doctors.

## Former MP demands doctor referral policy be scrapped


By Michael Swan  
The Catholic Register

TORONTO (CCN) — At a sparsely attended protest against the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, former MP Stephen Woodworth called on people to come to the defence of conscience rights for doctors. About 30 people with protest signs gathered on the front lawn of Queen’s Park Nov. 30 to demand the legislature overturn a CPSO policy which requires doctors to provide an “effective referral” to a willing and available doctor for procedures a physician objects to on the grounds of conscience. The policy would force Catholic doctors to refer for abortions and assisted suicide. “In a Canada that cherishes tolerance, we are witnessing deliberate intolerance. In a Canada which used to value diversity, we are witnessing deliberately enforced conformity,” former Conservative MP Woodworth told the protesters.

Woodworth organized the protest through a Facebook page he founded called the Democracy Defence Initiative. Following the protest, Woodworth and his followers walked to the CPSO offices to deliver a letter of protest. The letter has not prompted any response from the college. “These matters are before the courts and it would be inappropriate for us to respond,” college spokesperson Kathryn Clarke told The Catholic Register in an email. The Christian Medical and Dental Society, representing about 1,600 mostly Evangelical physicians and dentists, with support from the Canadian Federation of Catholic Physician’s Societies, launched a court challenge to the CPSO policy in 2015. Woodworth believes the provincial legislature should step in and dictate a new policy to the CPSO. “What I know from my training as a lawyer is that the College of Physicians and Surgeons is dele-

gated authority from the legislature of Ontario,” Woodworth said. “They are subject to direction from the legislature. It is necessary for people to realize that we’re living in a country where freedoms are being taken away from all kinds of opponents of regimes — opponents of government agencies.” Though rarely used, the Regulated Health Professions Act does give the Minister of Health “certain discretionary powers” relating to the independent colleges. However, the government is intervening in the constitutional challenge to the college’s policy on the side of the CPSO and against the claim that the policy infringes on the conscience rights of doctors. “As the matter is before the courts we cannot comment further,” a Ministry of Health spokesperson told The Catholic Register. Woodworth called on everyone to come to the defence of conscience rights for doctors. “You know, I’m not a doctor. I’m not going to lose my liveli-

hood because of what the College of Physicians and Surgeons is doing. But it is my duty as a citizen to stand up for their freedoms,” Woodworth said in an interview. The college maintains that its “effective referral” policy protects the rights of patients to access legal services and that requiring doctors to refer but not to actually perform abortions and assisted suicide is a reasonable compromise. “Even conscripted soldiers in wartime were allowed conscientious objector status to protect them from orders to contribute to the deaths of enemy soldiers,” Woodworth told his followers. “It is monstrous to now cast aside those ideals.”




COME LET US  
ADORE HIM.

A BLESSED CHRISTMAS  
TO ALL!

*Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*

*May the God Child  
be your joy and your hope  
as we celebrate the feast of LOVE*



*Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year!*

*General Administration of the Missionary Oblate Sisters  
of the Sacred Heart and Mary Immaculate  
Unit 111-420 DesMeurons St., Winnipeg, MB R2H 2M9*



# Is racism a factor in African refugee backlog?

By Michael Swan  
The Catholic Register

TORONTO (CCN) — While Canada resettled more than 35,000 refugees from Syria over the last 12 months and brought refugee processing times down to eight months for privately sponsored refugees from Lebanon, refugees in Ethiopia languish more than six years in the system and church groups are discouraged from sponsoring Africans.

“I don’t know whether to say the issue is racism or ignorance or lack of awareness of the diversity of humanity. I very much do not want to say racism,” said Jesuit Refugee Service East Africa director Rev. Endashaw Debrework. “There is a lot of ignorance in the world, especially in the western world.”

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada officials declined to answer questions about whether the vast disparity in results affecting black African refugees

could be characterized as racist.

It’s not a question of racist government officials or a policy based on racial distinctions, but one of results, said Mosaic Institute executive director Bernie Farber.

“Let’s look at the facts,” said the refugee advocate and expert in Canadian multiculturalism.

Eritrean refugees from East Africa have been drowning for years in the Mediterranean when leaky boats capsize, but it took one picture in 2015 of a drowned, three-year-old Syrian, Alan Kurdi, to elicit a visceral reaction from Canadians. A decade ago Farber helped organize a campaign on behalf of the victims of ethnic cleansing in Sudan’s Darfur region. No matter how many images of starving children and marauding Sudanese soldiers surfaced, Farber’s Green Ribbon campaign could not gain traction.

“Why would that be?” Farber asked. “Could it be that the colour of their skin was black?

Yes. What does that say about us? It says way too many things.”

Immigration officials put forth other explanations for the five-year gap in refugee processing times between Lebanon and Ethiopia.

“It is impossible to compare application processing times for the Syrian refugee resettlement initiative to average processing times,” said IRC spokesperson Jennifer Bourque.

Last year’s government pledge to bring 25,000 refugees in roughly 100 days by the end of February was met through massive temporary reassigning of government personnel, who over a few short months processed a pile of applications that normally would have taken years — “an exceptional and time-limited situation which required extraordinary measures,” said Bourque.

The government is not neglecting refugees from other parts of the world, Bourque said. But she

concedes that wait times of more than six years are not a model of efficiency.

“We agree that processing times are too long,” she said.

Operating out of a single embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, Canadian visa staff responsible for processing refugees throughout the entire East African region — home to nine million refugees, 26 per cent of the global refugee population — has trouble keeping track of refugees and arranging interviews.

“Interviewing applicants can be complicated by a lack of access (i.e. our staff cannot safely access the refugees), a lack of documentation and difficulties in establishing family relationships,” said Bourque.

In an email, Bourque referenced “security limitations” several times.

The government’s latest “levels plan” sets a target of 40,000 refugees in 2017, 16,000 of them to be sponsored privately.



Michael Swan

**Rev. Endashaw Debrework,**  
**Jesuit Refugee Service**  
**East Africa director**

“We will welcome one of the highest numbers of refugees and protected persons in Canadian history,” Bourque said.

The new targets for refugees are double the 2015 targets set by the previous Conservative government. The emphasis on private sponsorship, most often undertaken by church groups, “recognizes the significant contribution of Canadians wanting to sponsor refugees,” Bourque said.

While there are always other explanations, Canadians must not be afraid of facing up to the possibility of racial bias, said Farber.

“This seems to be not even in the background but in the foreground — this kind of hidden racism that many of us don’t want to believe for a moment that we embody and we encompass,” he said. “But the fact is that we must.”

“There is a lot of bureaucracy and a slowness in the process of resettlement generally — not only in the Canadian government but throughout the western world,” said Debrework. “But at the end of the day, we are all human beings whether white, black, Arab, Muslim or Christian. All need equal care. All need dignity.”



Hubert Pantel

**L’ARCHE CHRISTMAS PAGEANT** — Members of Winnipeg’s L’Arche community bring to the stage the second annual L’Arche Christmas Pageant Dec. 5 at Covenant Christian Reformed Church, in the city’s River East neighbourhood. The narration of Mary and Joseph’s journey to Bethlehem and the events leading to the birth of Jesus were acted out in tableaux by L’Arche members, accompanied by community-member musicians. A highlight of the evening is the singing of traditional Christmas songs and renditions of Silent Night in various languages, reflecting the cultural diversity of L’Arche assistants who come from many different countries. Three hundred people attended and contributed free-will donations of nearly \$900 for Winnipeg Harvest foodbank.

## Pope will not visit Canada in 2017, but is considering 2018 or 2019

By Deborah Gyapong

OTTAWA (CCN)—Pope Francis has indicated he will not visit Canada in 2017 but has left open the possibility of a papal visit in 2018 or 2019.

That means he will not be present as Canada marks the 150th anniversary of Confederation next year, nor for Montreal’s 375th jubilee celebrations.

The decision also postpones the possibility of a response to the Truth and Reconciliation Com-

mission’s Call to Action issued in June 2015 requesting the pope “issue an apology to survivors, their families, and communities for the Roman Catholic Church’s role in the spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children in Catholic-run residential schools” on Canadian soil.

News of the pope’s decision came in a Nov. 30 letter from the papal nuncio to the president of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.

“His Holiness Pope Francis has asked me to share with you his response to the invitation to visit Canada during the course of 2017,” the Apostolic Nuncio to Canada Archbishop Luigi Bonazzi wrote Bishop Douglas Crosby of Hamilton. “In this regard, with gratitude for the invitations received, Pope Francis wishes to communicate that it will not be possible for him to visit Canada in 2017, but it is his earnest hope to consider the possibility of including Canada among the destinations of his apostolic visits at the time of planning his travels for 2018 - 2019.”

The nuncio asked in the letter that Crosby communicate the news to the Canadian bishops.

Invitations to Pope Francis came not only from Canada’s bishops. One of the first requests came in February 2015 when Montreal Mayor Denis Coderre and Montreal Archbishop Christian Lépine visited the pope in Rome and invited him to attend Montreal’s 375th anniversary.

Through the Montreal archdiocese’s website, Lépine thanked Pope Francis for considering the visit.

“The presence of the Holy Father would certainly have generated great enthusiasm here,” the website said. “All the same, ‘the 375th anniversary of Montreal remains a unique opportunity to highlight the spiritual dimension

of the city’s origins,’ ” says the archbishop in a Dec. 8 pastoral letter.

Senator Murray Sinclair, who co-chaired the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, was not available for comment.

## Processing time is lengthy

Continued from page 3

Addis Ababa and Nairobi, face only the most dim and distant prospects of resettlement in Canada. Canada’s average processing time for a refugee with private sponsors waiting for them (usually a church group, but also other organizations) is 73 months (just over six years).

Parishes and other Catholic groups in Canada concerned about the fate of refugees have to go beyond resettlement efforts.

“A parish can raise funds to bring a family here and it takes five years. It takes six years. Meanwhile, these people need support,” Debrework said.

“Education support, medical


support, food, housing and many, many other supports. So, how do we balance? Should we just focus on bringing them in, no matter what they are suffering at the moment?”

Increasingly, the JRS finds itself having to feed people inside the Dollo Ado camps.


“The WFP (World Food Program of the United Nations) does not have enough funds to feed the children,” said Debrework. “One dollar makes a lot of difference. When we feed a child with a dollar we are saving a life. \$1,000 feeds 1,000 children.

“These are situations that need maximum attention to bring a lasting solution,” he said.

More information about the JRS is at [en.jrs.net](http://en.jrs.net)



*With One Heart,  
One Voice and  
One Mission, we wish  
peace to all the world.*



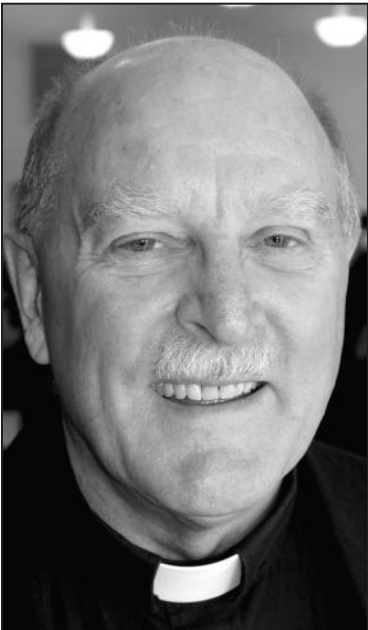
Saskatchewan Provincial Catholic Women's League



# Reaffirm Catholic health care in face of euthanasia

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

SASKATOON — With the legalization of assisted suicide and euthanasia in Canada, it is vital to reaffirm Catholic health care and what it means, ethicist Rev. Mark Miller, CSsR, told



Kiply Yaworski  
Rev. Mark Miller, CSsR

priests, ministry leaders and spiritual care providers from across the province Dec. 1 in Saskatoon.

“We need to stand up for what we believe in; we need to support our Catholic facilities in looking after patients,” he said.

“There are two principles that we operate from. One is that we don’t kill people, but the other one is that we don’t abandon people.”

Miller was a keynote speaker at a conference organized by the bishops of Saskatchewan to address the challenges of providing pastoral care in an era of euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide. Bishop Noël Simard of the Diocese of Valleyview, Quebec, also spoke during the one-day workshop at the Cathedral of the Holy Family in Saskatoon, exploring end of life issues and formation of conscience (see related article, page 7).

Born in Edmonton, Miller completed his doctorate in moral theology at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, and then spent 16 years as a clinical bioethicist working at St. Paul’s Hospital in Saskatoon. Presently serving as the provincial of the English-

speaking Redemptorists of Canada, Miller also works at the centre for clinical ethics at St. Joseph and St. Michael hospitals in Toronto.

“When the Supreme Court of Canada decided it was OK for physicians to kill patients at the end of life, it was a huge tragedy for our country,” Miller asserted, before providing an overview of end-of-life issues, the importance of palliative care, and the new reality in Canada.

In effect, the legalization of assisted suicide and euthanasia says that some lives are not worth living, Miller said. “I think that is to put the dying into a category that is destructive — not just to the dying but to all of us as human beings.”

The aftermath of permitting physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia for those with “irremediable suffering” will be ever-expanding boundaries, Miller predicted. “We have changed the definition of health care. Health care becomes to a great extent what you want.” Other societal changes will follow, he suggested, pointing to suggestions from some commentators that only those willing to kill patients now be accepted into medical school.

Miller pointed to palliative care and the Catholic spiritual tradition as strengths that must be emphasized and shared as alternatives to euthanasia. “We have alternatives in which there is not over-treatment, there is not under-treatment, but there is proper care for people. That’s what needs to be supported,” he said.

When it comes to the end of life, there are two great fears, Miller said, the fear of pain and the fear of abandonment. “What I mean by abandonment is that people feel that they are not worth being looked after.”

There is an attitude in this society that says no one should be dependent, and another that denies the reality of death, he noted.

“We live as if we are not going to die. Then all of a sudden we are facing dying and death and it’s like a panic reaction: let’s just get it over with. But dying is a part of living. And it is extremely important for us in our Catholic faith to understand that when you are talking about people who are dying, we are talking about our

brothers and sisters going through one part of the journey of life. And the questions that we always need to ask ourselves are the questions of how can we make that journey a life-giving journey.”

For many in our pragmatic, self-serving, efficiency-obsessed culture, that seems contradictory, Miller said.

“But I’ll tell you what I have seen in palliative care and care for the dying. I have seen family relationships grow — and grow stronger . . . I have also seen reconciliations,” he said. “It’s our job to support those things.” Even when someone is in a coma, transformation can happen in families and relationships, he said. “Things take place because Mom isn’t ready to go yet, something still needs to be done.”

Rather than capitulating to the culture’s values, Catholics must live their own values boldly and clearly, Miller said. “If we don’t have a sense of what we are trying to offer our people at the end of life, then they will get their values from our society, and it will never occur to them that it might be wrong to end their lives if they think they are going to be in pain or if they think they are going to be a burden.”

“We also need to understand our own ethics at the end of life,” he said. “If the burdens outweigh the benefits, you can refuse the treatment, even a life-saving treatment.” Refusing treatment is not suicide or euthanasia, Miller stressed. “They are making a decision about treatment and taking the consequences.”

He called for more discussions in parishes, communities and families about end-of-life issues, about how to care for those who are suffering, and about political action needed to ensure good palliative and hospice care is available.

“Palliative care in Canada offers the opportunity for good, holistic care at the end of life, in which patients will be freed from pain, or at least unbearable pain,” said Miller. “Palliative care is about living while you are dying. In the midst of that, it is about living to the best of your ability with the support that you need,” he said. “This is where we need to make it clear to our brothers

and sisters who are dying: you have lots of opportunities to live and we will do what we can to support you.”

The Christian understanding of the dying process has much to offer, he added. For instance, the loss of human strengths and abilities can be an important part of a person’s spiritual journey. “In our human weakness we begin to find God’s strength . . . to get up on the cross with Christ is a journey sometimes of faith and redemption,” he said.

“You do have to be careful about not dumping that on a dying person — ‘oh well, carry the cross like Jesus’ — that’s not for me to say to another person. But it’s important to understand that this journey is a jour-

the dying?”

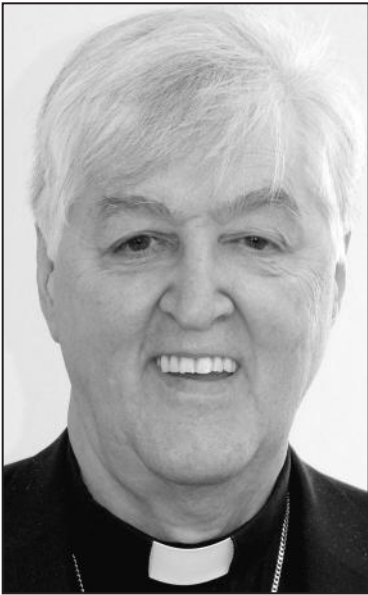
Miller challenged priests to think about how they might respond if a parishioner says in the midst of suffering that they just want to get it over with. “Don’t panic,” said Miller, saying that it is not a time to act as a “moral policeman” but rather, it is a call to engage in listening and dialogue with the person considering euthanasia or assisted suicide.

Great challenges and criticisms are facing Catholic health care institutions, said Miller. “As Catholics, and in our Catholic facilities, we are not going to kill people. That’s the bottom line. That is what we are defending. But what I also want you to understand is that we are going to take care of them. We are going to look after them in whatever way we can,” he said.

“There is going to be a crossroads in our facilities and it has already been put in the press in a couple of places,” he said, pointing to news reports about the transfer of a patient when a Catholic hospital in Vancouver refused to participate in euthanasia. “You read, ‘Oh those Catholic hospitals, they have no compassion.’ These are the hospitals where for 25 years they have been in the forefront of providing palliative care, but now, because we won’t kill people, we are not compassionate,” he said.

“What you have to say in the face of that is: there are different forms of compassion,” Miller said. “In fact, when you actually kill people, you don’t need compassion . . . as far as I am concerned, it is to say that your life isn’t worth living.”

Instead, the call “for followers of Christ is to support our brothers and sisters so that they know that their lives, until they are called home, are worthwhile. They are part of us and we are part of them and this is a journey we can make, and that we can make it in such a way that it is often a journey of faith and peace and hope.”




Kiply Yaworski  
Bishop Noël Simard


ney of faith, and somehow in that journey, the Lord’s strength will prevail,” Miller suggested.

He also stressed the importance of community. “A lot of people today see death as an individual experience, isolated from everyone else — ‘it’s my decision’ — and it is kind of reinforcing this individualism of our society. Not for us as Christians. We are a community . . . as a community, the question that we have to face is: what are we doing to support

*As snow gently falls from heavens above  
We give thanks for his gifts of hope and love.*




Wishing you a Blessed Christmas and Happy New Year!



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UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN  
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**Arise! Behold! Welcome!**



“Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead,  
and Christ will shine on you.”  
*Ephesians 5:14*

May the light of His Love always shine on you!

**A blessed Christmas  
and a Happy New Year!**



+Albert LeGatt, D.D.  
Archbishop of Saint Boniface



# Bishop Simard addresses end-of-life issues at workshop

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

SASKATOON — End-of-life issues, the formation of conscience, and the pastoral implications of the legalization of euthanasia and assisted suicide were explored by Bishop Noël Simard of the Diocese of Valleyfield, Quebec at a provincial workshop held Dec. 1 at the Cathedral of the Holy Family in Saskatoon.

Organized by the Catholic bishops of Saskatchewan, the day of reflection and discussion also featured presentations by well-known ethicist Rev. Mark Miller, CSSR (see related article, page 6).

Simard, who has a doctorate in moral theology from the Gregorian University in Rome, has served as an ethicist and moral theologian in a variety of capacities. He was appointed auxiliary bishop of the Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie in Ontario in 2008, and bishop of Valleyfield in December 2011. Simard is a member of the Pontifical Academy for Life and former chair of the Catholic Organization for Life and Family.

“Disease, suffering and death are existential realities we cannot escape. They are fundamental realities. But today we are living in a culture of death,” said Simard. “Euthanasia and assisted suicide bring another view on death and dying.”

The new reality in Canada presents a lot of pastoral challenges, with the Supreme Court decision on the Carter Case and Bill 52 in Quebec legalizing euthanasia and assisted suicide, which have been euphemistically dubbed medical aid in dying (MAID) or physician-assisted death.

“There is a lot of confusion in our people — even our Catholic people — because they will say that ‘medical aid in dying’ is a good thing, it is ‘part of health care’ . . . they don’t see that it is killing,” he said. “It is a language misunderstood and misinterpreted.”

Arguments for euthanasia emphasize the autonomy of the individual (“my life, my choice, my right”) but stand against a responsibility to the community, the common good and solidarity, Simard asserted.

“The true autonomous conscience is not self-centred but ori-

ented toward others, in solidarity with others. I cannot fulfil my life without opening myself to the other. So I am not an island, (but am) living in relationship with others, in solidarity with others,” he said.

The first half of Simard’s presentation considered the nature of conscience in detail, as well as tackling freedom of conscience, the formation of conscience, and moral error.

“What is legally permitted is not necessarily morally justified. The moral obligation comes first from the moral conscience . . . and what is lived or admitted by the majority is not necessarily a moral good. The number of similar opinions upon an issue does not determine the moral truth of an action. . . . Because the majority — 75 per cent — agree with medical aid in dying, that is not a reason to say that medical aid in dying is OK,” he said.

“When we form our conscience, we need to look at our intention. But good intention does not make an action good. The means must also be good and the circumstances must be taken into consideration.”

In considering end-of-life issues and the formation of conscience, it is necessary to take into consideration the realities of suffering and death, to clarify terms, to reflect on the right use of medication and relief of suffering, he said. “We have to rediscover the moral wisdom of the church teaching. We have to build up the community and the common good. And we have to base our action on the three calls: the call to respect the dignity of human person and the sanctity of life, the call to foster trust and compassion, and the call to promote social justice and good care for all.”

It is necessary to make a distinction between euthanasia (the killing of a patient) and stopping aggressive treatment and accepting death as a natural consequence, he noted. Many mistakenly believe that the church requires that all means must be taken to keep a person alive — but this is not true, said Simard. “When there is no reasonable hope, we have to just let our lives (go) into God’s house.”

Palliative care is the appropriate answer to suffering and death, a true and compassionate alternative

to euthanasia, Simard asserted.

Pastoral care must focus on the needs of the dying person: physiological, psychological, emotional, social, economic, spiritual and religious, listed Simard. Guiding principles include dignity, respect, quality of life, autonomy, respect for life, life as a responsibility, justice and equity, and especially solidarity, he said.

“And finally, accompanying the dying person — what does it mean? Humanity: attention to, and respect for, the full human particularity of the dying person. The dying person is not a number. She is a unique person with a unique biology, individualized needs, weakness, strengths, and life plans.”

To accompany the person who asks for euthanasia is problematic for a Catholic pastoral minister, Simard said.

The response could involve “first of all, receiving the request of presence — listening to the cry for help, developing a dialogue with the person on the meaning of his or her request, and trying to discern the real motives and reasons,” he said, as well as “offering spiritual help as prayer and proposing the Christian meaning to suffering and death.”

The pastoral minister may have to explain why it is not possible to be present at the moment of the lethal injection, Simard acknowledged. However, he also described the experience of one woman, who stayed with her brother and held his hand at the moment of euthanasia, even though she strongly disagreed with his decision.

“How can we express our disagreement and at the same time express mercy?” challenged Simard. “Truth and mercy. Pope Francis speaks a lot about mercy, and he quoted Pope Benedict: ‘mercy is truth.’ When you are merciful you are right in Jesus’ way of behaving and acting.”

As a general statement, pastoral ministers should make every effort to “permit the seriously ill to meet the Lord in the sacraments, and to have access to the forgiveness of sins, the anointing of the sick and the eucharist,”

said Simard.

At the same time, the request for the anointing of the sick by someone who is asking for euthanasia is “very problematic,” Simard said. “The canon 978.1 can be evoked, reminding the priest that ‘he is at once both judge and healer,’ and that he is constituted by God as a minister of both divine justice and divine mercy.”

Guidelines produced by the bishops of Alberta and the Northwest Territories earlier this year state: “This implies the duty to implore the sick person with gentle firmness to turn away from this determination (asking for euthanasia) in repentance and trust. If the person, however, remains obstinate, the anointing cannot be celebrated.”

Simard expressed it another way: “The anointing is for the living and aimed to bring healing and life. Euthanasia or assisted suicide which brings or causes death contradicts the meaning and the purpose of the sacrament or anointing.” At the same time, it

may happen that a particular situation could arise that might permit the sacrament, he said.

“When we are facing a complex situation, there is no black and white. There is a lot of grey zone, and it is where mercy can be expressed — in the grey zone. And I think we are called to express the mercy of God.”

He summarized: “I am not too much in favour of giving the sacrament of the sick to people asking for euthanasia, because there is a contradiction. But when I look at a person’s situation, I may reconsider, I may express my attitude and approach and my decision in a different way, based on mercy.”

As for requests for funeral rites for someone who has died by euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide, Simard again recommended a pastoral approach.

He pointed to Pope Francis’ call to discern, accompany and integrate frailty into difficult pastoral situations. “I think that we need to be very close to people, (bringing) a message of proximity and compassion.”

## Treaty plaque mounted

By Jacquie Berg

SASKATOON — Representatives of the Advisory Circle and the chair in Indigenous Spirituality and Reconciliation hosted the formal installation of a treaty plaque Nov. 30 at St. Thomas More College in Saskatoon.

The plaque consists of an enlarged replica of the original medal that was presented to par-


ticipating First Nations at the time of the Treaty 6 signing in 1876, along with an explanatory plaque acknowledging Treaty 6 territory and proclaiming the importance of treaties to all Canadians.

The event involved a smudging ceremony and a liturgy of the Word that included words of reflection and hope as the medal was unveiled along with the explanatory plaque.



Jacquie Berg

**TREATY PLAQUE** — A treaty plaque was formally installed Nov. 30 at St. Thomas More College in Saskatoon, in an event hosted by the Advisory Circle of the Chair in Indigenous Spirituality and Reconciliation at the Catholic College.



*A God who Became  
so Small  
Could only be  
Mercy and Love*

Thérèse de Lisieux

*Abundant blessings and joy  
of God’s greatest gift!*

*Joyeux Noel!*

Les Filles de la Providence  
Daughters of Providence

*Welcome, Wisdom of God ...*

*giving birth to Love  
in a season of light*

*Christmas Blessings*

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# Artists’ lives of faith chronicled

By Michael Swan  
The Catholic Register

If you think of artists as strange, unbalanced, complicated personalities whose natural habitat is somewhere on the margins, Herman Goodden is not about to change your opinion. But if you think books about art and artists are dull, academic, jargon-laden wastes of time, paper and ink, Goodden wants you to think again.

In his new book about three important 20th-century Canadian painters, Goodden does his best to include all the weirdness he could dig up about William Kurelek, Jack Chambers and Greg Curnoe. But it’s not weird for weirdness sake. Goodden wants to tell stories — stories that give you a concrete sense of the lives of his three artists.

There’s the story about how Chambers in 1954 used a pound of sausage to distract Pablo Picasso’s guard dogs, then invaded the house of the most famous artist in the world so he could ask for advice about where he should attend art school. Having accomplished this, Chambers ignored Picasso’s advice and caught the next train out of town.

Curnoe stayed three years at the Ontario College of Art in Toronto resolutely flunking courses and insisting that his old high school art program at H.B. Beal Secondary School in

Curnoe released in November by Elmwood Publications.

The book was commissioned by the Catholic Art Guild of London, Ont., which wanted Goodden, whose writing occasionally appears in The Catholic Register, to tell the stories of these three remarkable artists, including their lives of faith and their search for meaning.

In William Kurelek, easily Canada’s most popular painter from the 1960s through the 1980s, Goodden has tales to tell of real madness — not peculiarity or eccentricity, but crushing, debilitating mental illness.

In 1952 a depressed and traumatized Kurelek knew he was losing his sanity. He became fascinated with experiments in art therapy undertaken at England’s Netherne Hospital. He wrote to ask whether he could be treated there.

Hospital administrators replied that Canada was somewhat out of their catchment area. So Kurelek moved to England. He arrived June 1, 1952, and was admitted to London’s Maudsley Hospital (sister institution to the Netherne) on June 4.

Kurelek spent the better part of a decade in and out of the Maudsley and Netherne Hospitals and became the only Canadian artist whose sanity was saved by a Catholic newspaper. The Catholic newspaper’s role in saving Kurelek was minor, but crucial. While at Maudsley Kurelek was thoroughly

the person who understood him best, whom he could speak to most easily, actually prayed, believed in God and accepted the authority of the church.

Kurelek didn’t just become Catholic. He became the sort of Catholic the art world could not abide. Open and upfront about his religious convictions, much of Kurelek’s output was explicitly religious in a way that was unimaginable for a generation of artists who hid their spirituality behind gestures in paint and high concepts in psychology and philosophy. In the age of minimalism, Kurelek was using paintings to tell stories, publishing his work in book form — *A Northern Nativity*, Kurelek’s Canada, *A Prairie Boy’s Winter*.

Goodden recounts how the art community reacted to Kurelek.

“Probably the most damning instance of the complete disregard for Kurelek and what he was trying to do was by Dennis Reid in, I think it was about ’73 or so, a few years before Kurelek dies (1977),” Goodden told The Catholic Register. “(He) comes out with *A Concise History of Canadian Painting* published by Oxford University Press. Kurelek is then at his peak. He does not get mentioned. William Kurelek does not exist, according to this Concise History.

“Then (Reid) revamped it in the ’80s (second edition, 1988), years after Kurelek had died. And he worked in three paragraphs. Among those three paragraphs was ‘At the time of his death, William Kurelek was the most popular artist in the country.’”

It might have been nice if the art world had been willing to acknowledge Kurelek’s accomplishment while the artist was still alive, said Goodden.

In the end, Goodden finds himself with stories of three men who were outsiders — whether by choice or by circumstance.

Jack Chambers took umbrage when the National Gallery of Canada in 1967 thought he would be so honoured to have his paintings included in a package of educational materials the gallery provided to schools that he wouldn’t want actual payment for his work. He fought back by writing to over 100 artists across the country and forming Canadian Artists Representation to demand that artists be paid for their work. The National Gallery from that point forward did not show any Chambers paintings or collect any of his work during his lifetime.

Greg Curnoe spent his life sneering at the New York art scene and Americans in general. And he had unkind words to say about Toronto when the city seemed to present itself as another New York.

“He was the guy who proved, if you put your foot down, you don’t have to go to New York. You don’t have to go to Toronto. You don’t have to suck up to anyone,” said Goodden.

Though Curnoe was more than skeptical of religion, Goodden makes the case that he inherited from his United Church mother a Protestant spirit that drove him.

“He was a very vigorous Protestant. He was not a Protestant Christian, but he was a Protestant artist,” said Goodden.



Courtesy of John and Diego Chambers

**SUNDAY MORNING — Jack Chambers: Sunday Morning No. 2, Loch Gallery, Toronto copyright The Estate of Jack Chambers.**

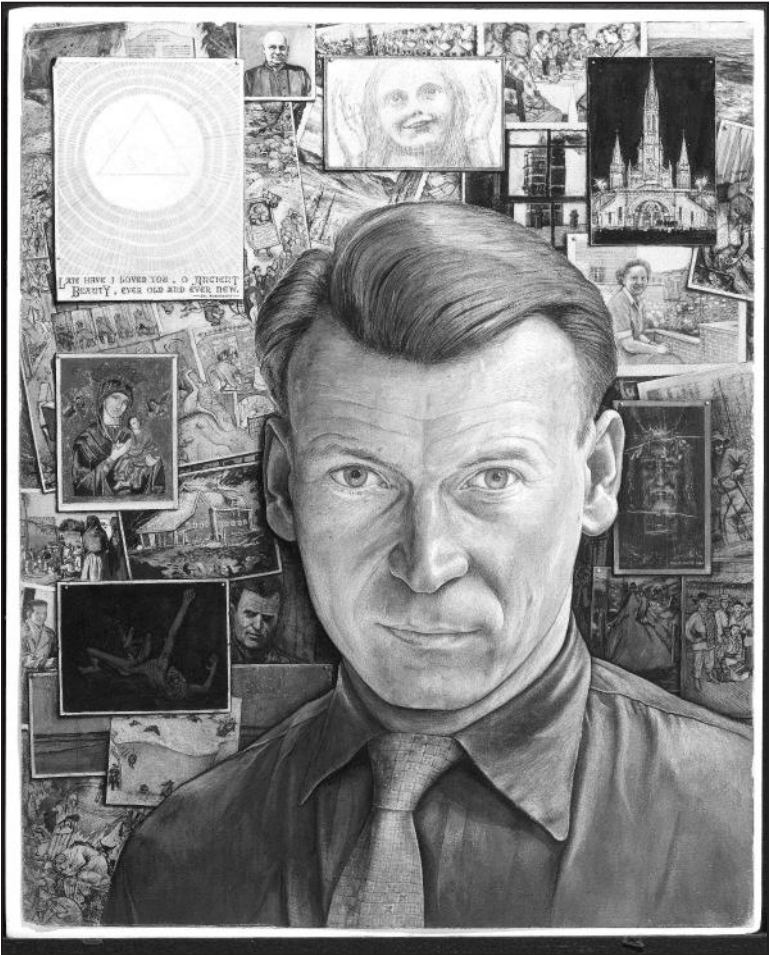
London, Ont., was far superior.

But Curnoe and Chambers were not really crazy. In fact, Goodden finds himself impressed by Curnoe’s upright, hardworking artist’s ethic.

“Curnoe was utterly faithful to his first and only wife Sheila, was emotionally and practically very present in the raising of their three children — Owen (born 1966), Galen (1968) and Zoe (1971) — was refreshingly un-ecentric and un-self-preoccupied, and for all the unorthodoxy of his calling as an artist and the originality of his vision, Curnoe displayed a sober and hard-working diligence that would’ve paid equally big dividends in hardware store management or accounting.” Goodden writes in *Three Artists: Kurelek, Chambers and*

frustrated and disappointed by his course of treatment. His one ray of light was an occupational therapist named Margaret Smith. Smith and Kurelek would talk about all sorts of things and the talk left the 25-year-old artist, atheist and socialist feeling less estranged from the world. Among their mutual interests was poetry. When Smith gave Kurelek a book of poems wrapped (for protection) in a Catholic newspaper, Kurelek was confronted with the idea that the one person he could talk to was somebody who actually believed in everything that he had rejected.

Smith never tried to convert him or even explain her faith to the young artist. When Kurelek asked Smith whether she was praying for him, she said yes. It was just there, a fact Kurelek had to deal with —



Courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto

**WILLIAM KURELEK — William Kurelek: Self Portrait, courtesy of The Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario copyright The Estate of William Kurelek.**

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- Planning and executing events for Queen’s House that include events such as our Spring Fling Lottery, Oblate Scramble Golf Tournament, Bike-A-Thon and Gala Dinner, special donor events, campaign launches, celebrations and recognition events, planned giving and grant writing.
- Work collaboratively to secure sponsorships, encourage and promote volunteer participation, promote, enhance and extend donor relationships and encourage the culture of philanthropy within and beyond our community.

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- Previous experience in event planning and management in a non-profit fundraising environment is an asset.
- Demonstrated skills in planning and organization.
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- Ability to work independently and as part of a diverse team.
- Dedication, commitment and respect for faith and spiritual interests and endeavors.

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# Congar’s book opens door on changing role of theology

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By Catherine E. Clifford

I received one of the most important introductions to theology and to the world of one of the great theologians of the 20th century when I first opened the pages of Yves Congar’s *A History of Theology*. It was never a “best-seller” and may not be counted among the major works in the Dominican theologian’s impressive collection of writings. Yet it opened the door to a set of questions on the changing role of theology — its ability to reflect upon the experience of God and to speak to contemporary people in every moment of history and in widely divergent social contexts — that have occupied my study and teaching ever since.

I was in a fourth-year honours’ seminar of an undergraduate program, having changed my major to religious studies just a year earlier. The program was offered through the collaboration and shared resources of Catholic, Anglican, Mennonite and United Church colleges. The Mennonite professor chairing the seminar asked me to prepare a presentation that would explain to my classmates — most of whom belonged to other Christian churches — how, since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church could change so much yet remain the same church. Others followed these developments with rapt attention!

Not knowing quite how to respond to this challenge, I sought advice from one of my Catholic professors, who immediately referred me to *A History of Theology*.

A challenging read, *A History of Theology* is a revised and updated version of an article that Congar had published early in his career (1938 - 39) in the *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, titled “*Théologie*.” Congar (1904 - 95), a French Catholic priest, was born at the beginning of the last century. He contributed perhaps more than any single theologian of the 20th century to the study of the church, including its structures and mission, called “ecclesiology.” During Vatican II (1962 - 65), he served as an expert adviser to several key commissions, making direct and at times significant contributions to the official texts of the council.

In six well-documented chapters, *A History of Theology* examines the changing definitions and approaches of theology through history. It begins from pre-Christian times when theology — a reasoned reflection on God — was a work of the metaphysical philosopher, to the views of early Christian writers, through the Scholastic period of the Early and high Middle Ages, the 16th-century Reformation, and from the Early Modern period to the late 20th century.

Various understood, theology’s methods evolved from the scriptural commentary of the church fathers (*sacra pagina*), to the more systematic and speculative works of the medieval theologians (*sacra doctrina*), to increased specialization in modern times.

Readers today will be impressed by the dynamic and continuous evolution of theology. In the wake of Vatican II, Congar noted that “the theological situation, in fact, even the idea of theological endeavour,” continued to evolve.

Congar deftly traces the historic shift in western theology from an approach informed by the philosophical tradition of Aristotle and represented by the works of Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century, to the more positivist system of the Franciscan Duns Scotus at the turn of the 14th century. Where Thomas and his followers

proposed a distinction and continuity between our knowledge of the world and knowledge of God, Scotus’ approach considers the revelation of God as something quite extrinsic to the order of creation, standing in the Augustinian line with St. Bonaventure.

These developments, prefigured in the dramatic condemnations of the thought of Aristotle and Averroes at the University of Paris in 1270 and 1277, set the stage for the rise of nominalism and the decline of late medieval theology. Congar’s perceptive discussion provides clues to persistent tensions that continue to manifest themselves in various currents of contemporary theology.

The medieval scholastics, in their quest for a coherent and logical system of thought, unwittingly made theology into an “instrument of specialists” that lost contact with the life of the church and the biblical tradition. In reaction, the 16th-century Reformers called for a return to the priority of Sacred Scripture and a reflection more attuned to the daily struggles of ordinary Christians.

In the Early Modern period, both Catholicism and Protestantism were influenced by more pietistic

## A History of Theology

By Yves Congar  
Doubleday, 1968

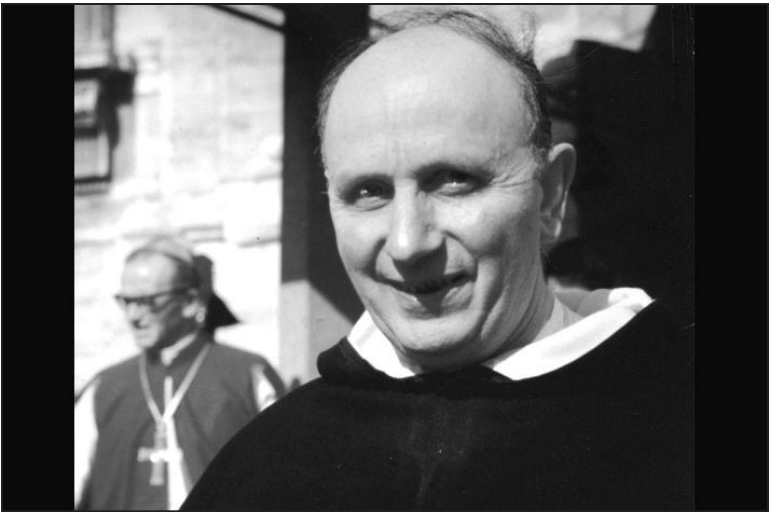
movements centred on encounter with Christ. In an age of social upheaval, peasants and the working classes easily identified with the suffering Christ and empathized with his mother.

The theological renewal of the 20th century was driven by the pastoral concern to proclaim the Gospel to modern people and informed by a return to the Bible, to the early sources of the liturgy, and to theological insights of the earliest Christian writers.

In every age, theologians are concerned to engage with the intellectual currents of their time, and to inform the living faith of the community of believers as they encounter new questions. The living witness of the church, rooted in the same faith of the first followers of Jesus that is recorded for us in the Scriptures, is necessarily transposed into the vernacular of new cultures and engaged in dialogue with new scientific knowledge. The human community changes and develops through history. The church learns from the developments of science and culture, and — with the assistance of God’s Spirit — can grow in its understanding of God’s revelation.

In this way, we can speak of “development” in Christian doctrine — one that is more than a simple change in the language or expression of faith, but also involves a deeper penetration of the mystery of God and of God’s boundless love for humankind.

While *A History of Theology* is not about Vatican II as such, it helped me to understand the council as a moment when the whole Catholic Church undertook a comprehensive self-examination when confronted by the his-



Wikimedia Commons/Archives des Dominicains de la Province de France

Dominican Father Yves Congar at the Second Vatican Council in 1964.

toric social, political and economic changes that were reshaping the human community. In a desire to proclaim the heart of the Gospel message to modern men and women, it sought to update church teaching, governance, liturgy, forms of ordained ministry and vowed religious life, and the witness of the lay faithful.

The perspective of history — or what we have come to call “historical consciousness” — led theologians and church leaders to understand that the church has adapted itself to changing social and cultural contexts and to the concrete pastoral needs of the people in every age.

Theology can never content itself to repeat blindly the formulas of the past. It has a critical and creative responsibility to appropriate the wisdom and meaning of faith in ways that will help contemporary people to encounter Christ and live as his disciples. Theology is charged with mediating the good news in ways that might inform the Christian community’s response to new challenges and insights as they arise in human history.

As a creature of history whose ultimate purpose is to inform the practice of Christian living, nothing escapes theology’s concern: economics, questions of social justice, concern for the poor and the marginalized. To accomplish this task, it must be in engaged dialogue with other disciplines.

Over the years, I have come to appreciate just how significant and transformative it was to introduce an operative historical mindedness into theological reflection and into the life of the church. The earliest version of *A History of Theology* was penned in the same period that Marie-Dominique Chenu, then rector of the Dominican house of study, the Saulchoir, where Congar taught, delivered a programmatic lecture. That lecture sparked a controversy that stretched over more than two decades.

Speaking on the feast of St. Thomas Aquinas in 1936, Chenu reflected on the historical method that inspired the study and teaching of theology at the Saulchoir, an approach characterized by critics as a *nouvelle théologie* — a dangerous “innovation” and departure from an unchanging tradition. Chenu was largely inspired by the reflection of Thomas Aquinas, who carefully distinguished between the object of faith as such and the expression of faith, which is conditioned by

a particular cultural context.

The Saulchoir taught the works of Aquinas, the “Angelic Doctor,” prescribed by Pope Leo XXIII as the model for Catholic theology, but with an approach that was historically minded, not uncritical, and attuned to contemporary pastoral challenges.

In 1938, Chenu’s religious superiors obliged him to subscribe to a number of theses that amounted to a retraction of his reflections, which soon appeared on the index of forbidden works. Shortly after, he was removed from his post as rector and the Saulchoir was closed.

Congar escaped censure during this period of the Second World War, when he served as an army chaplain and landed in a prisoner of war camp. But throughout the 1950s, he would be subject to suspicion, incomprehension and censure. Who knew that taking history seriously could be so costly, or considered such a dangerous undertaking?

The insights of Congar, Chenu and many others would only be widely received when Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council. Pope John saw Christ as the centre of history. In the Incarnation, Christ entered into human history. The risen Christ, through the Spirit, continues to act in and through the human community.

While there is both good and evil in the world, history is a graced reality and a “teacher of life” from which the church might learn. Indeed, John XXIII invited the bishops taking part in the Second Vatican Council to assume a renewed sense of responsibility for the mission of the church on what he called the eve of “a new era in the history of the world.”

These themes are taken up in the council’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, where the council calls upon all Christians, and indeed all people of goodwill, to assume their responsibilities as “artisans and authors of the culture of their community.”

The vocation of humanity, in an age where we have developed the capacity to shape the world in which we live — dangerously taxing the resources of the Earth for future generations — is to act in accord with “our responsibility to our sisters and brothers and to history,” *Gaudium et Spes* said.

— LONG VIEW, page 10

Clifford is professor of theology at St. Paul University in Ottawa. With Richard Gaillardetz, she wrote *Keys to the Council: Unlocking the Teaching of Vatican II*.

Abbot Peter Novocosky, OSB  
and the monks of St. Peter’s Abbey  
wish the readers of the *Prairie Messenger*  
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and new ears to hear  
the new life that is born for us  
at Christmas.



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# HBO's *Westworld*: robots and nature of the soul

By Kimberly Winston  
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HBO's *Westworld* is a rich stew of a television show that, depending on your point of view, is about the struggle between good and evil, the nature of the soul or sex with robots.

Hey, it's HBO, which apparently doesn't produce a drama series unless it has a kink or two. But as unsettling as some of the scenes in *Westworld* are, the show raises theological questions about what it means to be human and what it costs us to sacrifice our humanity for momentary pleasure.

"It's going to be a hard look in the mirror," actress Evan Rachel Wood, who plays the series' lead robot, Dolores, told the Los Angeles Times. "But I think you will also see the potential that we possess. We're not at *Westworld* yet; it could be a cautionary tale."

*Westworld*, which wrapped up its first season Dec. 4, is loosely based on the 1973 film of the same name written by sci-fi savant Michael Crichton. It starred Yul Brynner as "The Man in Black," the role played by Ed Harris in the series. In both versions, well-heeled guests pay big bucks to cavort and indulge their every sexual and violent whim in

a big, bad theme park where they cannot be hurt.

In the series — which diverts broadly from the original film — the lifelike robots that act as the park's "hosts" begin to remember the continuous loop of suffering they've been subjected to by the human "newcomers" and start looking for answers and a way out.

And that's where the series trips over from escapist futuristic fantasy to something more philosophical.

"The disturbing message . . . is that machines could one day be so close to human as to be indistinguishable — not just in intellect and appearance, but also in moral terms," Tony Prescott, a cognitive neuroscientist and director of a robotics centre at the University of Sheffield, said of *Westworld* in the online magazine *The Conversation*.

"At the same time, by presenting an alternate view of the human condition through the technological mirror of life-like robots, *Westworld* causes us to reflect that we are perhaps also just sophisticated machines, albeit of a biological kind."

One of those biological questions that also touches on religion involves "affect theory" — a new-ish field of study that ex-

plores whether humans and other animals are biologically hard-wired to express certain affects, including religion.

Ken Chitwood, a scholar of religion at the University of Florida, said *Westworld* touches on affect theory in its exploration of whether robots made by humans to look and behave like humans require us to treat them as if they were human.

"Are humans all that special?" Chitwood said. "Are they unique in the world, or are we more like the animals around us than we think? We immediately recoil from that because we believe we are created in the image of God. . . . What *Westworld* does is get us to think about, 'Can non-humans have souls, and how is that soul connected to our biology?'"

So far, *Westworld* has not answered that question, or any of the moral-theological questions it raises. Chief among them: What price does a judgment-free zone, where all manner of sins from murder to rape can be committed, extract from our humanity?

"That's what draws people in" to the show, Chitwood said. "That there's this crazy place where people can do anything they want to these hosts and is that 'sinning.' This show wrestles with the question of, 'If we do this to a robot, is it wrong?' But no one is asking, 'Is it just wrong to do these things in the first place?' What kind of effect are these acts having on their own souls?"

Bill Brimer and James Cleland have turned their theological lens on *Westworld*. Both men are leaders at SoulThirst Church in North Texas and produce the podcast "God Geeks," which looks at religion and comic books, television,



Photo by John P. Johnson/HBO

**WESTWORLD** — A scene from episode 8, with Anthony Hopkins.

film and more.

For them, the show raises questions about the nature of sin: Are we innately sinful, as the newcomers' atrocious behaviour toward the hosts would suggest? Or are we torn between sins and the impulse to do good, as the character William's story seems to suggest?

"I wouldn't say I completely agree with all of the show's perspectives, but it definitely shows that man in his heart is sinful," Cleland said in a telephone interview as he and Brimer prepared for their penultimate podcast on *Westworld*. "Given free rein and lawlessness, what do we fall into? Sin. The whole park is built around that premise and inevitably, each guest that comes to the park ends up doing some pretty evil stuff."

Cleland sees this as an accu-

rate depiction of man's state before what he as a Christian expects to be the ultimate return of Jesus.

"What I think is interesting is that in the world we live in right now, evil can amass a lot of wealth, a lot of power, a lot of money, just as it does in the show," he said. "Before Christ comes back, evil sometimes appears to be in the lead."

The show's creators, the husband-and-wife team of Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy, seem to be aware of the religious-philosophical landscape they are mining, though there is no indication they plan to answer any of those questions in the show soon.

"The show is trying to have its cake and eat it too," Joy told the website Deadline Hollywood. "We're comfortable with that level of paradox."



Photo courtesy of HBO

**WESTWORLD** — A scene from episode 9, with Thandie Newton, and Jeffrey Wright.

## Take a long view of history

Continued from page 9

Today, the task of theology continues to be to reflect on that responsibility in the light of the Gospel.

Reading *The History of Theology* opened up a door into the world of theology. It led me to Congar's other groundbreaking works — *Divided Christendom* (1937), *Lay People in the Church* (1950), *True and False Reform in the Church* (1953), *Tradition and Traditions* (1960 - 63) — and his many studies in ecclesiology.

His example of persistent hard work in the face of great adversity and censure spoke to me of how the service of theology is sometimes met with great incomprehension. Shedding light on the hard truths of history and pointing the way to conversion brings the cross. When I am tempted to be impatient with the slow pace of progress, it is helpful to take the long view of history. Stepping back helps to bring things into

perspective, to discern the movements of God's Spirit.

That first challenging conversation as an undergraduate student was the beginning of a long apprenticeship in the habits of dialogue. I have discovered many more ecumenical companions along the way. More than conversation partners, they are fellow pilgrims from whom I have received much.

The men and women with whom I had the privilege to study through my years of graduate school helped me to cultivate a passion for the church. Not because it is a perfect community, but precisely because the Spirit of God continues to work through this ragtag gathering of humanity, with all of its failings and weakness.

I strive to instill in my students today that same sense of confidence in the God of history and a love for the diversity of spiritual gifts that nourish and enrich God's pilgrim people.

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and they  
shall name him  
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# This Christmas discover Kieslowski’s cinematic gift

## Screenings & Meanings

Gerald Schmitz



Every Christmas season brings a spate of “holiday” movies and late-year titles with Oscar ambitions. This year let me recommend instead a cinematic treasure of enduring value — a true movie gift that will keep on giving.

This fall The Criterion Collection released a superb fully remastered edition of Polish master Krzysztof Kieslowski’s justly acclaimed greatest achievement, *Dekalog* (Decalogue), originally made for Polish television broadcast in 1988, a late-Communist period following the rise of Solidarity but before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet collapse. As described, its “10 hour-long films, drawing from the Ten Commandments for thematic inspiration and an overarching structure, grapple deftly with moral and existential questions concerning life, death, love, hate, truth, and the passage of time.” Kieslowski used nine different cinematographers on the series but the same music composer, Zbigniew Preisner, and the screenplays were all co-written with Krzysztof Piesiewicz, a trial lawyer with whom he had collaborated on *No End* (1984), a controversial depiction of Polish political trials under martial law.

The Blu-Ray edition which I have also includes the longer theatrical versions of *Dekalog 5* and *Dekalog 6, A Short Film about Killing* and *A Short Film about*

*Love*, masterpieces that are among the most profoundly affecting movies ever made. In addition, there are a number of archival interviews and recordings as well as expert commentaries including a 70-page booklet by University of Western Ontario film studies emeritus professor Paul Coates. (More information at: <https://www.criterion.com/films/28661-dekalog>.)

Kieslowski died of a heart attack at age 54, not long after completing his famous trilogy *Three Colours: Blue, White, Red*, which were post-Communist French co-productions situated outside Poland. One wonders what he would have made of contemporary European anxieties.

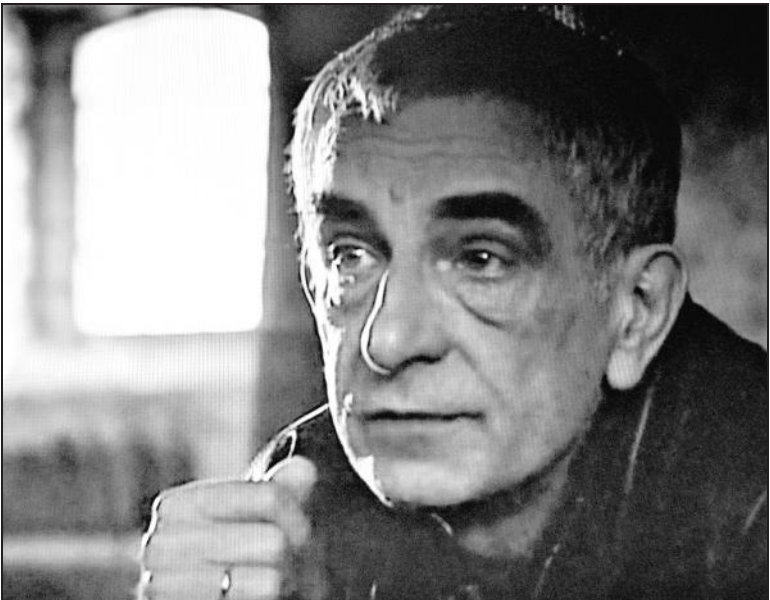
Kieslowski’s life and filmography coincided with a troubled and turbulent period in post-war Polish history in which the façade of totalitarian communism masked a deepening malaise both societal and personal. Born in Warsaw, he had a Catholic upbringing and retained a close complex relationship with God that he describes as “personal and private.” In interviews he has said he believes that “an absolute point of reference must exist.” At the same time, like the gospel parables, *Dekalog* puts forward probing questions rather than pat answers to the doubts and dilemmas of human life.

Kieslowski’s determination to become a filmmaker was a fateful choice. As recounted in a new

video, *Memoirs of an Angel*, an anniversary tribute to his career featuring a selection of interview and film clips, he had to be persistent after three times failing the entrance exam of the prestigious Lodz film school. (The documentary can be viewed online at: <http://www.indiewire.com/2016/03/watch-77-minute-tribute-documentary-to-the-great-krzysztof-kieslowski-259592/>.)

Kieslowski started out making realistic documentaries about Polish life that, while not overtly political, caused conflicts with the official censors. In the 1970s he turned to fictional narratives which he saw as affording more artistic freedom while remaining true to the conditions of life. This developed into what Paul Coates refers to as an observational “metaphysics of the everyday,” a cinematic gaze into the human heart, mind and soul that reaches its apogee in *Dekalog*. These films have a documentary aspect while revealing deeper truths about the nature of human beings and their relationships. As Coates writes: “Fiction is the speculation that follows from description, its question being, What lies within? . . . The desire to penetrate suffering more deeply, without exposing any individual, was a major motive for Kieslowski’s move to fiction.”

That searching examination of life implied a social critique, especially given the cultural and political ferment in Poland leading up to the rise of the Solidarity movement, years that also produced a “Cinema of Moral Anxiety.” However, unlike contemporaries making films of activist political dissent, notably Andrzej Wajda (*Man of Marble, Man of Iron*) who died this year, Kieslowski was interested in probing human



ANNIVERSARY TRIBUTE — This is a scene from *Memoirs of an Angel*, an anniversary tribute to Krzysztof Kieslowski’s career featuring a selection of interview and film clips.

behaviour at a more universal level, in making films “about individuals who can’t quite find their bearings.” The Poland of the 1980s, disoriented between resistance and repression, was fertile ground for such explorations. In interviews conducted in Paris in 1991 - 92 Kieslowski explains: “I sensed mutual indifference behind polite smiles and had the overwhelming impression that, more and more frequently, I was watching people who didn’t really know why they were living.”

The idea of using the Catholic enumeration of the Ten Commandments as a moral anchor was suggested by the devoutly Catholic co-writer Piesiewicz, although the resulting *Dekalog* films go beyond the literal to evoke profound allegorical meanings. Corresponding themes range from the idolization of secular gods to family relationships, crime and punishment, honesty, love, sex and jealousy, greed and other temptations. As Roger Ebert observed in an April 2000 introduction to the first North American video release: “There isn’t a one-to-one correlation; some films touch on more than one commandment, and others involve the whole ethical system suggested by the commandments. These are not simplistic illustrations of the rules, but stories that involve real people in the complexities of real problems. . . . None of these films is a simple demonstration of black and white moral issues.”

*Dekalog* is set in a single Warsaw housing complex with many windows that can be looked out of and into. Its mid-1980s Polish residents are not abstractions. The characters are parents, children, husbands, wives, lovers, the young and the old, the strong and the weak. They form an actu-

al community of sorts, however arbitrary and elusive. At the same time, Kieslowski deliberately does not dwell on specific external details, such as the restrictions imposed by the tottering officially atheistic edifice of the Communist system. What he wants us to concentrate on are the interior lives and moral struggles of his subjects that, while existing in an oppressive material reality, carry a larger metaphysical import — as if to say, at some level are we not all sinners who must decide how to live our lives in a world of sinful social structures?

By the late 1980s Kieslowski had become disillusioned with political developments. Moreover, politics cannot address some of the most important and essential questions of human life. As he put it during the Paris interviews, “it doesn’t matter much whether you live in a Communist country or a prosperous capitalist one, as far as such questions are concerned — questions like, What is the true meaning of life? Why do you get up in the morning? Politics doesn’t answer that.” There is no political cure for loneliness or loss.

That is not to say that the humanism of the *Dekalog* films is without socio-political implications. For example, as Kieslowski described *A Short Film about Killing*: “The film was an indictment of violence. Inflicting death is probably the highest form of violence imaginable; capital punishment is an infliction of death. In this way, we link violence and capital punishment as a form of violence.” That message has yet to be taken to heart in much of the United States.

Kieslowski’s approach is sober and serious, never superficial. As Ebert wrote, it is the opposite of “the simpleminded struggles of Hollywood plots.” What Kieslowski disliked about American culture was its “pursuit of empty talk and too much self-satisfaction.” He would certainly find plenty of challenging material in the excesses and moral ambiguities of contemporary western societies.

If you are looking for cinematic food for thought, The Criterion Collection’s *Dekalog* release delivers a truly impressive feast that will last long after this season’s passing amusements.

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# Newfoundland artist brings

By **Nancy Fornasiero**

When I first saw one of Josephine Williams Murphy’s colourful paintings online, I knew I wanted to meet her. It’s not that this somewhat obscure Newfoundland-born painter is an exceptionally accomplished artist, although she definitely has talent. But something in that folksy canvases spoke to me.

Months later a friend told me about a luncheon she’d been to where Murphy’s complete works had been showcased. Her series, called “Journey Home,” is made up of 50 individual vignettes from her rural upbringing during the 1940s, ’50s, and ’60s. I was told that it even made people cry. I became more intrigued.

Had I known then what I know now, I would not have been surprised about the emotional response. Viewing Murphy’s unpretentious paintings — with their simple realism, nostalgic themes, and joyous colours — feels as comforting as snuggling up with an heirloom patchwork quilt.

Like many Newfoundlanders, Murphy is a born storyteller — although, rather than using words, she painstakingly crafts her tales using brushstrokes on canvas. Her visual narratives have home-spun plots like A Visit to Aunt Bessie’s, or Gathering Berries for Jam, or Chopping Down the Christmas Tree. That first painting I saw, for example, illustrates the family’s daily bread-baking ritual. The foreground features Murphy’s serene-looking mother taking 10 warm loaves from the oven as her excited children look on. The bread is shaped in the traditional Newfoundland three-sectioned way, representing the Trinity. In the background laundry hangs to dry. The white cast-iron wood-burning stove, turquoise tiled walls, and patterned oilcloth bring the vintage 1940s country kitchen into focus. You can almost smell the wholesome, warm yeastiness of it.

Murphy’s paintings, which have been shown at many juried

art shows and galleries, exhibit her sharp instincts for colour and composition. Overall, though, they betray her lack of formal training. Case in point: she once overheard an art teacher in a gallery tell his students to pause to observe her works. “If you want to use proper perspective in your art,” he instructed, “don’t draw like this.” Much to her relief, he added: “Notice, though, that these paintings still work.” He was right. They do work; although when I first encountered them I couldn’t quite put my finger on why. I knew I had to dig deeper.

On a snowy day in February I make the trek to Cobourg, Ont., where Josephine Williams Murphy shares an empty nest with John, her high-school sweetheart and husband of 50 years. They warmly welcome me into their cottagey oak kitchen with its hand-stencilled walls covered in dozens of artworks, many featuring Murphy’s favourite motifs: loaves of bread and sheaves of wheat. The teakettle whistles, the smell of home-baked quiche wafts from the oven, and as my hostess chit-chats away in her distinctive Newfoundland accent, I begin to understand why her paintings are so appealing. There’s a whole lot of “Josephine” in them. On the surface, they illustrate the day-to-day events of her exceedingly happy childhood; on another level they radiate all the warmth, humility and positivity of the artist herself. I would eventually discover that there are even more layers to contemplate in these works — the kind that have less to do with paint and canvas and more to do with life itself.

Since the paintings all depict family scenarios, I had asked to meet one or two of the artist’s siblings. “Oh! My sisters are so excited to talk to you,” she says, while sprinkling bacon over the salad she’s prepping for our lunch. (Jo, as her family calls her and as she insists I do too, begins a lot of sentences with her favourite interjection: “oh!”)

Josephine apologizes that she couldn’t rally more of her sisters for our interview. I assure her it’s not a problem, and ask if they all live in town. “Well, mostly,” she replies, “or in Smith’s Falls. That’s where Joan lives. You know, the



Journey Home Collection Josephine Williams Murphy

one I told you about who almost became a nun?”

“Marg is here, you’re gonna get to meet her,” Josephine continues. “Oh! We just love Marg. She took such wonderful care of mum and dad when they moved out here.”

“And Mary’s comin,’” adds John while sneaking a bit of bacon to Sammy, a stray tabby they rescued.

“Oh yes,” agrees Josephine, “and Anne-Marie and Pat too. That’d be my sister Patricia, who we usually call Patsy; not my brother Patrick, who we call Pat.” (Josephine’s father, incidentally, is also named Pat.)

She’s now keeping track with fingers on both hands. “Plus Jimmy and Jerry are in Cobourg too...”

The litany of siblings isn’t over yet. Josephine hasn’t named those who live outside the area: Michael, David, Genevieve, Kevin, Ronald, James, Leonard, Brian, John, Paul, Terence and Peter. And there was little Brendan who never made it past infancy. In case you’re not keeping track, we’re up to 21! Every brother and sister, along with Josephine’s mum and dad, are represented in the scenes of her family-themed paintings, from the birth of the twins (two sets), to the gang all tobogganing, fishing, gardening, ice skating, praying, or sharing meals together.

Mary Williams was pregnant 19 times in 23 years, but according to Josephine, her mother saw every baby as a blessing rather than a burden. “You know, they didn’t choose. It was just a way of life back then,” she explains. “They were Catholic; you know, they weren’t well versed on the options... whatever came, came.”

The Williams kids had a religious upbringing — obvious in the paintings featuring visits from the parish priest and crucifixes hanging in every room of the three-bedroom house — but Josephine clarifies that these days only one of them is still a practising Catholic in the traditional sense. That’s not to say the childhood lessons didn’t rub off. “We all had such a loving upbringing and a great sense of God. We still carry that with us,” she explains. “It’s more about the way you live your life than anything else, right?”

Josephine herself is very committed to sustainability, social justice and community outreach — for example, every Tuesday and Thursday in her home studio, this retired occupational therapist patiently teaches mentally challenged adults to paint, and loves every minute of it. Evidently, the seeds of compassion were planted long ago in the little wood-frame bungalow on the outskirts of St. John’s.

Modesty seems to be another Christian value that Josephine has clung to — during our interview she repeatedly comments that she’s not terribly talented. But there are experts who beg to differ. Diane Glennie, former president of the Art Gallery of Northumberland, says that Josephine is “remarkable” and reminds her of the late Nova Scotia folk artist Maude Lewis (whose works have sold at auction for over \$20,000). Glennie feels that “the truth of the subject jumps right out of her pic-

tures.” Her works have also caught the attention of Dr. Brenda Beck, anthropologist and adjunct professor at the University of Toronto, who believes “Journey Home” is real treasure: “an exciting and valuable cultural document.” She describes them as “rich visual depictions of rural Newfoundland family life” and “fine examples of Canadian folk art.” Dr. Beck, a recognized authority on folk art, has been working to find a suitable permanent home for the series, somewhere like the Canadian Museum of Civilization.

One memorable meeting Josephine had was with David Blackwood, the celebrated Canadian artist from Newfoundland who calls himself a “visual storyteller.” Blackwood had seen some of her early work, paintings she somehow found time to complete though she was busy raising her three children at that time. “I loved David’s art so I was a bit embarrassed, you know?” Josephine recalls. When she told him that she wanted to take art classes to improve, he discouraged her. “What would be the point?” he asked. “If you learn all the rules, then it’ll take you years to get back to where you are now. You’d get so caught up in technique that you might miss the point. Your paintings are telling your story perfectly well right now.”

That was many years ago; the woman I chat with now in her spacious, pine-panelled studio is much more at ease with her unique, primitive style of expression. She’s also more comfortable with the word artist — a label that once made her cringe self-consciously. In fact, she now looks back on her amateur status as a blessing. “Because I didn’t have a lot of natural artistic skills, I was forced to linger at each painting. This gave me a lot of time for reflection,” she tells me as I wander around the garage-turned-studio that her husband refurbished for her, admiring dozens of lively depictions of family life. “These images seemed to bring me deeper and deeper within myself. I was getting reacquainted with the child I once was,” she confesses.


Josephine had no inkling when she started painting that her little hobby would become her life’s passion. Today, she describes her deep desire to paint as something she can neither explain nor control, but she’s noticed that the

— CONTINUED, page 13



Journey Home Collection Josephine Williams Murphy

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# ngs family memories to life

Continued from page 12

more she obeys the impulse, the more emotional the process gets and the more life makes sense to her. She often refers to the “sacredness of the ordinary” — something she discovered through the examination of her uncomplicated upbringing, the generosity of her parents, and the abundance that she and her siblings all felt despite their lack of material things. “I was overwhelmed that such simplicity was having a profound impact on me. It became more than just painting a few pictures of my childhood; the paintings were taking me on a spiritual journey.”

She pauses at her favourite painting, an image of her mother passing a loaf of home-baked bread over the fence to a neighbour, and says, “These paintings have put me in touch with the essence of who I am.”

It’s not just the artist who has found spiritual truths in her work. “Jo’s paintings changed all of us,” her youngest sister, Anne, tells me, while the other sisters nod in agreement. “They’ve allowed us to all journey back with her.” More astonishingly, perfect

strangers often have visceral reactions to Josephine’s works — they well up with tears, or smile ear-to-ear as long-dormant memories are aroused. “I think it’s wonderful how my paintings become about them,” she says.

When finally I have the chance to be alone with Josephine’s almost four-decades-worth of work, examining all the meticulous details in each painting, I grasp what she means. Precious memories of time spent with my own departed mother and grandmother resurface, and I am reminded of the values and lessons they’d passed on to me. For the first time since their passing, I feel the tangible presence of these two remarkable women, and, yes, a few tissues are required. When I learn that “Journey Home” is shown at spiritual retreats as often as it is in galleries, I am not the least bit surprised.

\*\*\*\*

Fifteen years ago, Ralph Benmergui, at that time a CBC radio host, did a brief interview with a little-known folk artist by the name of Josephine Williams



Journey Home Collection

Josephine Williams Murphy

Murphy — an encounter she’s certain he won’t remember. But he does.

“I’ve interviewed literally thousands of people, and no offence to them, but I often have no recollection of the interview,” he tells me. “But I sure do remember Josephine. Sometimes people stand out. Not just because they have an unusual story, but because their story affects you in a certain way.”

He recalls Josephine’s anecdotal paintings, especially the one about her dad buying and repainting an old ambulance with long bench seats in the back. (It was the only vehicle large enough to transport his brood. When the

traffic in St. John’s would pull over to let them pass, Pat Sr. would tell the kids it was because the Williams clan was so special!)

“I just really enjoyed her,” Benmergui recalls. “You know, we all get hung up on what it is that we need. We need a bigger house, we need more money, we need a vacation . . . by all rights a family like hers might have been miserable considering how many mouths they had to feed. And yet the way she described her life was the complete opposite. That’s one of the reasons I remembered her.”

He went on to explain that her story resonated with him on a personal level too. Benmergui grew up in Toronto as part of a tightly knit group of recently immigrated Moroccan Sephardi Jews. I thought it an unlikely connection until he elaborated: “I kind of grew up in the way that

she grew up . . . like where you’re part of a little tribe of people.”

We commiserate a bit more about Josephine and discuss the journey she’s been on. “Everybody’s life is a pilgrimage of some kind, right?” says Benmergui. “And everybody’s life is a prayer of some kind. How they do these things is the interesting part.”

It occurs to me then why I was drawn to that very first painting of Mrs. Williams baking bread with her children. At the time I didn’t understand what struck me about it but finally I get it. I hadn’t just viewed a painting; I had encountered a prayer.

Once I fully comprehend the depth of that humble little canvas, I can’t wait to tell Josephine. She is pleased as punch. “Didn’t I tell you?” she reminds me in her gentle yet powerful way. “Sacredness can always be found in the ordinary.”



Journey Home Collection

Josephine Williams Murphy

God’s mercy can make even the driest land become a garden, can restore life to dry bones (cf. Ez 37:1-14). . . . Let us be renewed by God’s mercy, let us be loved by Jesus, let us enable the power of his love to transform our lives too; and let us become agents of this mercy, channels through which God can water the earth, protect all creation and make justice and peace flourish.

— Pope Francis



Design Pics

Merry Christmas from the staff of the Prairie Messenger and St. Peter’s Press



Journey Home Collection

Josephine Williams Murphy



# Incarnation is a mystery into which we are drawn

## Liturgy and Life

Gertrude Rompré



As a child I used to love to visit the nativity scene in our parish church. In many ways it was a traditional manger scene with all the usual figures. But one thing made it special. There was a little angel sitting in the front of the scene with its hands outstretched. When I put a coin in the angel's hands, it nodded its thanks! I loved to go make my offering and watch the angel nod its head. Looking back, not only did that manger scene spark my

<b>Feast of the Nativity</b>	<b>Isaiah 52:7-10</b>
	<b>Psalms 98</b>
<b>December 25, 2016</b>	<b>Hebrews 1:1-4, (5-12)</b>
	<b>John 14:1-12</b>

young imagination, but it also taught me a profound theological truth. The mystery of the Incarnation is not something we observe but something with which we are called to interact.

The Scriptures we read at Christmas are all about how we, as Christians, are called to enter into the manger scene and become part of the mystery of the Incarnation. The com-

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ing of Emmanuel, God-with-us, is a contact sport, drawing us into the deep reality that our loving God does not watch us from a distance but is willing to enter into the grittiness and messiness of our human lives. The readings, in my view, invite us to enter into the Incarnation in three ways — they call us to contemplate, celebrate and participate.

Like Mary, we are called to contemplate and ponder these mysteries in our hearts. The mystery of the Incarnation is far too big for us to comprehend with our limited intellects. Rather, the wonder of God's presence among us, born to us as a child in a manger, must be treasured in our hearts. We enter into the mystery of the Incarnation by allowing the mystery to enter us at our deepest, most vulnerable selves. We contemplate the gift of our God — Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace — willing to become one with our human condition through the "cry of a tiny babe" (B. Cockburn). Through contemplation, we open our hearts to the presence of God-within-us!

The Scriptures also call us to celebrate. We rejoice! We sing praise! Our gladness spills out into song as we receive the mystery of God into our lives. It's no accident that gospels speak of multitudes of angels praising and glorifying God. It's no accident that we continue to sing *Gloria in excelsis Deo* 2,000 years later. In the beauty and the brokenness of our humanity, we rejoice in the knowledge that God is with us and for us. We celebrate our belief that God "sustains" us and offers "grace upon grace" to nourish us through the difficult times. Our hearts spill over with joy, not because we have a perfect, Hallmark greeting card life and family to celebrate Christmas, but because we have a God who loves us from within our grief and anguish and sorrows and joys. In our disappointments, God is here. In our happiness, God is here. In our stress, God is here. In our bliss, God is here.

In our \_\_\_\_\_, God is here. That is the mystery we celebrate this season.

Our contemplation and celebration of the Incarnation then enables us to participate ever more fully in this mystery. We, through our baptism, become one with the Christ Child born in the manger. Jesus was born in all humility, in a stable among ordinary people and farm animals. His birth was announced to shepherds in a field. No other setting could have been more unassuming. So, then, how do we make Christ more present in the mangers of our ordinary lives? Who are the shepherds to whom we are called to proclaim the good news? Where are we called to bring the consolation of our presence and love in the year ahead?

The Incarnation is not a spectator sport. It is a mystery into which we are drawn. As we contemplate the nativity in our own lives we do well to celebrate its wonder. As we ponder these things in our own hearts, we too participate in God's loving action in the world today. This Christmas, as we enter into our own manger scenes with our own meagre offerings, we can truly imagine the angels nodding in pleasure!



Gertrude Rompré

# Our greatest pain is that of inadequate self-expression

## In Exile

Ron Rolheiser, OMI



Art too has its martyrs and perhaps our greatest pain is that of inadequate self-expression. That's an insight from Iris Murdoch and it holds true, I believe, for most everyone.

Inside of each of us there's a great symphony, a great novel, a great dance, a great poem, a great painting, a great book of wisdom, a depth that we can never adequately express. No matter our wit or talent, we can never really write that book, do that dance, create that music, or paint that painting. We try, but what we are able to express even in our best moments is but a weak shadow of what's actually inside us. And so we suffer, in Murdoch's words, a martyrdom of inadequate self-expression.

What underlies this? Why this inadequacy?

At its root, this is not a struggle with what's base or deficient inside us — pride, concupiscence, arrogance, or ignorance. It's not ignorance, arrogance, or the devil that create this struggle. To the contrary, we struggle with this

tension because we carry divinity inside us. We are made in the image and likeness of God. This is fundamental to our Christian self-understanding. But this must be properly understood. We do ourselves a disservice when we understand this in an over-pious way, that is, when we imagine it as a holy icon of God stamped inside our souls, which we need to honour by living a chaste and moral life. That's true enough, but there's more at stake here, particularly as it pertains to our self-understanding.

What we are forever dealing with is an immense grandiosity inside us. There's a divine energy in us which, precisely because it is divine, never makes easy peace with this world. We carry inside of us divine energies, divine appetites, and divine depth. The spiritual task of our lives then, in essence, is that of ordering those energies, disciplining them, channelling them, and directing them so they are generative rather than destructive. And this is never a simple task. Moreover, our struggle to direct these divine energies triggers a whole series of other struggles.

Because we carry divine energy within our very makeup, we

should expect, this side of eternity, to struggle perennially with four things.

First, we will struggle, at some level, always, to keep a balance between the pressures inside us pushing toward creativity and other voices inside that are telling us to keep a firm grip on our own sanity. We see this played out large in the lives of many artists in their struggle with normalcy, to keep their feet solidly planted within what's ordinary and domestic because their push for creativity is also pushing them toward the dark, rich chaos that lies more deeply inside. All of us, more or less, struggle in the same way as do great artists. We too are lured toward the rich chaos inside us, even as we fear for what it might do to our sanity.

Second, we will struggle perennially with an overstimulated grandiosity. The divine fires inside of us, like all fires, easily flame out of control. In a world where everything is shown to us on a screen in our hands and where the successes, beauty, achievements, and talents of others are forever in front of our eyes, we are forever being overstimulated in our grandiosity. This is felt in our restlessness, in our sense of missing out on life, in our jealousies, in our anger for not being recognized for our talents and uniqueness, and in our constant dissatisfaction with our own lives.

Third, because there is an innate connection between the energy for creativity and sexuality, we will struggle with sexuality. The algebra is clear: creativity is inextricably linked with generativ-

ity and generativity is inextricably bound up with sexuality. No accident, great artists often struggle with sex, which doesn't give them an excuse for irresponsibility but helps explain the reason. In sharp contrast, many religious people are in denial about this connection. Unfortunately that only serves to drive the struggle underground and make it more dangerous.

Finally, we all struggle perennially to find that equilibrium between inflation and depression. We are forever finding ourselves either too full of ourselves or too empty of God, that is, either identifying with the divine energies inside of us and becoming pompous or, through false humility,

over-sensitivity, and wound, not letting the divine energy flow through us and consequently living in depression because we have stunted our own creativity.

James Hillman suggests that a symptom suffers most when it doesn't know where it belongs, and so it is important that we try to name all of this. Divine energy living inside of fallible human beings is a formula for tension, disquiet, and, yes, for martyrdom; but it's meant to be a creative tension, a mystery to be lived not a problem to be solved. Proper naming doesn't take away the pain and frustration, but at least it affords us a noble, poetic canopy under which to suffer.

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**Христос Раждається! Славимо Його!**

**Christ is Born! Glorify Him!**



*As we celebrate the joyful Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord, we extend to all the readers of the Prairie Messenger the wonderful tidings of Emmanuel, that God is with us and understands all you nations! For unto us a Child is given!*

May the deep joy and peace of His birth be celebrated in your homes this Christmas. May the Blessing of Emmanuel fill your heart and the hearts of those in your family, the domestic church, with joy and gladness this Christmas and strengthen you to witness for Christ in the New Year. **З нами Бог!**



**Bishop Bryan Bayda, CSsR,**  
**Bishop Emeritus Michael Wiwchar, CSsR,**  
**Clergy, Religious Members and all the faithful**  
**of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Saskatoon**



# Icon of Unburnt Bush depicts Mary and child

## Both Lungs

Brent Kostyniuk



*In You, O Blessed One, all creation rejoices: the choir of angels and the human race. Holy temple and spiritual paradise, glory of virgins. From You God took flesh, became a little boy, remaining the eternal God. He made Your womb His throne greater than the heavens. Wherefore, O Blessed One, all creation rejoices in You. Glory to You.*  
— Christmas Eve Divine Liturgy.

Whether your Christian heritage is from the West or the East, there are common elements about how we all celebrate Christmas. Central, of course, is the image of the Christ Child. In the West, homes and churches will be decorated with a Nativity scene, complete with stable, manger, wise men and shepherds, all gathered around Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

In the East, the Nativity icon will be given a place of honour. The Virgin Mother is shown half-sitting, supported by a hammock type bed used by the early Jews in their travels. All creation is called to the birth. In the icon, we see an angel announcing the event to two shepherds. As well, three angels attend the birth, while a donkey and ox look on. Striking is the absence of the usual sufferings of childbirth, an indication of the virgin birth of Christ.

*Kostyniuk, who lives in Edmonton, has a bachelor of theology from Newman and is a freelance writer. He and his wife Bev have been married for 38 years and have eight grandchildren.*

However, I would like to suggest a much different image for Christmas — the Icon of the Unburnt Bush. In one of its many forms, this icon depicts the Prophet Moses unstrapping his sandals as he approaches the burning bush on Mount Horeb. Within the bush there is an image of Mary holding the Christ Child. In Exodus 3:2 we read that Moses approached the bush and discovered it was on fire. However, the flames did not consume it. Tradition stemming from the early Church Fathers and the first Ecumenical Councils teaches us that the flame Moses saw was in fact God’s Uncreated Energies or Glory in the form of Light, which is why the bush was not consumed. This can be compared with the Light the Apostles witnessed at the Transfiguration. On Mount Horeb, God allowed Moses to see his eternal glory. When God spoke to Moses, Moses heard the pre-Incarnate Word or *Logos* of God.

For Eastern Christians the miracle of the Unburnt Bush is understood as a prefigurement of the virgin birth of Christ. Just as the bush was not harmed, neither was the



Brent Kostyniuk

ICON — Icon of the Unburnt Bush in St. Basil the Great Ukrainian Catholic Church, Edmonton.

Virgin. Just as the bush was “burned” by the Uncreated Energies of God without being consumed, so too was the Theotokos — *God bearing one* — consumed by that Energy while remaining the same.

For many Christians, the doctrine of the virgin birth is difficult to accept. We are told that the Theotokos is *Ever-Virgin*. She remained a virgin before, during, and eternally after the birth of Jesus Christ. This theology is an affirmation of who Christ Jesus is. Mary was chosen to be his mother, to conceive him, to give flesh to him, to give birth to him. Through this, we understand his true human nature. We also come to give the Theotokos a special place amongst the saints because, uniquely, she is

the finite dwelling place of the infinite God. In a sense, she is the new Holy of Holies, the new Temple where God resides.



This entire awesome reality is expressed beautifully in the following Theotokion, sung at the divine liturgy.

*When Gabriel uttered to you, O Virgin, his “Rejoice!” — at that sound the Master of all became flesh in you, the Holy Ark. As the just David said, you have become wider than the heavens carrying your Creator. Glory to Him Who dwelt in you! Glory to Him Who came forth from you! Glory to Him Who freed us through birth from you!*

As with all icons, the Icon of


the Unburnt Bush is intended to instruct us, just as Holy Scripture instructs us. In it, we see the message of salvation, given to Moses and fulfilled in Jesus. We marvel at his plan. We learn of the power of God which makes all things possible, even the Incarnation.

Finally, thank you to all those who took the time to let me know this column is being read and, at least occasionally, enjoyed. I wish you and all the Prairie Messenger readers a very Merry Christmas and a New Year that is blessed with sufficient for your needs and a good measure of happiness. May you be blessed as you welcome the Christ Child into your homes and into your hearts.



SCSBA

May you receive  
the blessings of  
peace and joy  
during the  
Christmas season.



from the

**SASKATCHEWAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION**

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# At Christmas, pray for and welcome refugees

## Journey to Justice

Joe Gunn



I'll always remember the first time I spent the Christmas "holidays" in a refugee camp.

It was the early days of 1982, on the Honduran border. Close enough to spit into El Salvador, we could sometimes hear bombardments. Families had next to nothing: they had fled the army's "scorched earth" campaigns by swimming across the bordering Rio Lempa. Tens of thousands of Salvadoran refugees huddled in makeshift huts scattered over dusty, bone-dry hills. We all slept in hammocks or on the ground. Almost equally impoverished, Honduran *campesinos* were the refugees' most gracious hosts, and ours, as we gathered for liturgy on the Feast of the Epiphany.

The Delegate of the Word (catechist) led us in prayer, song and biblical reflection. Sitting in a stiflingly hot makeshift chapel, Salvadoran and Honduran peasants joined together — they knew the same hymns and had all read the biblical passages about the three Wise Men coming to find and worship the Christ Child. To

*Gunn is the Ottawa-based executive director of Citizens for Public Justice, <http://www.cpj.ca/>, a member-driven, faith-based public policy organization focused on ecological justice, refugee rights and poverty elimination.*

my complete astonishment, the Honduran catechist began to describe me, and the priest I was travelling with, as current-day magi!

Given the living conditions, I was deathly sick — and certainly not feeling like royalty. Nonetheless, the catechist was undeterred. These foreigners had come from afar, but not on camels, even though we'd walked many miles into the border lands. We bore the gifts of solidarity — gifts of badly needed medicines, and perhaps, more importantly, would return home to raise the profile of the suffering refugees to the outside world. These gringos would not side with Herod and the powers of evil, but promised to bring the truth of the brutal war into public consciousness back in our home countries. God was with us (Emmanuel) in these border lands, and the Lord's work in the world was still being done today through the welcoming care of these refugees.

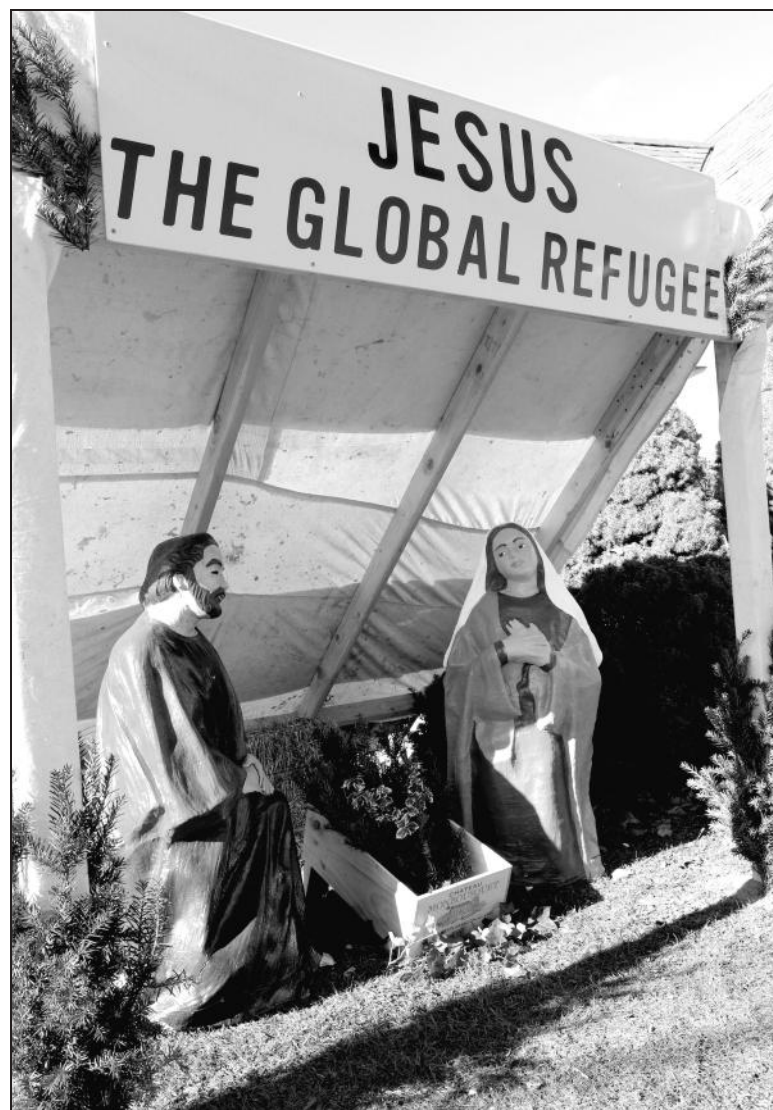
I don't think, all these years later, I've ever been referred to as a "Wise Man" again. But I did spend other Christmases among refugees. This year, many Canadians will be doing the same: more than 340 Canadian communities have received Syrian refugees, made them our friends, and welcomed them into our lives.

The Trudeau government

promised to bring 25,000 Syrians to Canada before 2016, and although this date was not met, the target was achieved by February. As of today, more than 35,745 Syrian refugees have come to our country under the expedited federal program. By all indications this was a substantial achievement of which we can be justifiably proud. Yet, rather than resting on our laurels, we must ensure that Canada's response rises to the ongoing challenge.

Unfortunately, the federal government plans to take in only an estimated 25,000 refugees in 2017. Churches and private sponsorship groups are being asked to receive and settle 16,000 of these refugees. The Canadian Council for Refugees had asked Ottawa to resettle 20,000 government assisted refugees, many more than the 7,500 the federal government has agreed to accept.

Beyond the numbers, there are qualitative changes to refugee policy that our federal government should be asked to undertake. Sponsoring groups are still waiting too long for the arrival of refugee families they've agreed to sponsor. Refugees, other than Syrians from Lebanon, Turkey or Jordan, are not being expedited in the same way. Many are hindered by the need to repay travel loans to Canada, increasing immigration fees, and high housing expenses in urban areas. Statistics Canada reports that over 34 per cent of newcomer families to Canada live in poverty — this will not be lowered as thousands of Syrians face "Month 13," the time when their federal benefits expire and many will need to resort to inadequate provincial welfare incomes. It will not help that many settlement agencies



CNS/Gregory A. Shemitz

**GIVE SHELTER** — A crèche titled "Jesus the Global Refugee" is seen outside Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Church in Wyandanch, N.Y., Nov. 27. The structure, designed as a refugee's lean-to, was created to call public attention to the biblical mandate to welcome immigrants and give shelter to refugees. This year, writes Joe Gunn, allow yourself to contemplate some of the challenges refugees still face.

have been told that government plans to cut their budgets next year.

This Christmas, allow yourself to contemplate some of the challenges refugees still face. The

United Nations reports that a staggering 65.3 million persons worldwide have suffered forced displacement from their homes.

— **WORK**, page 21

## Political identity and behaviour operate more like religion than we admit

By Arthur E. Farnsley II  
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Students in my college classes start out thinking religious identity and behaviour are primarily about ideas. When I ask them about differences between Catholics and Methodists, they respond with differences in beliefs: the pope, contraception and transubstantiation.

These theological differences are real, of course, but I learned long ago that ideas do not create religious identity: they follow from it. My students imagine we pick from a large menu of ideological options and then make decisions about which membership best fits our own ideas.

It does not take long to convince them this "decision" model is badly incomplete. We never start from a neutral position. Our thinking is shaped by where we are born, who raised us and the tribes we call our own.

My students know, for instance, that people of Irish, Italian

or Mexican descent are much more likely to be Catholic. Their Catholic identity and the intuitions that flow from it are shaped by their tribal membership long before they know a menu of ideas even exists. By the time they think about the ideas, their interpretation, acceptance or rejection is already deeply conditioned.

Ideas still matter but these ideas matter mostly to those who share a group's identity. Catholics do not become Catholics, nor do Muslims or Jews become Muslims or Jews, because of reasoned argument: who we are comes first.

It's time to acknowledge that political identity and behaviour operate more like religion than many of us care to admit.

This may sound obvious to some, but I learned it the hard way. I have spent too much of my adult life pretending the opposite, that politics is about ideas and we develop our positions through reason, logic and formal argumentation. It's time I accept the truth: who we are comes first in politics too.

It's time to stop saying "People don't vote their interests." This usually means working white people would be better off voting for a government that promises to protect people like

them. But that's not how they experience their interests. They want a world where people like them have meaningful jobs and high status. In that world, those who need state protection have low status. Why should they trust the government as the solution when they see government as the cause of their lower status?

We must stop assuming people's interests are based on the amount of money they earn rather than who they are.

It's time to stop saying "Candidates should focus on the issues and stop running negative ads." In what world is this a more effective strategy? It may appear effective in an academic world where people like me incorrectly assume elections are about ideas, reason and argumentation. But the political operatives of both parties have known for decades that voting behaviour is about emotion, intuition and tribal affiliation. It's about whose status goes up or down. The operatives know who we are.

It's time to stop saying "Better civic education will fix the problem." I am the director of the Indiana University Center for Civic Literacy, so I believe civic education matters. But we need to be realistic about how it matters.

The Constitution applies to all of us; we all live in a complex, bureaucratic world. There is a difference between fact and opinion. Better education in these areas can support evidence-based debates, but the way we interpret evidence is shaped first and foremost by who we are.

Smart people have been telling us this for a while. Read Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Jonathan Haidt's *The Righteous Mind* and John Hibbing et al's *Predisposed*. Each debunks the notion that our reason operates free from, much less above, our pre-existing intuitions.

Most people seem to understand this about religion but have failed to realize it about politics.

This is understandable; there are good reasons to resist this view of political behaviour. We do not like to think of public deliberation as quite so susceptible to the wiles of cynicism and manipulation. We imagine our own intuitions and affiliations stem from clear thinking while our adversaries are peddling mere identity politics. We want politics, even elections, to be evidence-based. We don't want to live in a "post-truth" world.

But this is not about giving up on facts, truth or logic. When people lie outright, or are simply

wrong on matters of fact, we must say so. But facts are understood in a context shaped by everyone's fundamental sense of who they are and which side they are on.

There are limits to the religion and politics comparison. Religious organizations adapt more slowly to change than political parties do. There are relatively few barriers to broad religious pluralism in America, but our vast diversity of political views must be squeezed, more or less, into two parties.

Despite such limits, any hope of bridging serious social differences between rural and urban, rich and poor, young and old, or among racial and ethnic groups, starts with learning about people's identities. We have to find places where our intuitions overlap. We have to search for places where our many tribal affiliations coincide even as we disagree about other issues.

As with religion, the choice between "facts" and "identity" in politics is a false one. We can argue about policies using evidence, just as religionists argue internally about theology and ethics. But we should also remember that political behaviour, like religious behaviour, begins with the way we understand our place in the universe.

*Farnsley II is professor of religious studies at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis and author of *Flea Market Jesus*.*



# All humanity can identify with iconic image



## Questioning Faith

Mary Marrocco

At a championship series major league baseball game in Toronto, after a questionable umpiring call, disgruntled spectators started throwing beer cans onto the field of play. It wasn't the first time this sort of thing happened, but an incident on this particular night created an image that caught attention: a distraught mother, in the stands, shielding her baby with her body. A flying beer can fortunately didn't hit the baby but was close enough to spray beer all over the child on the way by. Photographs show the kind of parental distress you might expect in a war zone, not a theatre of entertainment.

The image of a mother holding a baby in her arms is "iconic" in

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the true sense: it's an image (Greek, *eikon*) of how God reveals himself in our world. For Christians, the word "image" shows humanity's special relationship to God. "God said, 'Let us make humankind in our own image (*eikon*)' " (Gn 1:26). We are images, or icons, of God, in some way that no other part of creation is.

God dreamt up all the billions of people who have ever lived, the vast planet on which we all dwell, the billions of planets throughout the universe, the (possibly) billions of universes. In all that is — larger than we can glimpse or imagine — humanity is special because humans are *eikons*, images, of the one God.

And of all the images dear to Christian tradition, the mother and child holds a prime spot. Why do we hold a special place for Mary in the church? The answer is in this image.

Like the crucifix, the "Madonna with child" is so familiar,

we may forget what's astonishing about it. It doesn't apply only to mothers, women, or boy babies. It applies to every human.

Ancient Christian hymns help us to enter into the mystery of this image. Such hymns are still sung today because they give a key to the magnificent mystery of our own living: *Mary, a creature, holds in her arms the Creator of the universe*. No wonder Christian hymns marvel at this oh-so-common spectacle of a woman holding a baby. For they see it in the light of creation and redemption. They see the Creator becoming vulnerable and fragile, as a human, and placing himself in the care and power of the creature. If she were to drop him, he would be as hurt as any child.

If Mary were to take this baby to a major league baseball game, and a beer can were to be launched within an inch of his head, she would shield him with her body just as the 21st-century mother did.

Jesus, as an infant, was not threatened by beer cans, but he was surrounded by violence. The violence of poverty, causing his mother and foster-father to seek shelter in a place where animals were fed. The violence of jealousy, causing Herod to seek and massacre an untold number of first-born boy babies. The violence of power, causing Joseph to take his family to another country for refuge. Even in the moment of celebrating Jesus' birth, the Word made flesh, God-with-us, the fulfilment of all promises — we recall human violence.

The photograph of the baby needing its mother's protection brought home, more than any other image, the foolishness and violence of beer-throwing in a baseball stadium. It was clearly on a different level from images of adult spectators, players, and officials in the same situation. A child's innocent vulnerability highlights the shocking nature of human violence. The vulnerability and innocence of Christ helps us see that the violence is in us, not in God.

How can we, so prone to violence, become God-like? For that



Janice Weber

**ICONIC IMAGE** — Of all the images dear to Christian tradition, the mother and child holds a prime spot, writes Mary Marrocco. "Why do we hold a special place for Mary in the church? The answer is in this image. Like the crucifix, the 'Madonna with child' is so familiar, we may forget what's astonishing about it. It doesn't apply only to mothers, women, or boy babies. It applies to every human."

is what we, made in God's image, are called to.

Violence in God's name is the challenge of our day. Christmas is God's judgment on this belief.

In this time of preparation to celebrate Christ's birth into the world, we get to stop and listen. We get to wonder at the movement of the shining stars, travelling with the Wise Ones toward the one star. We get to smell the sheep on the hillside while listening to the angel's concert. We get to behold the baby's newness, and bask in Mary and Joseph's courage and faith, wrapping him and laying him in a manger.

The world's violence didn't deter them from rejoicing in the new life and new work God gave them. It didn't make them sequester the newborn in isolationist protectiveness. In their poverty and vulnerability, they were able to let this Child be for the world. Mary made a place for the Word to be made flesh. And this allowed her, the creature, made in God's image, to become bearer of God.

Let us receive all that's given us in these days of wonder. Let us be changed by them, from violence to the true peace that only the Prince of Peace can give.



*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory of a Father's only begotten son, full of grace and truth. - JOHN 1:14*

May the light of Christ's coming into the world bring peace and joy to all!



From Diocesan Administrator Fr. Kevin McGee and the clergy, religious and faithful of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon





# This is the miracle, that he comes, even here

## Barefoot and Preaching

Leah Perrault



The Christmas story is so familiar that it comes as an inevitability for most of us. A baby lying in a manger, lights on the streets and carols on the radio, starting in November, and bringing with it a host of parties and decorating, baking and lists. The story comes, with all its trappings, every year at this time. But does Jesus come, I mean, really come and show up and change my life?

We're decorating, and the carols are playing and I have this image of smiles and laughter, kids filled with eager expectation, and an afternoon of family togetherness. What actually happens is over-excited kids arguing over the two-and-a-half pairs of noisy elf shoes that a well-meaning aunt gifted them last Christmas, and *O Holy Night* being drowned out by a tinny rendition of *Jingle Bells* and impending meltdowns, while the puppy chews on the tree skirt. My expectations threaten my ability to feel the promise of the coming Prince of Peace.

*Perrault is a wife and mom, a grateful employee of Emmanuel Care, and a speaker, writer and consultant at [www.leah-perrault.com](http://www.leah-perrault.com)*

It is time for the Christmas concert, on a weeknight, and supper is hotdogs in 17 minutes between trying to find the earrings that go with the Christmas dress and an argument about the necessity of brushing hair. Jesus is coming, but I can't think about him right now. There's a diaper to change, and the

car tires are low again and need to be filled before we can leave, so we're down a parent on the search for a missing mitten. Mighty God, we could use you now, but we haven't got the time.

Somewhere else, the kids are grown and gone, and it is the first Christmas without a wife of 35 years. The pain was a too-late clue to the cancer that stole her energy and then her life. The decorations are in the boxes in the basement, and they are too heavy with grief to be lifted. The bells are ringing, once the source of great joy, and now an instigator of a flood of tears. Everlasting Father, what do we do when our comfort has escaped us, and everything we

thought was everlasting seems to have shattered right in our hands?

In another heart, the promise of a baby is just another reminder of empty arms and silence in a home that was built for children that have never come. It is too much to hear the story one more time. The nativity feels like a funeral for the three babies born into heaven, every single year. Wonderful Counsellor, where have you been?

Just like our ancestors in faith, we are waiting for king of glory and power, one who comes to fix and save us from ourselves and our suffering, and just like that night some 2,000 years ago, he comes in the silence and the small, the whispering and the dark. He comes in the cracks, whispering in the darkness, crying out with us.

He comes in ways that I cannot recognize him without the eyes of faith. After I have spoken harshly, abused my power as a parent, he shows up under the tree when my oldest pulls out a book and reads to her younger siblings, bringing on 30 seconds of miracle in 13 inches beneath the twinkling lights. He shows up while they turn off all the lights when I am trying to cook, so that they can all sit in the magic of just the tree lights.

He shows up when I concede that we will just be late and unkempt for the Christmas concert. Jesus comes, when the flood of tears gives way to a shower and early night, wrapped around her pillow, and a dream of a first date. He arrives, when at Christmas mass, for a moment, that couple holds another family's baby and receives an invitation to be godparents.

Jesus comes into whatever our lives look like today. He comes into our loneliness, our depression, our busyness, and even our expectation. He comes without fanfare and angels, without the need for a room, all prepared and ready. Whatever today brings, he is coming. It is enough that I show up for what today holds and expect to see his tiny presence, that I anticipate that today, he is born again, to save a world that is distracted, and a little bit crazy, like me.

Even here, even now, he comes, again. The story is ever ancient, and ever new. The manger is whatever corner in which he fits. When I notice him there, I can stop to adore him, to make a little more room. Because Jesus has changed everything. These little people who need more of me than I feel I have to offer get what they need because he comes and shows up and makes more room in my heart. He whispers that I get to choose again every time I fail. He offers a peace that comes when I surrender to what is, today.

This is the miracle. He comes even here, especially here, to the places that are not yet whole. Emmanuel, God is with us.



CNS/Debbie Hill

**CHRISTMAS MIRACLE** — This is the miracle, writes Leah Perrault. "He comes even here, especially here, to the places that are not yet whole. Emmanuel, God is with us."

## Despite cardinals' challenge, *Amoris Laetitia* is clear about mercy

By Phyllis Zagano

True fact: if you lock four professors in a room they'll emerge with five opinions.

Oddly enough, four cardinals read Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* and came out with a single opinion, and a letter.

To the pope.

OK, not a letter. It was a *dubium*, which is Latin for "you are wrong." The deeper meaning is "we are right."

It's the communion wars all over again. Now it's about divorced and remarried folks who haven't gotten annulments of their prior marriages.

Following the second session of the synod of bishops on the family, the pope wrote 264 pages on "The Joy of Love," including this:

*Because of forms of conditioning and mitigating factors, it is possible that in an objective situation of sin — which may not be*

*subjectively culpable, or fully such — a person can be living in God's grace, can love and can also grow in the life of grace and charity, while receiving the Church's help to this end (351).*

That means someone in an "objective situation of sin" — a non-church marriage — may not be "subjectively culpable" — not exactly guilty due to mitigating circumstances. And the church can and should help.

There you have it. The pope — and the synod — called for pastoral wisdom and kindness toward folks divorced and remarried without benefit of annulments.

It is official church teaching — the result of the two-year synodal process — that pastors use both their heads and their hearts in guiding people in "irregular" marital situations. They are supposed to display mercy.

But then there is Footnote 351. The footnote includes earlier comments from Francis:

*In certain cases, this (the church's help) can include the help of the sacraments. Hence, "I want to remind priests that the confessional must not be a torture chamber, but rather an encounter with the Lord's mercy" (Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium [Nov. 24, 2013], 44: AAS105 [2013], 1038). I would also point out that the Eucharist "is not a prize for the perfect, but a power-*

*ful medicine and nourishment for the weak" (ibid., 47: 1039).*

There he goes again. It's right there in black and white. The pope thinks the job of the church is mercy.

Some folks seem to object. A few canon lawyers are waiving their law books, sputtering like motorboats, about all that. The naysayers are especially fond of Canon 915 — their ever-popular canon that denies eucharist to people who "obstinately persevere in manifest grave sin."

Just to be clear: Footnote 351 does not say: "let him leave the mother of his children for a trophy wife." Nor does it say, "let her find another man."

What Footnote 351 says is: every individual has a story. Every individual's story has its causes, and some causes are more complicated than others.

The person whose spouse disappeared years ago has no way of obtaining an annulment. The person whose life and history were destroyed by war or earthquake cannot prove a case for annulment. The couple with children, now wed civilly for 25 years, may have made mistakes when they were very young.

They all may privately judge their prior marriages null. In many cases, they had good reason to leave their first marriage: their partners refused to have children, or were infected with drugs or

alcohol, or were physically and verbally abusive, or refused to support them, or refused marital love, or were psychologically unstable, or were psychologically immature.

Sometimes a do-it-yourself annulment is the best folks can manage.

I know the paperwork nightmare of annulment procedures. I have helped friends navigate the shoals of diocesan tribunals. Sometimes things are easy. The paperwork falls into place or an administrative decision appears — a form wasn't filed in the first place. But sometimes things are hard. He lives in another country. She will not answer a letter.

It can take a lot of time. It used to take a lot of money.

Unfortunately, the four cardinals — three retired and one sidelined — want to throw the Code of Canon Law at all these people

and, apparently, at Pope Francis.

The pope is having none of it.

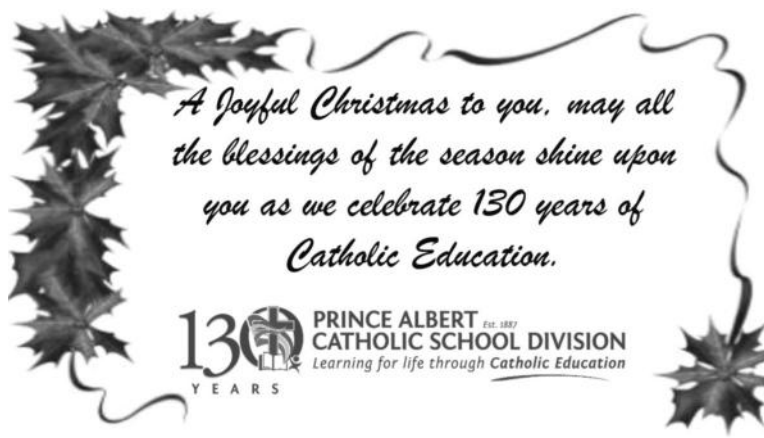
The teams are lining up. The dean of the Roman Rota — the head of the Vatican's court of appeals — says if the four cardinals don't like Francis' teachings they should turn in their red birettas. Francis already removed the youngest of the complaining cardinals, 68-year-old Raymond Burke, as head of the Apostolic Signatura in November 2014. Burke, a canonical strict constructionist, is known for his fondness for the *cappa magna*. The others — Walter Brandmüller, 87, Carlo Caffara, 78, and Joachim Meisner, 82 — are well retired.

Will the fights go on? Probably. Will the pope win?

It's not about the pope.

It's about the People of God. They are the winners.

*Zagano is senior research associate-in-residence at Hofstra University in Hempstead, N.Y. Her most recent books include *The Light of the World: Daily Meditations for Advent and Christmas*, *Women Deacons?: Essays with Answers* and *In the Image of Christ: Essays on Being Catholic and Female*.*





# Enemy soldiers left trenches to celebrate Christmas

By Paul Paproski, OSB

The nations of Europe and their allies, a century ago, were reaping the harvest of an arms race fuelled by nationalism. Countries, jockeying for influence on the world scene, had invested heavily in the military and formed powerful alliances to secure peace. Feelings of loyalty were heightened in August of 1914 when Great Britain declared war against Germany. Canada automatically joined with Great Britain in the Great War, which was christened by some as the War to End All Wars.

Patriotism was strong in the Prairie provinces. Crowds gathered on the streets in Regina in a mood of jubilation after learning of war. Many revellers threw their hats into the air. The excitement, in Saskatoon, led to an impromptu parade watched by crowds waving Union Jacks and singing patriotic songs. The train station in Saskatoon became a focal point of the city just 10 days after the declaration of war. Soldiers gathered there to be sent away to battle. A throng of well-wishers arrived and they became so numerous that the train had to be delayed an hour to give soldiers time to board. Military experts

were certain the war would be over before Christmas and were sure the Canadian troops would not see action.

The Prairie provinces soon provided more than 40,000 recruits for the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Many soldiers viewed the war as an opportunity to both serve the empire and visit Europe. About 20 per cent who enlisted had been unemployed and facing poverty. Businessmen and politicians were optimistic the oncoming war would end the recession. Saskatchewan had gone through boom years and some of its cities had borrowed heavily anticipating expansion. The economic downturn in 1913 threatened to financially ruin them.

The fighting between the Allies and central powers in Europe was fierce. Soldiers dug a system of fortified trenches and fought in trench warfare. By Christmas Eve 1914 the opposing armies faced each other from trenches filled with mud and rats.

Families in the British Empire sent Christmas cards and letters to the trenches to cheer up their loved ones. When Christmas Day arrived some Allied soldiers began to sing Christmas songs. Others accompanied them in song from the German trenches. Some brave soldiers from opposing sides put their lives at risk and met in the open. They were joined by more of their comrades. The enemies



Paul Paproski, OSB

**PEACE ON EARTH —** The Christmas Spirit in 1914 transformed enemies into friends. Allied and German soldiers left their trenches on Christmas Day to sing Christmas songs, trade greetings and gifts. Christmas became an opportunity for foes to reach out to each other in peace. During Christmas we recall how God became one of us and offers us the gift of peace. Our gift, in return, is to make peace with ourselves and with one another.

exchanged food, souvenirs and cigarettes. The camaraderie soon evolved into a soccer match. The instantaneous friendship among foes was shocking. These men had gone through horrendous fighting. The Canadians, even before the declaration of war, were aware of Germans being referred to as “the hated Hun.” News of this insubordination soon reached the generals who put an immediate stop to it. The men were herded back into the trenches. The absurdity was replaced, that evening, by fighting.


The Christmas incident of 1914 says much about the power of Christmas. The Christmas Spirit in

1914 brought enemies together and united them as a common human family. The Christmas spirit dissolved the hatred and division fed by nationalism and patriotism. Christmas, for a moment, brought Peace on Earth.

Rev. Flor McCarthy, SDB, a spiritual author, writes that the notion of peace is much deeper than the absence of war. The Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*, conveys a richer meaning than its English equivalent. *Shalom* stands for a sense of completeness and well-being that is possible even in the midst of troubles. *Shalom* offers a peace so profound that it

will not let itself be manipulated by outer circumstances, no matter how violent or brutal.


The peace emanating from *shalom* is a state of inner calm that flows from a right relationship with God and out to other people. Peace is a gift from God and does not come by human effort alone. Peace is the gift of Christmas. When the Son of God came to us as a helpless child, God was reaching out to us in peace. God became one of us. God reaches out to us in peace and offers us the gift of peace. Our gift, in return, is to make peace with ourselves and with one another.



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*For unto us a child is born...  
~ Isaiah 9:6*

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# Lifelong lesson is learned in child’s sneak preview

By Alma Barkman

*Go up and spy* (Joshua 7:2).

Try as I might, I could no longer believe in Santa Claus. I tried to, I really did, if only for the sake of my parents, but the facts eventually spoke for them-

*Barkman is a freelance writer from Winnipeg (www.almabarkman.com)*

selves.

Take my mother’s claim that Santa had caught his beard in our storm door, for instance. My secret inspection revealed that the white whiskers he left behind bore striking resemblance to the stuffing that fell out of an old armchair.

Footprints Santa supposedly left in the newly fallen snow bore the exact same tread pattern as Dad’s winter boots.

The cookies and milk I left out

for the jolly fat soul were inadvertently gobbled up by my older brother. He admitted as much when he thought I wasn’t listening.

And so rather early on in life I had gathered up undeniable proof that Santa was a lovable, but mythical figure. While the adults were gullible enough to believe that reindeer flew and a fat man squeezed down skinny chimneys, I knew better.

The real puzzle lay in trying to

figure out where those very same adults hid my presents every year.

A rectangular metal trunk salvaged from a vintage car sat in my parents’ bedroom, and for the most part solicited no unusual attention. But from November on, I kept that trunk under constant surveillance, convinced that my Christmas presents must surely be tucked away somewhere within its mysterious depths.

I’d wait until my mother went out to do chores and then sneak in and unclasp the chrome buckle latches on the metal trunk. The lid creaked as I opened it, and more than once I was nearly overcome by mothball fumes, but I persisted in my stealthy practice.

long lashes used to look down at me in the village store. She was dressed in a pink coat and bonnet, with a frilly dress underneath, and she wore white shoes and socks. One lingering look and I quickly closed the lid of the trunk.

As I tossed and turned in bed that night, things suddenly began to fall into place. The shortage of eggs for breakfast, my mother frequently walking to town — why, of course! She was swapping eggs in exchange for the doll, a “buy now, lay later” deal.

I could hardly bear to think about it, an honest, hardworking mother sacrificing precious time and money for an underhanded traitor who didn’t deserve to be called her daughter.

Have you any idea how hard it is for a six-year-old girl to contain her guilt? I feigned innocence for two long, long weeks, taking advantage of opportune times to wonder aloud what I would be getting for Christmas, all the while yearning for just one more peek into the trunk. I probably exercised more self-discipline in those two weeks than in all my ensuing years.

## Searching for our special star



### Figure of Speech

Dr. Gerry Turcotte

*When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.* — Matthew 2:10

This may seem like an odd question to ask, but how many of you have ever asked yourself about Nativity scenes — in particular, when the first one (beside the obvious one in the Bethlehem stable) actually took place? Well it never occurred to me to ask. My eyes were opened on this matter when I read an article about Pope Francis making a surprise visit to a Franciscan shrine in Greccio, Italy. There he knelt in front of a shrine created by his namesake. On Christmas Eve 1223, this was where St. Francis of Assisi purportedly erected the world’s first Nativity scene.

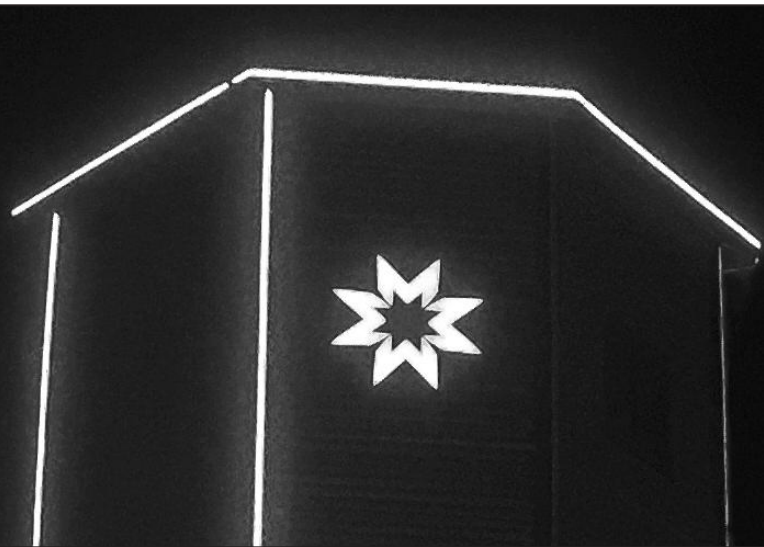
Pope Francis would later tell a group of young people, on yet another impromptu visit, that this birth was an example of how “God lowered himself, obliterated himself to be like us, to walk before us, but with smallness, that is, you can say, humility, which goes against pride, self-importance, arrogance.” And it was a star that led the three Wise Men to this site, which prompted the pope to insist that we look out for a ‘special star that calls us to

do something greater, to strike out on a journey, to make a decision.’

At St. Mary’s University here in Calgary we organize under the banner of what we call the St. Mary’s Star. Four qualities of Mary (simplicity, clarity, purity and confidence) are each represented by one of the four letter M’s that form the star. It is our commitment to students, and to the community, that we will honour all learners who come to our door, and because of our small

class sizes that allow us to focus on the whole person, we truly believe that everyone has an opportunity to discover who they are. That is the remarkable gift of an education: that people can discover their own special star.

The truth about education is that while it is intensely personal, focused on self-improvement and intellectual development, it is also communal in many ways, preparing students for their roles in the wider world. At St. Mary’s we know that our students will take their special talents out into the community, but with a clear foundation that has taught them to focus on social justice and the greater good. We invite them to search for their special star, knowing that together, in community, they will form a dynamic constellation. And perhaps at Christmas this is one of the greatest gifts we can imagine.



Gerry Turcotte

**ST. MARY’S STAR** — At St. Mary’s University in Calgary, they are organized under what is known as St. Mary’s Star. Four qualities of Mary (simplicity, clarity, purity and confidence) are each represented by the one of the four letter M’s that form the star, writes Gerry Turcotte.



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# This world we all live in is as small as it is large

## Around the Kitchen Table

Lloyd Ratzlaff



As a lifelong Canadian prairie dweller (and glad to be so), I tend to think of human congregations in ascending — or perhaps it’s descending — order: from farm to hamlet, hamlet to village, village to town and city, and so on up to metropolis or megalopolis.

Not everyone thinks this way, for example our friends Babs and Fredy Egli in Buchs, Switzerland. Buchs has a population of about 30,000, which in Saskatchewan would make it a fair-sized city, but to the Egli’s it’s a mere town, although within the town limits of Buchs lies the medieval *Stadt* — the city — of Werdenberg.

Werdenberg is the oldest timber-frame settlement in Switzer-

land, comprised of a few winding streets among ancient wooden houses where a few hundred souls live, perhaps as many as inhabited the village of Laird, Sask., where I grew up. And Werdenberg is a city for one reason: it has a castle. The much larger community of Buchs does not, and therefore cannot be a *Stadt*. No castle, no city.

When Larraine and I strolled down Werdenberg’s cobblestone streets, we could hardly resist singing the childhood ditty, *There was a crooked man who walked a crooked mile . . .* surely it was in one of these uneven structures that the old man lived with his crooked cat and mouse. These houses are built side-by-side, with common interior walls, and most of them have ground floors that formerly were barns or stables, and only in recent years have been refurbished as human living spaces. The ownership of Werdenberg houses is strictly governed by legislation. Typically, they are passed down to succeeding generations of families who have occupied them since medieval times, and the law prescribes the upkeep of any dwellings left without heirs to inherit them.

On our visit to the venerable city, I was particularly struck by two of the buildings. One had an upper-storey window in a room where the bodies of the dead were



Lloyd Ratzlaff

**WHOSE HOUSE IS IT? — A house in Switzerland with a poem inscribed in German lettering caught Lloyd Ratzlaff’s attention.**

traditionally laid for a time before their burial. The window was surrounded by painted red flames, being the outlet through which the soul travelled and having to endure purgatorial fires on its passage.

The other house, as if to complement the first, had a poem on its front, inscribed in old Germanic lettering: *Diss hus ist min und doch nicht min, wer vorher da, s’was ouch nit sin, Wer nach mir kumt muoss och hinus; sag lieber fründ wem ist diss hus?*

Translated, it means roughly: *This house is mine and yet not mine, someone else was here before, whose it wasn’t either. Whoever comes after me will have to leave it too; so tell me, dear friend, whose house is it?*

And this world we all live in together, which is as small as it’s large — whose house is it? *Once in royal David’s city stood a lowly cattle shed. . . .* That settlement of Bethlehem, more ancient by far than Werdenberg, was hardly the size of my village of Laird, yet the prophet Micah sang of it, “Thou, Bethlehem, though thou be little among the thousands of

Judah, yet out of thee shall come forth he whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” King David’s city had only a barn for a castle and a manger for a throne, and the prince who was born there once upon a time keeps being born again today — forever today — in the humblest habitations of this small planet we call, for now, home.

*Ratzlaff is a former minister, counsellor, and university lecturer. He has authored three books of literary non-fiction published by Thistle-down Press, and edited an anthology of seniors’ writings published by READ Saskatoon. He has been short-listed for three Saskatchewan Books Awards, won two Saskatchewan Writers Guild literary non-fiction awards, and served on local, provincial, and national writing organization boards. He has taught writing classes for the University of Saskatchewan Certificate of Art and Design (USCAD) and the Western Development Museum.*

The virgin will be with child  
and will give birth to a son.  
And they will call him  
Emmanuel  
which means  
**GOD WITH US**

Matthew 1:23

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**SANTA MARIA SENIOR CITIZENS HOME**

**Work to improve policies**

Continued from page 16

Some 21.3 million of these are refugees, that is, persons forced to flee across a border. Eighty-six per cent of refugees have been accepted by less developed countries, often those bordering the refugee source country. Millions remain, often for decades, in underfunded refugee camps where the future looks hopelessly worse than yesterday. A very small number of these persons were lucky enough to be selected to come to Canada — and our full response to the refugee crisis must take these most vulnerable overseas populations into account.

Exactly 30 years ago, in 1986, the Nansen Medal was awarded to “the Canadian people” by the United Nation’s High Commission for Refugees. The award was received because so many Canadians welcomed, housed and settled the Indochinese “boat people.” This Christmas, pray for and welcome refugees. Also, let’s act to improve Canadian policies and spending priorities so that fewer refugees remain in suffering.

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Peace is built on justice

During Christmas, our thoughts naturally turn to the Holy Land and the Middle East. That is where the mystery of the Incarnation occurred. That is where Jesus was born. That is where Jesus grew up with Mary and Joseph and, later, walked and taught with his disciples.

It's a land that has a long history. But its recent history is a tale of tragedy. This was outlined at a Dec. 5 interfaith forum in New York. Panelists also made suggestions on how to improve the situation.

Christians in the Middle East face extinction because of genocide, wars and international indifference to their plight, according to the panelists. A concerted multilateral effort to establish a safe haven for Christians while rebuilding their devastated homelands is preferable to massive permanent resettlement to other countries, including the United States, they said.

Twelve speakers at the Sheen Centre for Thought & Culture event explored "The Crisis for Christians in the Middle East," with a particular focus on vulnerable Christian minorities in Syria and Iraq. Christians formed the majority in the Middle East until the Crusades in the 12th - 14th centuries, but "the past thousand years haven't been good in many ways," said Jack Tannous, assistant professor of history at Princeton University.

Tremendous violence perpetrated against Christians led to widespread conversion, he said, and long periods of stasis have been punctuated by large-scale persecution and followed by immigration.

As a result, many Christians were effectively exterminated from the lands where they lived for centuries, said Michael Reynolds, associate professor of Near Eastern studies at Princeton University.

Genocide is the accurate description for the fate of Christians, especially in areas controlled by the Islamic State, speakers said.

"Today we are witnessing the world's indifference to the slaughter of Christians in the Middle East and Africa," said Ronald S. Lauder, president of the World Jewish Congress and former U.S. ambassador to Austria. Referencing the Holocaust, he said, "Since 1945, genocide has occurred again and again. 'Never Again!' has become hollow. You can't just declare genocide and say the job is done. You have to back it up with action."

"Jews know what happens when the world is silent to mass slaughter. We learned it the hard way," Lauder added.

History has not been kind to the land where Jesus was born. It's ironic that the Prince of Peace was born in a place that has turned into a Land of War and Violence. His key message was to promote justice for all. But he is not finding much "goodwill."

— PWN

The Loving Tree

A group of laypeople in the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Parma, Ohio, have started a beautiful custom. It is appropriate to highlight it at this time of year.

Each year on the Dec. 6 feast day of St. Nicholas, St. Nicholas Parish connects with homebound parishioners through the St. Nicholas Loving Tree. The tree offers corporal works of mercy to parishioners who are homebound. Their names are put onto the tree and volunteers visit the person whose name they have chosen and take along a little gift.

This is "to let the shut-ins know they are loved and not forgotten," explained parishioner Gerrie Sando, who co-ordinates the project.

Each shut-in is also visited at Easter and given a loaf of *pascha*, a traditional sweet bread baked for the holiday. The parishioners are also remembered with greeting cards throughout the year.

The number of shut-ins varies each year, but can number as many as 20. "It's worked out very well; it's been a blessing to our parish," Sandor said.

The visits likely have created a bigger impact on the community than a roomful of gifts. It's an idea that is not expensive and is worthy of promoting. It's a gift that keeps on giving.

— PWN

St. Thomas More showed we must never be resigned to injustices

By Terrence J. Downey, PhD

This fall marks the 500th anniversary of the publication of Thomas More's *Utopia*, a fanciful traveller's tale of an imaginary society, that has intrigued, mystified and inspired generations. As is true for all enduring literature, *Utopia* can be read on various levels: as an entertaining fantasy of what an ideal society might look like; or, as an incisive social critique that ridicules bureaucratic pomposity, arbitrary laws and grossly inequitable distribution of wealth and opportunity.

Either reading underlines *Utopia's* striking contemporaneity: a 16th century tract portraying an alternative universe that speaks directly to the 21st century by challenging the pervasive notion that we are resigned to the persistent injustices of the world in which we find ourselves. More's literary masterpiece suggests that nothing could be further from the truth. Typical of great saints whose lives and writings have confronted and confounded the powers and prevailing orthodoxies of their times, More's wisdom in *Utopia* inspires the courage to know that the world doesn't have to be the way it is.

*Utopia* is a prophetic voice across the ages. In ridiculing the arrogance of leaders, and "flatulentine diplomats" delighting in fancy dress, prestige and self-centred indifference to the plight of the people, More anticipates Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*: "I beg the Lord to grant us more politicians who are genuinely disturbed by the state of society, the people, the lives of the poor," and the pope's lamentation in his Lampedusa homily (July, 2013): "... we have fallen into a globalization of indifference. We are accustomed to the suffering of others; it doesn't concern us."

Centuries before environmentalism became part of contemporary discourse, More's *Utopia* identified its essence: "Mother nature has deliberately placed all her greatest blessings, earth, air and water, under our noses, and tucked away things that are of no use" such as gold and silver.

This resonates in an era that is witnessing global environmental devastation and climate change, the consequences of what Pope Francis describes as the "indiscriminate exploitation" of the earth, a clear failure of stewardship on the part of Christians who are "called to watch over and protect the fragile world in which we live."

*Utopia* questions why "a totally useless substance like gold should ... be considered far more important than human beings." Catholic social teaching has long since emphasized a "preferential option for the poor," the primacy of people over profit thereby challenging the dominant economic priority referenced by More.

This is reiterated by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*: the worship of money, a "dictatorship of an economy lacking a

truly human purpose," denies the pre-eminence of the human person; whatever "stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenceless before the interests of a deified market."

*Utopia* is highly critical of a legal system that treats private property on the same level as the sanctity of human life, and laws that sustain an economic system which enables inordinate concentration of wealth in the hands of a few while depriving workers of opportunities to provide for their families. In this, More walks with Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* who speaks of the dignity of human work and how "the laws of competition and survival of the fittest" means that many are "excluded and

marginally: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape."

This situation was described by Pope Francis in his address to Popular Movements (October 2014) as harmful to our world: "Children are discarded, young people are discarded because they

— BALANCED, page 23

Christmas message from the CCCB

By Bishop Douglas Crosby  
President, Canadian  
Conference of Catholic Bishops

This past year the Holy Father gave us the gift of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, choosing as its motto "Merciful like the Father" (*Misericordes sicut Pater*). In March, on the Feast of Saint Joseph, he joined this gift with another, *Amoris Laetitia*, the Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family, tying it closely to the theme of the jubilee, both by inviting Christian families to live in the daily spirit of forgiveness and by encouraging us to be signs of God's mercy and closeness

"wherever family life remains imperfect or lacks peace and joy" (no. 5).

In Canada, 2016 was a year in which the term mercy took on heightened significance apart from the inspiration of Pope Francis. It was the year when Parliament, provincial legislatures and physicians' colleges set policies that would permit physicians to help patients end their own lives under the misperception of mercy-as-compassion. It was also the year when Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission would release its findings and calls to action, expressing the suffering felt within indigenous

communities, thus prompting Canadians to reflect on what mercy-as-forgiveness ultimately means.

Christmas is not an obvious place to look for insights on mercy, even though it is at this time of year that division and pain cry out for healing. What can Christmas teach us about mercy? The birth of the infant Christ is the event through which mercifulness is revealed as the central aspect of God's relationship with humanity. God takes on human flesh because of his deep sympathetic concern for our pain and brokenness.

The mystery of the Incarnation is essentially the mystery of God's compassion. Through Christ, God became like us in all things but sin (Hebrews 4:15), that by his suffering and death on the cross he might win for us the reward of eternal life (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 457). In this way, we were taught that Christ's new commandment, to love one another as he has loved us (John 13:34 - 35), had virtually no limits in the ordinary run of life.

According to the logic of the New Testament, humility and mercy are inextricably intertwined. To those who love and keep his commandments (John 14:15), Christ's mercy will flow from generation to generation (Luke 1:50). Such was the declaration of Mary on the occasion of her Visitation to her cousin Saint

—MARY, page 23



CNS

**CHILD PROTECTION WEBSITE — The Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors has launched a beta version of its website in English. The website — [www.protectionofminors.va](http://www.protectionofminors.va) — eventually will include versions in Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and French, the commission said in a statement Dec. 6. It includes a template for local guidelines on preventing sexual abuse, resources for a day of prayer for the victims and survivors as well as a mailing address to contact commission members. Pope Francis' international Council of Cardinals identified the protection of children and young adults as one of the church's priority needs.**

Downey is president of St. Thomas More College, University of Saskatchewan



# Christmas fills St. Peter’s Square

By Cindy Wooden

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — As Christmas approached, St. Peter’s Square was filled with balloons, singing and an incredible variety of Baby Jesus figurines — everything from plastic figures that would fit in a walnut shell to those that were larger-than-life sized.

For Pope Francis, the most important ingredient in the mix

was joy.

Reciting the Angelus Dec. 11 and blessing the Baby Jesus statues children brought for their home or school Nativity scenes, the pope insisted that the true meaning of Christmas should bring Christians a deep and abiding sense of joy.

Unlike “superficial happiness” or even the giddiness shopping can bring, he said, “it is a joy that

touches the depths of our being while we await Jesus, who already has come to bring salvation to the world, the promised Messiah, born in Bethlehem of the Virgin Mary.”

“God entered history to free us from slavery to sin; he pitched his tent among us to share our existence, heal our wounds, bandage our injuries and give us new life,” the pope said. “Joy is the fruit of this intervention of salvation and God’s love.”

The Christmas decorations and lights and the Nativity scenes being set up in homes all over the world are signs of that joy, Pope Francis said. They are a call “to welcome the Lord who always knocks at our door, the doors of our hearts, to draw near to us” and “to recognize his footsteps in those of our brothers and sisters passing by, especially the weakest and neediest.”

Pope Francis asked the children to pray in front of their Nativity scenes with their parents. “Ask Baby Jesus to help us all love God and our neighbours.”

## ‘Balanced economic system’ discards elderly in our society

Continued from page 22

do not have work, and the elderly are discarded with the pretext to maintain a ‘balanced’ economic system.” By envisioning a different society, one where acts of mercy evoke admiration and equitable distribution of goods is celebrated, *Utopia* calls us, with Pope Francis, “to build with patience a different society, more hospitable, more humane, more inclusive.”

But St. Thomas More is a prophetic voice for the ages not simply by virtue of his prescience and remarkably perceptive insights into human nature and the natural world, but mainly because he showed by example in his own life that we must never be resigned to injustices.

*Utopia* was written at a time when there was no freedom of speech, not even freedom of thought, in Tudor England. And while *Utopia* was never published in England during his lifetime, its presence in print placed him in a perilous position as this was an era when rash expression could quickly land the perpetrator in the Tower of London.

More eventually ended up there, of course, and ultimately forfeited his life as a consequence of his principled refusal to publicly endorse the marriage of King Henry VIII. By so doing, More showed by prophetic example that our ultimate obligation as Christians is to transform the world, not the other way around.



Design Pics

### Messiah

Pianissimo to fortissimo,  
Diminuendo into crescendo,  
Handel’s ink, deep from his mind’s reservoir  
Note by note by note — began to flow.

Across the world: voices, strings and horns play  
In December’s perennial bouquet.  
Beauty for the ears — melodious sounds —  
The Messiah flowers this winter’s day.

By Peter C. Venable

## Mary worshipped Jesus ‘with a kiss’

Continued from page 22

Elizabeth. It is modelled as well by Mary on Christmas night.

“His mother only, in her maiden bliss, worshiped the beloved with a kiss,” wrote the poet Christina Rossetti, reconciling a moment of tenderness between mother and infant with the overwhelming reality that this particular infant was love incarnate destined to redeem humanity.

The reverence of Saint Joseph, the shepherds, the Magi, the ox and ass, and the angels above all follow suit. That ado-

ration and mercy are two sides of the same reality may not be apparent at first. But just as humility is required in seeking pardon and forgiving others, so the extent of our mercy, which is the fruit of our humility, necessarily depends on the adoration of Christ: Christ in the manger, Christ on the cross, Christ in the eucharist.


Our experience of remorse following sin, the brokenness that disrupts our families, the suffering of loved ones who have lost hope in life, the failures for which we must seek pardon and those of others we are asked to pardon,

each evoke a different aspect of what it means to be merciful like the Father.

The significance of those who gather on bended knee around the infant Christ, and the many carols and hymns that have since immortalized that moment, is to remind us that the adoration of Christ precedes every great Christian act, not the least of which is mercy.

It is my prayer that this Christmas we might all find room in our lives to adore the infant Christ, seeing in him the face of God’s mercy, and be moved to radiate his love for humanity to those around us.

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## May Peace and Joy fill your hearts this Christmas!



# MERRY CHRISTMAS

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# Children are key to peace and development of Africa

JOHANNESBURG (CNS) — Pax Christi International, the Catholic peace movement, said it will build up young people to contribute to peace and justice in Africa, noting that children are the continent’s greatest resource.

Young people could “contribute to the development, well-being and peace” of Africa, Pax Christi members said in a statement from a Dec. 5 - 9 conference on “non-violence in Africa: Creating a Future of Hope” at the Denis Hurley Peace Institute.

The statement on a culture of peace and non-violence was read by Pax Christi co-presidents Marie Dennis, a laywoman from

Washington; Bishop Kevin Dowling of Rustenburg, South Africa; and retired Bishop Paride Taban of Torit, South Sudan.

Pax Christi consists of more than 100 organizations around the world, and about 30 of these were represented at the Johannesburg meeting, which drew participants from nine African countries, including South Africa, South Sudan, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Lesotho.

Parochialism, intolerance, extremism and violence are on the rise, the statement said.

“The huge investment in the militarization of peace and conflict could be channeled toward

active non-violent peacebuilding approaches,” it said.

The Pax Christi members acknowledged their “role in promoting a culture of active non-violence, social justice, peace, reconciliation, healing and forgiveness.”

Affirming that the “life, dignity, rights and well-being of each person should be at the centre of all our work,” they said they are encouraged by the African Union’s commitment “to silence the guns in Africa by 2020.”

Member organizations will “create avenues for empowering young people with moral, spiritu-

al, and ethical values as well as practical skills that enable them to contribute more effectively toward a stable, just and peaceful Africa,” the statement said.

Conference participants said they will work with like-minded organizations on issues such as migration, human trafficking and social justice, and will “mobilize our various constituencies to promote peace and reconciliation in countries and communities currently experiencing violence.”

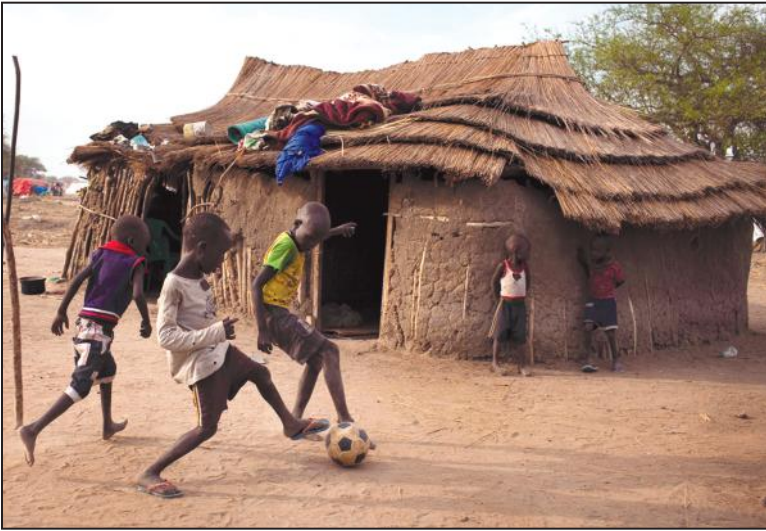
They called for “investment in active non-violence mechanisms as an alternative means of resolv-

ing conflicts.”

The Pax Christi members committed themselves to improving their ability to host peace talks among adversaries at all levels, using “home-grown, faith-based approaches that promote non-violent means” of conflict resolution.

They called on religious leaders “to lift up the vision of non-violence in their preaching and teaching ministry.”

Also, governments and political leaders should respect human rights and “invest in and promote a culture of peace and active non-violence,” the statement said.



**DISPLACED CHILDREN** — Children play soccer in 2014 at a camp for displaced people in Minkamman, South Sudan. Pax Christi International, the Catholic peace movement, said it will build up young people to contribute to peace and justice in Africa, noting that children are the continent’s greatest resource.

CNS/Jim Lopez, EPA

## Priests need ‘to get hands dirty’: pope

By Cindy Wooden

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Priests are called to be mediators between God and God’s people, offering their time and their very lives in service; they are not God’s “intermediaries” or functionaries, who go to work to get paid or, worse, enter the priesthood in search of status, Pope Francis said.

Priests who only want to dress the part end up looking ridiculous, he said Dec. 9 during his homily at mass in the chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*.

Looking at the day’s Gospel reading, Matthew 11:16 - 19, where Jesus talks about people who are never satisfied and always judge others, Pope Francis related

those attitudes to what is seen in the lives of priests.

An authentic priest, he said, is close to the life of his people, while a functionary “does not know what it means to get his hands dirty.”

Those who are functionaries are not happy, but seek happiness “in being noticed, in feeling like an authority.”

“To make themselves important, they take the path of rigidity,” he said. “Many times, detached from the people, they have no idea what human pain is.”

“They hold a whip in their hands with the People of God: ‘You can’t do this, you can’t do that.’”

Pope Francis said an elderly monsignor who works at the Vatican — “a normal man, a good

man in love with Jesus” — told him about going to buy some shirts at a clerical clothing store and seeing a very young man, perhaps 25 years old, standing in front of a mirror trying on a large cloak, “velvet with a silver chain.” Then the young priest or seminarian topped it off with a “saturno,” a wide-brimmed clerical hat, which mainly disappeared from clergy’s wardrobes after the Second Vatican Council.

The monsignor, Pope Francis said, “with a quip of healthy humour said, ‘And some people say the church won’t ordain women!’”

When a priest becomes a functionary, the pope said, “he ends up looking ridiculous. Always.”

There’s not much time.  
Christmas is nearly upon us.



Sister Fay Trombley S.C.I.C.

Have you ever been so far north that the next stop is the North Pole and Santa Claus? Located on the shores of the Arctic Ocean, Tuktoyaktuk is the northernmost mission community on Canada’s mainland.

The Inuvialuit village is home to 900 people and since 2005, it’s been home base to Sister Fay Trombley S.C.I.C. As she says, the community is so far north, the next stop is Santa Claus! Sister Fay’s door is open from early morning until late at night—all to welcome an endless stream of children, young people and adults who find in her a trusted presence of pastoral care and healing.

Like all our missionaries who minister daily in Canada’s remote missions, Sister Fay’s only Christmas prayer is to share the Good News of Our Saviour’s birth with all across Canada’s North.

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