



La Loche

"Separately we received the news of these events, and separately the victims fell," said Rev. Scott Pittendrigh, dean and rector of St. John's Anglican Cathedral, of the recent shootings in La Loche, Sask. "Together we will give voice to our lament."

— page 3

Bible interpretation

Learning to interpret tricky, terrible and difficult texts in our sacred Scriptures is not some obscure, academic challenge, says Rev. Elias



Mallon. When preachers and ordinary believers misinterpret their sacred texts, the result is almost always fundamentalism.

— page 5

Share Lent

Christians are invited to create a climate of change, says Armella Sonntag, Saskatchewan animator for Development and Peace. Interwoven into the Share Lent theme this year is the idea of pilgrimage, where people go on personal pilgrimages at home, in their parish or with others in their local communities and communities across the globe.

— page 6

No end to refugees

As long as there have been wars there have been refugees, says Winnipegger Anne Mahon, and long before the crisis in Syria Canadians have been working to help those who have been forced to flee their homelands. There is no end in sight to the great need of so many.

— page 7

Dancing toward reconciliation

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet, in partnership with the TRC, created Going Home Star — Truth and Reconciliation, an original contemporary ballet about the Indian residential school system.

— page 10

Ogle a people's priest and politician

By Brigid Ward

SASKATOON — On Feb. 3 St. Thomas More College's Department of Political Science hosted a mini-conference titled Bob Ogle: The People's Priest and Politician, attended by a large and diverse crowd.

Rev. Bob Ogle was a prominent figure in Saskatchewan. He was born and raised in Rosetown, educated at St. Peter's Seminary in Ontario, and ordained in 1953. He served as a parish priest in Saskatchewan until 1964, when he went on a mission to Brazil. He returned to the province in 1970 and in 1977 was asked to run for Parliament for the New Democratic Party in Saskatoon East. He was elected in 1979, and served until 1984 when he received notice from the Vatican that he could not run again. He authored several books, held a doctorate in canon law, and was an Officer of the Order of



B. Ward

OGLE CONFERENCE — Speakers at a Feb. 3 mini-conference titled Bob Ogle: The People's Priest and Politician, were (from left) Rev. Lorne Calvert, Dennis Gruending, Rev. Bill Blaikie and Caitlin Ward.

Canada. Ogle passed away in 1998 after a long battle with cancer.

Wednesday's event celebrated

Ogle as both a religious figure and a political actor, and emphasized the continuing importance of

Ogle's work in the 21st century. The event was structured in two parts: three panellists (STM engaged learning co-ordinator Caitlin Ward, journalist Dennis Gruending and former premier of Saskatchewan Rev. Lorne Calvert) spoke for 10 minutes each on a different aspect of Ogle's life and contribution to society. After a short break, former MP Rev. Bill Blaikie delivered a 45-minute address on the intersections between Ogle's political career and his own. The event was concluded with a question-and-answer period that explored how Ogle's legacy can inform current politics and social justice action.

Ogle was Ward's grandfather's cousin, and she talked about him from a family perspective. She drew on family lore, her own memory, and an interview with her grandmother who worked in Ogle's campaign office in the 1970s. She spoke about his respect for women and his egalitarian outlook, which was ahead of his time.

Gruending spoke about encountering Ogle in his own line of work as journalist and writer. Gruending authored the entry for Ogle in the Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan, but had met him in 1978 and known him as a fellow correspondent in the global south — Gruending for Maclean's Magazine and Ogle for CJWW Radio in Saskatoon. Gruending recounted how, when he agreed to run for the NDP in Saskatoon-Humboldt in 1996, he sought advice from Ogle,

— REFUGEES, page 4

— PASTORAL, page 7

Religious minorities need priority

By Deborah Gyapong

OTTAWA (CCN) — Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA) Canada national director Carl Hétu said Christian and other religious minorities should get priority from Canada as refugees.

Upon returning from a trip to refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon, Hétu said he was troubled by news reports denouncing the previous Conservative government policy that gave added focus to persecuted religious minorities in the Middle East. "I thought it was terrible," he said.

"It's important to recognize that in the Middle East, when you are a Christian right now, the chances of being persecuted are high, especially in Iraq and Syria," Hétu said. "That needs to be recognized by the federal government of Canada."

"The difference with the Muslims I met is they are all waiting for the war to be over to go back home, so they are waiting it out," he said. "If you are a Christian, you can't go back."

"It is easier for Muslims to go back to a Muslim town than for Christians to go back to a neighbourhood that is destroyed and gone, especially if they have been kicked out because of their faith," he said. "Some of the Christians told me their house is occupied now by Muslims. They were told this is no longer your house, particularly in Iraq."

Aid to the Church in Need Canada national director Marie-Claude Lalonde said religious minorities "are definitely targeted

and disappearing."

"We are talking more and more of a genocide against Christians," she said. She said she was not aware, however, if the government had in fact changed its policy.

The Liberal government is instead focusing on "complete families; women at risk; and persons identified as vulnerable due to membership in the LGBTI community," according to the

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship ministry. They are not differentiating among religious groups.

Both Hétu and Lalonde stressed the churches and partners they support in the Middle East help all vulnerable people, including Muslims. Lalonde and Hétu both recognize Muslims need help as refugees.

Only mercy can overcome evil: pope

By Carol Glatz

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — God doesn't want to condemn anyone; he wants to save every person in the entire world, Pope Francis said.

"The problem is letting him enter one's heart" to transform one's life, the pope said during his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square Feb. 3.

"This is the heart of God, the heart of a father who loves his children and wants them to live rightly and justly and, therefore, to live in fullness and be happy," he said.

The pope continued a series of talks dedicated to divine mercy, looking specifically at how divine mercy and divine justice go hand in hand.

"It might seem that they are two things that contradict each other," he said, but they don't because "it is precisely God's mercy that brings true justice to fruition."

God's justice is different from the human administration of legal justice, which is "retributive, that imposes a penalty on the guilty,"



CNS/Paul Haring

SELFIE WITH THE POPE — People take a selfie as Pope Francis arrives to lead his general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Feb. 3.

the pope said.

"This path still does not lead to true justice because it doesn't actually conquer evil but simply contains it," the pope said. "Rather, it is only by responding

to (evil) with the good that evil truly can be overcome."

The Bible shows that true justice bypasses a court system, he

— VICTIM, page 19

Church’s ministry to gays is expanding rapidly

By Simon Caldwell

WARRINGTON, England (CNS) — The Catholic Church’s pastoral ministry to gays is rapidly developing and expanding as western societies become more secular, said a U.S. priest at the forefront of working with gay people.

Rev. Philip Bochanski, a Philadelphia priest who serves as associate director of Courage International, said increasing numbers of people who “experience same-sex attraction” but who wished to live chaste lives were turning to the church for help.

The demand has resulted in Courage, a Catholic organization dedicated to the pastoral care of homosexuals, spreading from a single chapter founded in New York in 1980 to more than 150 chapters worldwide, with increasing interest from dioceses around the world seeking to set up their own chapters.

Each year, the group works with more than 2,000 people who experience same-sex attraction to conform their lives to the demands of the Gospel.

“As the culture becomes more secular, we find individuals in the culture making decisions for themselves to come and seek help,” Bochanski told Catholic News Service Feb. 2. “We are not trying to fix or cure anybody. We are just

trying to walk with them.”

Bochanski said many people who felt unhappy with their lifestyle often felt isolated by a “gay-affirming” culture and were “looking for a home.”

He said that as a result, “our Courage groups are growing.”

“Since last summer, between 12 and 15 new chapters have been set up in (the United) States,” he said. “Also, the number of dioceses requesting programs for their priests is growing.”

“Our primary work and concern is just to provide a welcome in a pastoral context,” Bochanski said. “For a person experiencing same-sex attraction who comes to the realization that they need to live a chaste life, to do that in the world can be very lonely and overwhelming at times, and we try to accompany them through that and try to support them by listening, by sharing experiences and by giving spiritual direction and offering the sacraments.”

Bochanski suggested the appeal of Courage might correspond with possible rising numbers of people experiencing same-sex attraction in “highly sexualized” cultures also marked by high rates of family breakdown.

“I think it is clear that this is a bigger part of the conversation in the culture these days, so the question is, ‘Are people just talking

about it more or are more people experiencing a same-sex attraction?’ ” he said.

“Those figures are hard to come by in terms of percentage of the population, but it’s not surprising that — as we live in a culture that’s marked more and more by broken families, by absent fathers, by parents who have children without being married, and so there is little stability in some homes these days — that these family dynamics have a deep impact on a child’s sense of being safe, being loved, of having a permanent connection of belonging and being affirmed,” he said.

“In my experience, all these things factor in when someone is disposed to develop a same-sex attraction,” he continued. “The breakdown of the family generally can certainly be connected to a higher prevalence of people experiencing those attractions.”

Many of those who approached the church were “hurting” or were wary that they would be accepted by parishes, said Bochanski.

“It is the part of my ministry where I feel most fatherly,” he said. “To be asked to walk this path with them is a great privilege for me.”

Bochanski, 42, spoke to CNS during a tour of four dioceses in England, Scotland and Ireland, where he had been invited to

advise clergy on the pastoral care of homosexuals.

His visit included the Diocese of Shrewsbury, England, where he spoke to lay Catholics during a meeting in Warrington Feb. 2 before addressing clergy Feb. 3.

He said he believed that priests “want to be faithful to what the church teaches, and they want to be welcoming and compassionate to the people that they serve.”

While “the conventional wisdom is that you can’t do both,” Bochanski said Courage gave clergy the knowledge and the vocabulary to explain the church’s authentic teaching in a compassionate way.

It is firmly rooted in the interpretation of Catholic teaching on sexuality and morality set out in the Catechism of the Catholic Church and considers the universal call to chastity to be “absolutely essential,” he said.



CNS/Simon Caldwell

Rev. Philip Bochanski

Britain moving toward genetically modified babies

By Simon Caldwell

MANCHESTER, England (CNS) — A Catholic bioethics institute has accused the British government of moving toward the creation of genetically modified babies after scientists were given permission to alter the DNA of embryos in experimentation.

The Anscombe Bioethics Centre, an Oxford-based institute serving the Catholic Church in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, denounced the development as “yet more destructive experimentation on human embryos.”

“Experiments to edit the genes of human embryos represent a further step toward the creation of GM babies,” said a Feb. 1 statement by David Jones, director of Anscombe.

“This move is only the latest step after attempts to clone human embryos, to create human-animal hybrid embryos and to create three parent embryos,” he said in a statement sent to Catholic News Service.

“Each step has been accompanied by exaggerated promises to cure or prevent diseases, but the real result is simply more unethical experimentation on human beings at the earliest stage of their development,” Jones added.

He said gene editing would be legitimate “only where it is safe and beneficial for the individual patient and not where it aims to affect future generations.”

“The real promise of ‘gene editing’ techniques is the hope of ethical and effective therapy of children or adults who were born with conditions that currently have no cure,” he continued. “Research should focus on development of safe and effective somatic gene therapy, not on yet-more-destructive experimentation on human embryos.”

Jones’ comments came in response to a Feb. 1 announcement that the Human Fertilization and Embryology Authority, the regulatory body overseeing in vitro fertilization and experiments on human embryos, will permit researchers at the Francis Crick Institute in London to modify the DNA of newly conceived embryos.

The scientists aim to use a technique to turn off genes in one-day-old embryos to determine how such intervention will effect development in the week that follows as the embryo multiplies from a single cell to about 250 cells.

The purpose is to identify the roles of particular genes in the hope of improving in vitro fertilization success rates and to try to reduce the number of miscarriages. All embryos used during experiments must be destroyed within a week.

China has previously attempted to edit the human germline, but the decision by the HFEA makes Britain the first country in the world to set up a regulatory framework for undertaking such research.

Pope concludes year for consecrated life

By Cindy Wooden

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — An encounter with Jesus changes people’s lives, and that should be especially noticeable in those who are consecrated completely to serving God, the church and others, Pope Francis said.

“One who has this encounter becomes a witness and makes the

Jubilee Year of Mercy, emphasizing God’s love and mercy for each individual and the mission to share that experience with the world, the pope told thousands of consecrated men and women who joined him in St. Peter’s Basilica and hundreds of others who watched on screens outside once the basilica was full.

The mass in St. Peter’s Basilica began with the traditional blessing of candles and a prayer that God would guide his people toward his son, “the light that has no end.”

The feast day commemorates the 40th day after Jesus’ birth when, in accordance with ancient Jewish practice, Mary and Joseph took him to the temple and presented him to the Lord. The feast’s Gospel reading from St. Luke recounts how the aged Simeon and Anna were praying in the temple at the time and recognized Jesus as the Messiah.

The event, the pope said, is a “feast of encounter,” not just the meeting of Jesus with Simeon and Anna, but the encounter of people’s

world, to live and suffer and die for the salvation of humanity, shows that he did not want to “remain outside of our drama, but wanted to share our lives.”

In the same way, whether living in a cloistered convent or travelling the world as a missionary, Pope Francis said, “consecrated men and women are called to be a concrete and prophetic sign of this closeness of God and of sharing with the fragile, sinful and wounded condition of people today.”

Pope Francis, a Jesuit, spoke as one of the consecrated people, telling the congregation that as Christians and as religious “we are guardians of awe.”

The experience of an encounter with Jesus constantly must be renewed, he said. One’s spiritual life must never be simply routine, the mission and charisms of an order must never be “crystallized into abstract doctrine” and the spiritual insights of the order’s founder “are not to be sealed in a bottle. They aren’t museum pieces.”

“Our founders were moved by the Spirit and weren’t afraid to get their hands dirty” as they ministered in Jesus’ name to real people living real lives, the pope said. “They didn’t stop in the face of obstacles or when others misunderstood them because they preserved in their hearts the awe of having encountered Christ.”

“They did not domesticate the grace of the Gospel,” he said, but lived with an “all-consuming desire to share it with others.”

“We, too, are called today to make prophetic and courageous choices,” the pope said. In that way, “others will be attracted to the light and can encounter the father’s mercy.”



CNS/Paul Haring

YEAR FOR RELIGIOUS — Pope Francis carries a candle as he arrives to celebrate a mass with religious in St. Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican Feb. 2. The mass concluded the Year of Consecrated Life.

encounter possible for others, too,” he said Feb. 2, the feast of the Presentation of the Lord.

Overlapping by two months, the Catholic Church’s special Year of Consecrated Life has led to the

hopes and expectations for a saviour with the fulfilment of those hopes in Jesus.

Christ’s birth is the ultimate encounter, he said; God’s decision to have his son born into the

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Cardinal Collins stresses opposition to euthanasia

By Deborah Gyapong

OTTAWA (CCN) — Cardinal Thomas Collins stressed his opposition to euthanasia and the importance of conscience rights before the parliamentary committee on physician-assisted dying.

“We urge you to consider carefully the drastic negative effects physician-assisted suicide will have in our country: killing a person will no longer be seen as a crime, but instead will be treated as a form of health care,” the Archbishop of Toronto told the committee.

The cardinal appeared with Christian Medical and Dental Society of Canada’s (CMDS) executive director Laurence Worthen on behalf of the Coalition for HealthCARE and Conscience that includes the Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto, the CMDS, the Catholic Organization for Life and Family, the Canadian Federation of Catholic Physicians’ Societies, the Canadian Catholic Bioethics Institute, and Canadian Physicians for Life.

“The right to be put to death will, in practice, become in some cases the duty to be put to death, as subtle pressure is brought to bear on the vulnerable,” said Collins, warning of the “grievous effect” engaging in the killing of patients will have on the medical profession and upon patient trust.

“The strong message from the Supreme Court is unmistakable: some lives are just not worth living. We passionately disagree,” he said.

Collins said those who have moral convictions that prevent



CCN/D. Gyapong

OPPOSITION TO EUTHANASIA — Cardinal Thomas Collins appeared before the joint Parliamentary Committee on Physician-Assisted Dying with Christian Medical and Dental Association of Canada executive director Laurence Worthen on behalf of the Coalition for HealthCARE and Conscience Feb. 3.

them from being involved in euthanasia or assisted suicide “deserve to be respected.”

Government must ensure conscience protection for both institutions and individuals, he said. “They should not be forced to perform actions that go against their conscience, or to refer the action to others, since that is the moral equivalent of participating in the act itself. It is simply not right or just to say: you do not have to do what is against your conscience, but you must make sure it happens.”

During the question period following their formal presentation, several committee members asked for suggestions on how physician-assisted death might be implemented safely, given the Supreme Court decision.

“I am sure people around this table are very much committed to assuring physician-assisted suicide takes place,” the Archbishop of Toronto told the committee, noting it is their task. “I don’t believe that is the direction the country should be going.”

The cardinal said he would not engage in suggesting how many doctors might be necessary to determine if someone qualifies for euthanasia or assisted suicide. “What I do believe is the rights of conscience need to be protected,”

he said. He also said alternatives need to be funded and presented, such as palliative care, to ensure protection of the vulnerable.

“I’m with the cardinal on this,” said Worthen, noting his time with a medical ethicist in the Netherlands revealed how safeguards do not work. “The so-called safeguards are there just to sell physician-assisted suicide.”

No other jurisdiction that allows physician-assisted suicide or euthanasia has put the funding in place to do a full evaluation on whether a person is being coerced, Worthen said.

“We have concerns even with use of words ‘safeguard,’ ” he said. “It normally means ‘whatever we can put in place to save our conscience on how these vulnerable people are going to be put to death.’ ”

Collins was preceded by Canadian Unitarian Council executive director Vyda Ng who told the committee institutions that receive public funding should be required to provide physician-assisted dying on their premises. “It’s the constitutional right of every Canadian to receive this care,” she said, noting the “delicate balance” between patient rights and those of individual physicians. She acknowledged someone checking into a faith-based facility “will know ahead of time certain moral values apply.”

The cardinal said health care institutions run by religious groups are more than bricks and mortar. “Institutions are made of people,” he said, referring to the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Grey Nuns and others who built health care institutions. “They have values,” he said. “That’s why people come to them” because they are trusted.

Both Collins and Worthen laid out the risks to vulnerable Canadians who lack access to palliative care and supports for those with disabilities and mental illness. They urged the government to improve these services.

“Despite our concerns, members of our coalition will not obstruct the patient’s decision, should this legislation be put in place,” Worthen said. While they will not refer, they would transfer patients to other facilities if they determined they wanted to pursue the option.

The Coalition calls for all patients to have direct access to a “third-party information and referral service that would provide them with an assessment once they have discussed assisted death with their own doctor and clearly decided they wish to seek it,” he said.

Worthen stressed the proposal is “not to simply send someone to

— DEPARTMENT, page 5

Prayer service held for people of La Loche

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

SASKATOON — A Saskatoon prayer service Feb. 2 at St. John’s Anglican Cathedral brought together representatives of different faiths and backgrounds seeking peace and healing for the community in the wake of a shooting in La Loche, Sask., that left four dead and seven injured.

The grandmother of one of those wounded in the Jan. 22 shooting was in attendance. She spoke about her granddaughter, who is still in hospital, reporting that her condition is gradually

improving, and that she opened her eyes for the first time that day.

“All the people praying and supporting us and loving us — we return all of that to you,” she said, adding that in spite of what has happened in her community, she will always be a proud Dene woman.

Many have been hurt by trauma and violence over the years, she added. “We haven’t broken down . . . because of prayers and the good Lord standing by us and watching over us.”

Rev. Scott Pittendrigh, dean

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K. Yaworski

PRAYERS FOR LA LOCHE — Tapers were lit during a community prayer service for the people of La Loche held Feb. 2 at St. John’s Anglican Cathedral in Saskatoon.

Suicide advocates carrying the debate

By Michael Swan
The Catholic Register

TORONTO (CCN) — Advocates in favour of wider access to assisted suicide have dominated parliamentary committee hearings that will help craft a new assisted-suicide law, with little opposition so far from religious voices.

“It’s hard to find allies. It’s hard to find people who will acknowledge the vulnerability piece,” said Rhonda Wiebe from the Council of Canadians with Disabilities. Wiebe was speaking a day after the CCD and lawyer David Baker made the case for safeguards to protect the vulnerable. That same day, ex-Tory MP Stephen Fletcher and a representative from Dying With Dignity appeared before the Joint Committee on Physician-Assisted Dying to argue for wide and easy access to voluntary euthanasia.

Toronto Cardinal Thomas Collins appeared before the committee on Feb. 3 (see related story, this page).

To date, the focus of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops has been on a joint declaration launched last October with the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. The declaration, found at euthanasiadeclaration.ca, has so far garnered 10,000 signatures. It makes a strong case for more and better palliative care, but includes no specific recommendations on how to regulate the now legal practice of assisted suicide. CCCB president Bishop Douglas Crosby has asked to be allowed to address the committee but is waiting to hear if his request will be granted.

Last year the Supreme Court of

Canada gave Parliament a year to come up with new laws and regulations to govern the practice of physician-assisted suicide. That deadline expired Feb. 6, though the court has given the government a four-month extension to finalize its plan. Meanwhile, assisted suicide is now legal in Quebec.

Canada’s Catholic bishops have urged Parliament to invoke the notwithstanding clause, which would set the Supreme Court’s decision aside for five years, but that is not expected to happen.

Catholic voices are much more active in trying to protect the conscience rights of doctors. The Catholic Civil Rights League has written to the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario to oppose the regulatory body’s policy that would require doctors who object for moral or religious reason to make “an effective referral to another health care provider.”

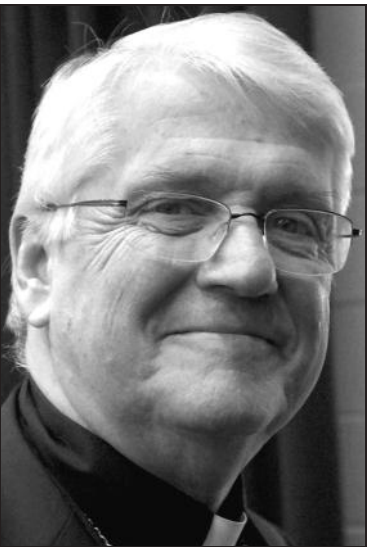
“A proper balancing of the rights of physicians with the concept of patient autonomy must not result in the trumping of the rights of physicians,” said the CCRL submission to the college.

Meanwhile, the leading voices for the vulnerable in Ottawa have been the Council of Canadians with Disabilities and the Canadian Association for Community Living.

The Euthanasia Prevention Coalition, which has strong ties to both Canada’s Catholic bishops and Evangelical leadership but claims no religious affiliation, said it has not been invited to testify in person to the committee.

“We have contacted all of the members of Parliament on the committee. We have talked to people in charge of the committee working

for the government and we’ve had no response yet,” said EPC executive director Alex Schadenberg. Schadenberg has prepared a submission which can be submitted in writing. He warns that regulation of assisted suicide in other jurisdic-



CCN/D. Gyapong

Bishop Douglas Crosby

tions fails to effectively control or monitor who is being killed and for what reason. The primary flaw is that assisted deaths are not reported until after the fact, and only by the doctor who performed or supervised the intervention.

Like the Council of Canadians with Disabilities, Schadenberg advocates that all requests for assisted suicide go to a judge. “Judges have more power to have oversight than a doctor,” he said. “If the decision is made by two doctors alone and the reporting is done after the death, obviously you have a closed-in system where you’re allowing the decision to be made behind a closed door.”

Activists compare Winnipeg school to residential schools

By Michael Swan
The Catholic Register

A Jesuit-inspired middle school in Winnipeg's poorest, most violent neighbourhood has been met with accusations of cultural genocide and comparisons with the infamous residential schools that devastated native communities across Canada.

In January Point Douglas neighbourhood community activist James Favel and social worker Larry Morrisette published an angry call for the Gonzaga Middle School to put a halt to plans to set up shop this fall in the area just north of Winnipeg's downtown core — an area where household incomes average about half the average for the city and more than one-third of residents are Aboriginal.

A Catholic school with a Catholic culture means another attempt to strip indigenous kids of their own culture and spiritual traditions, the two said.

"On the heels of the Truth and Reconciliation (Commission) findings and recommendations, it's kind of a big middle finger to everybody," Favel told The Catholic Register.

"The Catholic Church has caused us enough damage. It is time for this to stop," wrote Favel and Morrisette on the CBC



ACCUSATIONS — A pair of activists are calling Winnipeg's Gonzaga Middle School just another type of residential school.

News website.

This version of what Gonzaga is all about is inaccurate, uninformed and insulting, as far as Gonzaga president Tom Lussier is concerned.

"Comparisons between us and a residential school are just odious," said Lussier.

Gonzaga Middle School will be Canada's second Nativity School. Mother Teresa Middle School in Regina is the first. There are 60 such schools in

the United States.

The Nativity School concept was pioneered by Jesuits in American inner cities beginning in the early 1970s. The idea is to offer families an extended and intensive educational program in the most critical years leading up to high school. Nativity Schools have built a reputation for breaking the cycle of poverty. Longer school days, a longer school year, smaller class sizes, one-on-one tutoring, social work

support for kids and their families and mentoring that follows students through high school and university are all part of the model.

Favel and Morrisette characterize this as a "country club" education offered in exchange for conformity to Catholic religious practice.

The Gonzaga advisory board includes professor Niigaan Sinclair, acting department head of Native Studies at the University of Manitoba. A "Statement of Reconciliation" posted to the Gonzaga Middle School website was co-written by Sinclair's father, Justice Murray Sinclair, who headed up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Lussier is not an outsider who has invaded Winnipeg with a formula to solve North Winnipeg's problems. He was born and raised in the city and spent 35 years working at St. Paul's, the Jesuit high school in Winnipeg, 11 years

as principal before he took on the challenge of Gonzaga.

"We think the public school system in Winnipeg is doing a lot of very good work. But there remains the need, based on research, for more resources being brought to bear in northeast downtown and the Point Douglas area," Lussier said. "Those are the two areas of the city that are most affected by socioeconomic disadvantage."

Regina's Mother Teresa Middle School opened its doors five years ago. As the school's first students now make their way through Grade 10, the school is gaining trust in the native community.

"You're dealing with a group of people who don't trust easily, and rightfully so," said Mother Teresa executive director Curtis Kleisinger. "We've gone from 50 per cent Aboriginal-First Nations to 82 per cent this year. Next year, we'll probably be in the 90s. That shows you we're gaining faith in the Aboriginal community, with the grandmothers."

The idea that a Jesuit-inspired school would try to separate anybody from their own culture or faith is ridiculous, said Kleisinger.

"As a matter of fact, I'm focusing on your identity and your culture and helping you explore who you are," he said. "Most of my students came from the Catholic system. The parents have already made the decision to have them in a Catholic school. I'm not stripping anybody of their culture."

Students and families choose to go to Mother Teresa. They go through an interview process before they are accepted. Nativity Schools are not residential. Students live with their families

— STUDENTS, page 5

La Loche events 'have shaken us all'

Continued from page 3

and rector of St. John's Cathedral, said that the events in La Loche "have shaken us all," explaining that the prayer service was being held to honour those who died and to offer support and prayers for healing and strength to those who survived.

"We are also gathered to pray for the whole community of La Loche and for indigenous communities across Canada, and for all communities where poverty and the lack of opportunity have such devastating consequences in people's lives," added Pittendrigh.

"We come from a variety of backgrounds, from multifaith traditions, from indigenous communities . . . we are a cross-section of those who represent this province and country," he said. "We come to affirm that even in the midst of tragedy we can continue as a community, supporting one another and rekindling our hope in the goodness of humanity and our shared life together."

"Separately we received the news of these events and separately the victims fell," Pittendrigh said. "Together we will give voice to our lament, for silence will not heal us, nor will our silence lead to a renewed community. Together now we are taking a step to heal and give testimony to our desire for a healed community and a better world."

Harry Lafond, executive director of the Office of the Treaty Commissioner, stressed that the need for healing goes beyond the community of La Loche. "We can't allow La Loche to become a memory only in La Loche. It is

our memory, it is a part of our own story. As we go forward, and as healing takes hold, it is not only La Loche that needs to heal, but all of us, because we are intended to be one large community."

Events such as the 1906 agreement between the Dene people and the Crown to enter into a unique relationship under Treaty 10 "demonstrate our oneness and our desire to be together," Lafond noted. "But even in 1906 there was a sense that things could go wrong."

The recent recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) offer a way to move forward, Lafond pointed out. "It offers a tool kit so that we can begin to initiate change in our own hearts, because that's where it all has to begin — and from there to our families and our communities, to Saskatchewan and Canada."

Violence such as that experienced in La Loche demonstrates that change is absolutely necessary, he stressed. "We can't continue to live the way we are living. The status quo is not satisfactory. Reconciliation points us to a place where we need to look more closely. We need to look at our assumptions and our attitudes toward each other," Lafond said.

"We have lots to reflect on, we have much to change. That change won't happen unless we allow it to emerge from our hearts, and to open our eyes, and see each other for what we are: people intended to live together in harmony."

The service continued with readings from sacred texts, hymns and prayers, and the lighting of tapers in the darkened cathedral. Prayers were led by Dr. Mateen Raazi of the Islamic Association

of Saskatchewan and Rev. Amanda Currie of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church. Song of Mourn and The Rising Song were presented by drummer and singer Bluejay Linklater.

A book of condolences was available for signing, and a collection was taken for La Loche community school.

Refugees are thankful to Canadians

Continued from page 1

Lalonde pointed out that no one, Christian or Muslim, can go back now, but if the fighting dies down, even for Muslims, returning "will be difficult, even for them."

"The bishops of Syria and Iraq are begging us to help keep Christians in the Middle East," she said. "We are trying to help them as much as possible. They hope and they certainly pray for it, the Christians will be able to get back to their own countries, their own regions."

"How easy it's going to be, I don't know," Lalonde said. She, too, noted that when ISIS moved into northern Iraq, fatwahs were issued telling Muslims they could take all the goods of the Christians. "Will it be possible for these two groups to live together? It's a big question," she said. "It's going to be difficult for both groups in that regard."

"We're hearing about starvation; we're hearing about violence in the refugee camps," she said. "Christians are reluctant to go to refugee camps because they fear they are going to be targeted. It's definitely not easy for them."

Hétu said Iraqi refugees he visited in Jordan and Lebanon are thankful to Canadians for their support through CNEWA and other charities "to help them survive this nightmare."

Thanks to the donations, they have warm places to stay, food and medicine, he said. "They were telling me there's no sense of emergency now; they have a sense of security but they are still refugees and, as refugees, they live without hope at this moment."

Many Iraqi Christians do not understand why Syrian refugees are being accepted in Canada ahead of them. "Some have been there much longer than the Syrians, so there's bad blood there. They feel forgotten again, especially the Iraqi Christians."

Many Iraqi Christians thought their application would be fast-tracked to Canada, but the Syrian crisis last fall "put a stop to their hope," Hétu said.

The Syrian refugees he met, like the Iraqis, know they can "never go back to their homes either, particularly the Christians because their life was taken away by radical Islamists in Syria," he said.



CCN/D. Gyapong

Carl Hétu

Hétu also observed great fatigue among the people helping with refugees. The presence of 1.4 million refugees in a small country like Lebanon, with a population of 4.4 million, is also putting pressure on local populations.

Both Hétu and Lalonde hope UN-hosted peace talks in Geneva will lead to an end of the fighting in Syria.

Bible texts taken out of context leads to fundamentalism

By Michael Swan
The Catholic Register

TORONTO (CCN) — Chances are you've never heard a homily preached on Deuteronomy 20:10-18. It's kind of difficult to apply these God-given rules of war to daily life in the 21st century.

The part about how you should enslave the women and kill all the men and boys if the village you are attacking resists has little application when asking your boss for a raise or negotiating a mortgage renewal. Of course, if the village does not resist you must take the more peaceful route of just enslaving everybody. While it may at first seem encouraging that God gives you permission to take the women as your booty, along with children and livestock, it's hard to apply this principle in a dispute over reserved parking spaces at the office. And at some point more and more women, children and livestock may become problematic. Killing your enemies (Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites) so they won't infect your religious practice with any of their bizarre culture could be seen as an over-reaction when applied to Presbyterians.

The fact is that the Bible was written in a very different place at a very different time by people whose self-understanding and worldview was formed by forces we may understand intellectually but we will struggle to feel deep in our guts.

Fortunately for Catholics, the war codes in Deuteronomy never quite make it into the lectionary for Sunday readings. Nobody has to preach on them.

It need not be so, Franciscan Friar of the Atonement Father

Elias Mallon told The Catholic Register. It is possible to find some deeper Christian meaning in difficult texts from the Bible. But it requires study and an understanding of the history embedded in biblical literature, which was collected over a 1,000-year span and finally accepted as part of the Bible by about 250 — more than 17 centuries ago.

Mallon was recently in Toronto for a three-way discussion among Catholics, Muslims and Jews about reading and interpreting difficult texts. The event was hosted by the Archdiocese of Toronto.

Mallon is a New Yorker who has spent a lifetime reading, translating and understanding the ancient languages from the dawn of civilization at the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, in what is now Iraq. The Bible and Jewish culture were built in reaction to that harsh world of Gilgamesh and the vast array of angry gods that emerged from Babylon. Having mastered these ancient languages, Mallon gained insights into the Bible and the monotheistic cultures of the three Abrahamic religions. He's been a contributor to Muslim-Christian dialogue since 1985 and he's the author of *Islam: What Catholics Need to Know*.

Learning to interpret tricky, terrible and difficult texts in our sacred Scriptures is not some obscure, academic challenge. When preachers and ordinary believers misinterpret their sacred texts the result is almost always fundamentalism, Mallon said.

"Fundamentalism is probably, and I mean this sarcastically, the ecumenical reality," he said. "We all have it. It's a problem for all of us — Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists. Right down

the line, that's the problem."

Fundamentalism is usually the result of reading an ancient, sacred text as if it were a newspaper or a modern textbook — reading the words without any awareness of the culture or the historical circumstances in which they were first spoken.

When Moses urges the people of Israel to take "eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (Exodus 21:24-25), the Bible is not urging on vengefulness. It's trying to limit the violence that was a feature of almost every dispute in the cultures of the ancient world. Blood feuds at that time demanded complete annihilation of an enemy. Every insult was met with the threat of murder extending to entire families. "Eye for eye" was a way of limiting the violence.

A thousand years later, Jesus teaches that limiting the violence is not enough. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:38-42) Jesus identifies a kind of border for the kingdom of God which is established whenever and wherever the violence stops.

"All of our texts are ancient. All of our texts come out of a context," Mallon said. "It's a world that wasn't pluralistic. It was more violent."

The Islamic State, Boko Haram, Al Shabab, Ian Paisley's "defensive militia" in Northern Ireland, Lebanon's Phalange militias in the 1980s, volunteer militias in Jewish West Bank settlements all insist on plucking out bits of sacred texts to justify violence. The only way to prevent violent, fundamentalist readings of the Bible and Quran is to know and preach a more accurate, more

sophisticated reading.

"Somebody said once, and I wish it had been me, as soon as you find God loving the things you love and the people you love and hating the things you hate and the people you hate then you know it's not God," Mallon said.

The worst readings of sacred literature often come from people

trying to read the other religion's holy book and explain it. When an angry Catholic tells you what the Quran says, a resentful Jew interprets the New Testament or a paranoid Muslim picks at the Bible you can be sure you're wandering into dangerous misunderstanding.

"A sacred text needs a prayerful, believing reader," said Mallon.



Catholic Register/M. Swan

BIBLICAL TEXTS — Atonement Father Elias Mallon, pictured in a Jan. 16 photo in Toronto, is a scholar of ancient Near East languages and culture who insists Catholics need to do a better job of reading the difficult texts in the Bible.

Students are thriving

Continued from page 4

and families are supported through the school.

Students who rarely turned up in class before their experience at Mother Teresa are now in high school averaging 92-per-cent attendance.

"We've had kids who have lost every member of their family, who have really struggled and have really been angry and have had to battle through things," said Kleisinger. "But now they're in school doing incredibly well, engaged in all kinds of activities and want to be marine biologists."

Lussier is quick to point out the idea behind Nativity Schools is not to target any ethnic, racial or

religious minority. The aim is to give poor kids an education that will change their life prospects.

Lussier makes no apology for offering a Catholic education, but sees that as the furthest thing from some form of proselytism or brainwashing.

"The approach we are taking is perhaps a little bit more sensitive to the history of residential schools and that's partly because in Winnipeg we have the largest urban indigenous population in Canada," he said. "We will include in the curriculum of this school teaching on indigenous culture and history in Canada in a way that respects the fact that we are all treaty people and we have a shared history."

Department must serve

Continued from page 3

the yellow pages" or to a 1-800 number or a website. "Our doctors are committed to the life and well-being of their patients," he said, noting they would want to maintain the patient/doctor relationship to determine the underlying reason for the request and "responding compassionately."

Worthen said it is a misreading

of the Carter decision to say it requires individual physicians or facilities to provide the service. "If this is something the Supreme Court of Canada has mandated, the Department of Health has to provide those services."

For remote areas, instead of forcing doctors to perform euthanasia, the Department of Health could send doctors in, he said.

Preaching on texts and getting it wrong

By Michael Swan
The Catholic Register

When it comes to misreading the lectionary on Sunday morning, there's lots of ways of going wrong.

"There are a few Gospel texts in the lectionary in which the most common homiletic approach is to insist that Jesus didn't really mean what he said," notes Christian McConnell of St. Peter's Seminary in London, Ont.

McConnell is a liturgy expert who is head of St. Peter's Institute for Ongoing Formation. He's heard a lot of sermons — good and bad. The story of Martha and Mary is one that very often gets priests and deacons disagreeing with Jesus, McConnell said.

"Most homilies insist that Martha's 'active' approach and Mary's 'contemplative' approach are equally important, despite the fact that Jesus' entire point — his punchline, as it were — is that 'Mary has chosen the better path,'" McConnell wrote in an email. "If we don't want to allow (rightly) that contemplation is more important than action, we should maybe revisit the assumption that (the story) is about 'contemplative' and 'active' at all."

Look again at the story and you may see that Martha is doing

exactly what is expected of her in Middle Eastern culture, where women serve dinner to the men then eat later in a separate room. In the ancient near east (and sometimes today) women were to keep silent and defer to men in public. Mary defies the norms of her culture and its expectations for women. She sits at Jesus' feet, making herself equal to the men in the room.

"There's a lot of countercultural sting in that text," said McConnell. "And it almost never gets preached. Instead, homilists actually preach against the text itself."

If there's any place where inattentive reading can turn the New Testament into a weapon of fundamentalism, it's The Revelation to John also known as the Apocalypse — the last book of the Christian Bible.

"The Apocalypse is one that preachers avoid," said Rev. Andrea Spatafora, New Testament professor at Saint Paul University in Ottawa.

Parts of Revelation come up toward the end of the liturgical year, during Advent and during Easter. Nearly 32 per cent of Revelation appears in the modern Catholic lectionary. Before the Second Vatican Council, it was never read at mass.

The book isn't primarily about

the second coming, or condemning people to hell or some horrible, fiery final judgment, said Spatafora.

"It is good news. There's some dimension of judgment. There's that aspect. But the emphasis is not on that," he said.

"It really is on the Paschal Mystery and the salvation that is now already realized."

The imagery that drives this poetic search for Christian meaning reminds readers constantly of endurance, perseverance and salvation. There is the lamb that is slain but still standing, the Son of Man coming with power and authority but to save us, and finally the new Jerusalem — an enormous city that can accommodate everyone.

"The new Jerusalem is an image again of universality and immensity — the city that really is beyond human measurement," Spatafora said.

When the book of Revelation names 144,000 who are saved, it's not meant as a limiting number. It's 12 by 12 by 1,000, a number so large it is unimaginable in the ancient Mediterranean mind.

Revelation saves its condemnation for systems that oppress people and authorities that abuse their power. Ordinary folk don't get that treatment.

Christians invited to create climate of change

By Paul Paproski, OSB

BRUNO, Sask. — Christians are invited to create a climate of change both at home and abroad, 14 people were told at a Development and Peace workshop, Jan. 24, in Bruno, Sask. The theme for Share Lent in 2016 is Create a Climate of Change, Armella Sonntag of Battleford, provincial animator for the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, said.

Interwoven into the Share Lent theme is the idea of pilgrimage, where people go on personal pilgrimages at home, in their parish or with others in their local communities and communities across the globe.

The conception of Creating a Climate of Change is being promoted by Pope Francis who is challenging everyone to open their hearts and be merciful, Victor Granger of Bruno said. Pope Francis is encouraging everyone to be wary of how lifestyles in the West are leading to the exploitation of resources and a changing climate. The consequence of the western lifestyle has brought shifts in weather patterns and a surge in devastating storms.

The Grangers are striving to follow the environmental message of the pope and theme of Lent by creating a climate of change in their home and business through a simpler and more creative lifestyle. Lent can become a pilgrimage of

taking steps to live more simply, he said. It is possible to live more modestly by looking at what one wants and then at what one needs. Having fewer things at home can make life more enjoyable because that means there are fewer things to look after and clean, he remarked.

The Grangers practise recycling at their home and business and have cut down on their disposable waste. They use rain water for their garden and arrange their vegetables in patterns where the plants need less water. Eating one's own garden produce lessens the reliance on food that must be transported over long distances, he said. The Grangers purchase their beef from a local farmer and they know the meat is healthy because

the farmer takes good care of his cattle. Purchasing beef locally means the Grangers support a local business and are doing their part to reduce their carbon footprint by reducing their reliance on food that must be transported.

There are many materials available for parishes to communicate the theme of the Share Lent Campaign, Sonntag commented. Activities of Share Lent introduce people to the corporal works of mercy which include: feeding the

hungry, giving a drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, visiting the imprisoned, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick and burying the dead.

Development and Peace uses its resources to assist people in Canada and across the globe who are victims of disasters, conflicts, injustice, and who struggle to eke out a living, Sonntag commented. The Catholic organization will begin its 50th year celebrations in 2016 and conclude them next year.

Catholic school sponsors refugee family

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

SASKATOON — A Catholic elementary school in Saskatoon has taken on the challenge of sponsoring a refugee family from Burundi, a small African country wracked by civil war.

Students of École St. Matthew School cheered and waved Canadian flags Feb. 4 at the launch of their campaign to raise \$30,000 in support of the private refugee sponsorship of the family — a mother, father and four children who have fled Burundi and are now living as refugees in Rwanda.

The sponsorship was initiated after a parent at St. Matthew heard about the 1000 Schools Challenge issued by a school in Toronto, encouraging schools to sponsor refugees.

(SAH), the diocese has signed an agreement with the federal government that permits it to work with parishes and other groups in the community to privately sponsor refugees.

“At first I was hesitant about it, knowing that school councils and priorities can change from year to year,” Zyla said, noting that sponsorship is a big commitment that can take years to complete. “But when I spoke to them, I saw that the parents and the staff clearly understood the reality of sponsorship: they realize this is not just a one-year project or a six-month project. They have a vision and a plan for how this will unfold as the children grow over time.”

A refugee sponsorship committee consisting of students, school staff, parents and members of the Catholic School Community Council was established to oversee planning.

“We expect it will take about 18 to 24 months of fundraising before we can welcome a family into our community,” said Krista Schreiter, chair of the committee. “Our involvement won’t stop there. The family will need support to get used to their new home for about a year after they arrive. We’ll be here to support them every step of the way.”

Zyla is enthusiastic about the commitment being undertaken by the school, and the awareness and involvement already evident among the students. “This is what

Catholic education is about, this is faith in action, this is everything that we are called to,” she said. “I just keep thinking: ‘and the little children shall lead them.’ ”

During the school assembly to launch the fundraising campaign, Farrukh Syeer of the Saskatoon Open Door Society, a helping agency that assists newcomers in becoming part of Canadian society, spoke to students about refugees and the challenges they face.

“First they suffer in their home country, then they suffer during their journey, then they suffer after their journey,” he said, describing how those fleeing their homes and travelling to other countries might be confined to refugee camps, or forced to live illegally, without an identity or rights. “Then, even if they are settled in a place where they are safer, it is not so easy to make a life in a new place that they don’t know much about.”



Paproski

“Danielle Schock, one of our parents, heard about the 1000 Schools Challenge from a friend in Alberta, and there was immediate interest and support from our whole school community — staff, students and parents,” said François Rivard, principal at St. Matthew. “It was unanimous that this would be a great way to put our faith into action, a tangible way to share God’s blessings and demonstrate compassion and service to others.”

School representatives approached Christine Zyla, co-ordinator of the Office of Migration at the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon, with the idea. As a Sponsorship Agreement Holder

SHARE LENT — Victor Granger of Bruno and Armella Sonntag of Battleford, Sask., provincial animator with the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, hold the 2016 Share Lent poster. They gave presentations Jan. 24 at a Share Lent workshop in Bruno. The theme for Share Lent is Create a Climate of Change.

Come to know God through others

By Frank Flegel

REGINA — Be the Salt of the Earth and the Light of the World was the theme for the 2016 version of World Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. It was also the topic of homilist Rev. Gary Kuntz Jan. 24 at Living Spirit Centre, but he also included ecumenism in his homily.

The Living Spirit Centre is one example of ecumenism among non-Catholic Christian faiths: it includes three churches, Eastside United, St. Philips Anglican and Bread of Life Lutheran.

Each year Christians in one country develop an order of service which is used all over the world. This year it was Christians in Latvia who developed the order of service.

The service included several readings and prayers performed by various members of Christian denominations interspersed with hymns which appeared to be familiar to everyone. Flannery Salkeld of St. Augustine’s Parish, Wilcox, Sask., sang the psalm responses while Michelle Dickie of Living Spirit Centre provided the piano music. She played for all the hymns and provided music prior to and after the service.

Kuntz opened his homily by defining ecumenism as “the ability or capacity to move into a different world and become rich,” not referring to material wealth but enrichment of one’s self. “You come to

know one another and become one,” as Christ intended.

He referred to the Reformation as an example of “how far off we had gone and the church’s response was to try and obliterate the ideas” of the Reformation. “And what did the Christians try to do to our First Nations people? They tried to obliterate them and their spirituality.” He then referred to the increasing presence of Islam and asked, how are we going to welcome them? Christ became flesh incarnate in all, said Kuntz. He suggested asking them what have you learned about God? “Because you may experience God in a way that I don’t know.” Come to know God through them, he suggested. “If we want to be Light of the World and Salt of the Earth, we have to be ecumenical,” he ended.

Immediately after the homily Pastor Charles Kooger of Sonlight Christian Reformed Church invited everyone to come forward and take a pinch of salt to be placed on the tongue and light a small candle. It was called a Gesture of Commitment to be Salt and Light. The candles remained lit for the remaining prayers and were snuffed just prior to everyone sharing a gesture of peace.

The service ended with Del Bornowsky of St. Philip Anglican Church reciting the Beatitudes before the final blessing.

The service was followed by a reception featuring homemade cookies and dainties.



K. Yaworski

SCHOOL SPONSORS REFUGEES — Principal François Rivard addresses students at École St. Matthew School in Saskatoon during a fundraising launch for the Catholic elementary school’s sponsorship of a refugee family from Burundi.

Consecrated life honoured at Saskatoon event

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

SASKATOON — An Honour the Legacy celebration recognizing the contributions of those in consecrated life was held Jan. 29 at the Cathedral of the Holy Family in Saskatoon.

Organized by the Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools (GSCS) Together in Faith and Action Committee, the appreciation event was held as the Year of Consecrated Life drew to a close. Declared by Pope Francis, the year officially ended a few days later, on the Feast of the Presentation, Feb. 2, which is also the World Day of Consecrated Life.

"We are celebrating the key role that sisters, priests and bishops have played in Catholic education since the district began," said Rev. Kevin McGee, vicar-general for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon and pastoral associate for GSCS. He added that the event echoed Pope Francis' call to express to those in consecrated life "the affection and the warmth that the entire Christian people feel toward them."

In his homily at the eucharistic celebration that opened the event, Bishop Bryan Bayda of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Saskatoon personally expressed his appreciation to his Grade 1 teacher, Sister Agnes McGrath of

the Sisters of the Child Jesus.

Now living in British Columbia, the retired teacher was in attendance, and Bayda called her up to the pulpit. Together they looked at a photo of the bishop's first grade class at Bishop Murray School in Saskatoon, and Bayda reminded her which student he was in the 1967 picture: "I'm standing right next to you!"

He thanked her and all teachers for sharing their lives, their skills and especially their presence. "Thank you for witnessing to our children, to other teachers, and your principals, to parents, and to the world," he said, before giving McGrath an apple.

During the banquet and program that followed mass, the names of religious women and priests who have served in Catholic schools in GSCS communities were on display and projected onto an overhead screen. The list of sisters and priests who have served in the Catholic school district was researched and compiled by Sister Teresita Kambeitz, OSU, and a directory of the names was presented to board vice-chair Wayne Stus during the program.

Also on display was a mosaic of a pitcher, a wash basin and a towel, formed from hundreds of tiny photographs of sisters and priests who have served in the area.

Another display featured a large quilt map of Saskatchewan created by Sylvia Obrigewitsch, NDS, during the province's centennial year, showing where 61 different orders of religious women served across the province since 1860. "We know that their lives were all about Jesus, their loving Lord," said Kambeitz. "And their loving service was to continue his mission of teaching and healing here in Saskatchewan."

All those in attendance were presented with a commemorative piece of art — a limited edition print by teacher and artist Monique Martin, who delivered a video message explaining the images she used in the artwork. Rev. Ron Griffin, CSB, of St. Thomas More College came forward to assist in cutting up the block that produced the print, ensuring its uniqueness.

Catholic schools began in Saskatoon in 1911, when three Sisters of the Presentation of Mary were asked by Rev. Vachon, OMI, and Bishop Paschal to staff Saskatoon's first Catholic separate school, which opened in the basement of St. Paul's Cathedral, said GSCS director of education Greg Chatlain.

"The Sisters of Our Lady of Sion arrived in 1917, establishing Sion Academy in 1919. Mean-



K. Yaworski

CONSECRATED LIFE — Rev. Kevin McGee, vicar-general for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon and pastoral associate for Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools, and Sister Teresita Kambeitz, OSU, gave a presentation about the history and impact of sisters and priests in the Catholic school district during an Honour the Legacy event Jan. 29 at the Cathedral of the Holy Family in Saskatoon.

while in the Humboldt area, which is now part of GSCS, the Ursuline Sisters were invited by the Benedictines to staff schools," he added.

In total, some 17 religious communities of sisters have served in the GSCS system, along with diocesan and eparchial priests, as well as priests from the Basilian, Benedictine, Dominican, Redemptorist and Oblates of Mary Immaculate religious orders, he said.

"There have been amazing shepherds, amazing leaders, and one of those was Bishop James Mahoney," Chatlain said, playing an audio clip of the late bishop speaking about Catholic education, when trying to secure full funding for Catholic high schools. "We do not simply want to teach our children how to live in this world. We want to teach them how to live in this world as Christ lived. We want to form in them

the mind that was in Jesus Christ," Mahoney said.

History and milestones were explored in a dialogue between McGee and Kambeitz. The crowd learned that over 400 sisters have taught in Saskatoon and area Catholic schools, as have 29 priests. As well, 33 priests and one deacon have served as school chaplains. The Sisters of Sion had the highest number of teaching sisters, at about 125, as well as the longest record of service, from 1991 to 1992, reported Kambeitz. In total, 51 sisters have served as principals in Catholic schools.

Closing remarks and thanks were presented by Sister Juliana Heisler, NDS, retired teacher, principal and parish life director, and Rev. Mick Fleming, CSsR, priest moderator of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish and a member of the Redemptorist community at St. Mary's in Saskatoon.

No end in sight to refugees in the world

By James Buchok

WINNIPEG — As long as there have been wars there have been refugees, and long before the crisis in Syria, Canadians have been working to help those forced to flee their homelands, and there is no end in sight to the great need of so many.



Anne Mahon

Nine years ago, Winnipegger Anne Mahon began volunteering with the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba (IRCOM), a non-profit operating a transitional housing complex for refugees. Once a week Mahon teaches English as an Additional Language to about 20 newcomers to Canada, some of whom are university educated, others who have never held a pencil.

Their stories of survival compelled her to write *The Lucky Ones: African Refugees' Stories of Extraordinary Courage*, a collection of personal accounts of being forced from one's home and begin-

ning again in a new country. The stories come from men, women and children, aged four to 73, representing a variety of African countries and backgrounds.

Mahon writes of resilience and an extraordinary courage and will to live. "I have been transformed by being the messenger of these peoples' stories," she told a gathering at St. Gianna Beretta Molla Church Feb. 2.

She said she wrote the book to create awareness about refugees, to honour their stories, which she believes are often misunderstood, and to raise funds. Half of the proceeds from the book are being donated to the African community through the University of Winnipeg's Opportunity Fund assisting new university students with tuition fees. The other half goes to SEED Winnipeg for micro-loan opportunities for business and community projects.

"There is no one quintessential refugee," said Mahon. "Some come from refugee camps, others were never in a camp; some have university degrees, others have no education; some come to reunite with family that came before and immediately have a family and a community, others arrive completely alone. Some have seen or experienced war and acts of violence. Some have lived through total instability in their lives with no idea of the future."

She read an excerpt from the book, from a man who experienced the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya that opened in 1991 and currently contains 179,000 people who have fled wars and violence in neighbouring countries.

"Have you ever seen people fight over a jug of water?" he

asks. "The water was precious, to drink, to bathe" in temperatures reaching 40 C.

The lesson Mahon has learned from refugees is one of gratitude. "For refugees, everything begins with gratitude. They thank us over and over for giving them safety and opportunity."

Newcomers know the value of family, Mahon said. "Their first question is always, 'How is your family?' because if the family is good, all is good."

In another excerpt, a man writes that besides housing and food, those we help need our respect.

"Some people confuse helping with telling someone what they should do," he writes. "There can be an attitude of superiority: 'You are the one who needs me and my country because you are coming here.' This does not help us. For me, helping is based on respect and an understanding of each other. To say, 'I don't have anything to learn from you; you are the one learning from me,' creates the impression of inferiority."

"People say they would like to give a cup, or a bed or a television. They really care. That is a good start, but help like that is for the short term. You can buy me a huge beautiful bed, but if I cannot sleep, then it is just for decoration. I know that it was not meant for decoration, it was meant for sleep, but in order for me to be able to have a restful sleep I need to feel like a contributing, valuable member of the society I live in."

"We have an opportunity to learn from them," Mahon said. "Anything is possible. We should never limit our expectations to the boundaries of what we already know."

Pastoral method explained

Continued from page 1

and learned about the Father Bob Method of canvassing: when going door to door, ask the constituents about themselves rather than launching into your campaign promises. Gruending identified this approach as a "pastoral method," born out of Ogle's experience as a parish priest and missionary.

Calvert recalled how his entry into the political life coincided almost directly with Ogle's departure from it. Whereas Ward and Gruending talked about direct personal experience with Ogle, Calvert talked about the "legends and letters" of the priest. Referencing the biblical story of Jacob, Calvert said of Ogle, "Here is a man who wrestled with angels." He explained the allegory: Ogle had wrestled with many issues and situations, from the decision to run for the party to the daily wrestling with suffering and inequality in the world. Like Jacob, Calvert explained, Ogle carried the injury from the struggle for the rest of his life.

Blaikie's talk was titled *Prophetic Obedience: Reflections on the Life and Work of Bob Ogle*, by the junior half of the NDP's

1979 God Squad. He recounted how he and Ogle had entered politics at a similar time, though at different periods in their own lives. The God Squad in his title referred to Ogle as priest and himself as a United Church minister. Blaikie told of his experiences with Ogle — both funny and poignant — to illustrate a larger point about morality and the need to connect the conflicts and inequalities we see in the world to our Christian duty to do something about it. One particularly striking story was how, on Christmas Eve 1973, Rev. Ben Smillie, a United Church minister, entreated Ogle to speak in his Christmas Day homily about the bombing of Hanoi, which was ongoing. Ogle did so.

Wednesday's event was organized and chaired by Prof. Christopher Hrynko, who teaches in the Department of Religion and Culture at St. Thomas More College. There were several sponsors for the event: the Dubé Chair in Catholic Studies, the Department of Religion and Culture, the Mission and Ministry Office, and the Dean's Office. Special thanks was expressed to Gertrude Rompré for facilitating.

Edmonton centre eases refugees into Catholic schools

By Thandiwe Konguavi
Western Catholic Reporter

EDMONTON (CCN) — If any agency was prepared for a wave of Syrian refugee families to arrive in Canada, it is Edmonton Catholic Schools' One World . . . One Centre.

With a newly made holy door at the welcome centre declaring, "Let the children come to me," assistant principal Karen Fabris and her team were not sent scrambling as news hit of the refugee crisis.

"We've been welcoming all, for years and years and years — any families and those in need for years already," she said. "So it's who we are as a district."

Since opening its doors in 2012 in the former St. Patrick School, the centre for newcomers has welcomed more than 4,000 students and families to Edmonton Catholic Schools, including 400 refugees from all over the world.

To date, 34 Syrian refugee students have been placed in schools throughout the district across grade levels, most of them arriving in December and January. Taking in up to 24 students in a day, the centre now runs like a well-oiled machine.

"When the family comes in to see us, we try to make sure they are in school that afternoon or the next morning," said Fabris.

The students are not dropped off at school and left by themselves in the back of the class until the teacher has one-on-one time with them.

Their educational backgrounds range from children who were

born in refugee camps and have never attended school, to students who have attended school throughout their lives with professional parents who continued reading with their children even while displaced.

"Every family is different regardless of where they're coming from and regardless of background," said Fabris.

"No story is the same; no background is the same. So we have to treat every student as an individual. To lump them together as a group and to say, 'This is the need of the Syrians,' is not what we're doing. We have to look at each as an individual."

When a family arrives at the school they have been registered, and each student has been assessed one-on-one with an experienced educator according to Alberta Education's English as a second language benchmarks.

Their teacher will know what they can read and write in English, and what their English listening and speaking abilities are. They are ready to start programming from the first day, said Fabris.

Each student is given a United Way Tools for School backpack which includes pens, papers, a water bottle and lunch kit.

"It just makes for a much more positive start when you know you have what you need and you're not being singled out as 'I don't have a pencil,'" said Fabris. "Rather than going to the school and then sitting in a class not having them, they're walking in, head held high, 'I've got everything I need.'"

English as a second language consultants constantly provide



WCR/T. Konguavi

WELCOMING NEWCOMERS — Karen Fabris says Edmonton Catholic Schools' One World . . . One Centre has been providing a one-stop welcome for all newcomers to city schools since 2012.

professional development for teachers in the district. With 8,599 English language learners in the district, they are the fastest growing part of the student population, making up 21.4 per cent.

Sensitivity is built into all professional development programs offered by the centre so the teach-

ers also understand where the children are coming from.

For Syrian refugee students, the centre's religious and social studies consultants have put together a package of information for school staff about the Syrian refugee crisis and why it happened.

The resource is available for district staff on the district's portal site. It includes videos pre-screened by consultants for teachers to show their students about what has caused the crisis and why families must leave their home country.

In addition to school supplies, the centre also provides each family with information for bus routes, public libraries, City of Edmonton recreation passes and brochures for job opportunities.

"We're working with a group of people who have had to leave their home country and everything they know, so the most rewarding part is to make them feel welcome, answer the questions they have, and provide the support they need so they feel that Canada is their new country," said Fabris.

The centre, created to be a wraparound service for new families, also houses a federally funded Language Instruction for Newcomer to Canada (LINC) program for adults, and the Mosaic program offered by the Early Learning Department of Edmonton Catholic Schools for newcomer families with preschool children.

In the Edmonton archdiocese, the refugee students that have arrived so far have been privately sponsored, largely by parishes in collaboration with Catholic Social Services.

When the wave of government-sponsored refugees will arrive is not yet known, said Fabris. Even CSS is sometimes only alerted hours ahead of their arrivals. But when they do arrive, the process is in place.

Euthanasia must be 'exceptional and rare,' says Somerville

Deborah Gyapong

OTTAWA (CCN) — Bioethicist Margaret Somerville warned 11,000 to 12,000 people could be euthanized a year in Canada if a new law does not ensure euthanasia is exceptional, rare and only a last resort.



CCN/D. Gyapong

Margaret Somerville

The founding director of the McGill University Centre for Medicine, Ethics and Law told the parliamentary committee on physician-assisted dying Feb. 4 she thought "Canadians would be extremely worried" and "upset if they thought there were between 11,000 and 12,000 Canadians being killed by lethal injections

given by doctors every year." (See related story, page 3.)

Somerville said her estimates are based on the rate of euthanasia deaths in the Netherlands and Belgium at four per cent and 4.6 per cent of deaths annually. "I could almost not believe it when I worked out those figures and I actually tried to go back and make sure they were correct," she said.

Both euthanasia and assisted suicide are "inherently wrong and should remain criminally prohibited," she told the committee, but she was willing to offer some recommendations to "limit the risks and harms of legalized euthanasia."

Any framework to allow it should respect the constitution and the Charter of Rights and aim to "do the least harm to the value of respect for life," she said.

Respect for life is not just a religious value, she stressed. "It's a foundational value in every society in which reasonable people would want to live, and it must be upheld at two levels, that of the individual person, and that of the society in general."

Religions were the institutions that used to uphold respect for life in the past, she noted.

"In 21st-century secular western democracy such as Canada medicine and law are the main institutions carrying the value of respect for life for society as a whole," she said. "Both are implicated in physician-assisted death

which would damage their capacity to carry this value. It is in every Canadian's interest to make that damage as small as possible."

Any person requesting euthanasia must be offered "high quality palliative care and pain management," she said. That must be "legally required in order to obtain informed consent to euthanasia."

The legal prohibitions against euthanasia and assisted suicide must remain in force "to avoid future normalization of euthanasia," she said, noting any legislation allowing it must make it clear it is an exception that "should only be used as a last resort," and "rarely."

Somerville suggested the legislation should be "entitled 'an act to amend the Criminal Code to allow for an exception to conviction for culpable homicide and assisted suicide.'"

"This means those not complying with the law allowing euthanasia could be criminally liable and also that the person seeking euthanasia must show they fulfil the conditions for having access," she said. "That is they have the burden of proof."

Access to proper pain management is a human right, Somerville stressed. She cited palliative care expert Dr. Harvey Chochinov, who said people who request euthanasia often change their minds when offered good palliative care and pain management.

Somerville also said euthanasia should be restricted to the terminally ill whose life expectancy is less than four weeks. It should not be allowed for children. Psychiatric evaluations must rule out "all possibility of coercion or duress."

A superior court judge should certify any request for euthanasia, as the Supreme Court is requiring now for those seeking exemptions to the suspension of the Carter decision that is to come into effect on June 6.

For nearly 2,500 years, physicians have not recognized assisted suicide and euthanasia as medical treatment and "this position should be maintained and these interventions kept out of medicine," she said.

"Consequently, a new profession should be established to carry out euthanasia," she said. "The practitioners should not be health care professionals, or if so, only ones who have permanently retired from practice."

"Practitioners should be specially trained, licensed, and have travel money provided to give people across Canada equal access to euthanasia," she said. "If

this approach is not adopted, two publicly available lists of physicians and institutions should be established, those who will provide euthanasia and those who will not. This is a reasonable compromise between Canadians who agree with euthanasia and those who oppose or fear it."

"The Supreme Court emphasized that the Charter right to security of the person includes freedom from fear about what could happen to us when we're dying," she said. "This seems often to be forgotten with respect to those fearful of euthanasia."

"You are not just legislating for the present, but for future generations of Canadians with respect to how they will die," she said, pointing out legalizing euthanasia and assisted suicide are a "seismic shift" in Canada's foundational values.

Somerville was among the last of the 62 witnesses who have appeared before the joint parliamentary committee on physician-assisted dying. The committee also received 100 written briefs.

The committee began considering the testimony Feb. 5, and will present its report Feb. 26.

Website:

<http://www.prairiemessenger.ca>

Ambassador Bennett uncertain about his future

By Deborah Gyapong

OTTAWA (CCN) — Religious Freedom Ambassador Andrew Bennett remains uncertain whether his three-year term will be renewed, but says he will continue to fight for religious freedom if his position is eliminated.

“As a Catholic, this has very much become part of my vocation, the defence of religious freedom, and the promotion of a robust understanding of human dignity,” Bennett said in an interview.

“I will find ways to continue to be involved,” whether as ambassador or not, he said.

Bennett’s contract expires toward the end of February. As of late January, he had not met with Foreign Affairs Minister Stephane Dion to discuss whether he will continue as ambassador, or, for that matter, whether the Office of Religious Freedom, instituted by the previous Conservative government, will remain.

In the mandate letter to Dion released shortly after last October’s election, there is no mention of religious freedom as a priority. While there is a nod to diversity and pluralism within Canada, the mandate’s international focus aims to “increase Canada’s support for United Nations peace operations and its mediation, conflict-prevention, and post-conflict reconstruction efforts.”

For Bennett, understanding the religious dimension is key to conflict resolution and peace.

Highly secular societies like Canada or those of western Europe are “outliers” in a world where religion plays a huge role in every facet of life, he said. Religion informs not only cultural discourse, social action, economic, but also “a whole way of looking at the world.”

“When engaging in international relations, if we are not able to be conversant in the language of religious faith” and with how people relate to the world and within their own countries, “then we really have a serious diplomatic blind spot,” he said.

Over the past three years, he has helped to equip his colleagues “with the tools and language they need” to engage religious communities in a “good, nuanced,” and “winsome fashion.”

The office has also funded a number of projects overseas to promote religious freedom in countries such as Nigeria, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Ukraine, Burma, and Bangladesh, with various partner groups in those countries.

Bennett sees two particular areas that need special attention.

First, Canadians in general and foreign service personnel in particular “need to have a much deeper understanding of Islam,” he said. This would include learning about the Sunni and Shia branches of Islam and the conflict between them; of the differing schools and branches within Sunni Islam; of the great diversity within predominantly Muslim countries such as Indonesia, Bosnia, and Morocco; and of the many differing actors within Islam. This understanding has to go “beyond addressing questions around stabilization and countering violent extremism,” he said.

Canadians can engage more fully if they have “knowledge of some of the fundamental beliefs” and structures, he said, noting that as the Canadian Muslim community continues to grow and “become an integrated part of Canadian life,” that worldwide diversity is mirrored at home.

Second is the challenge of addressing the worldwide perse-

cution of Christians, he said. “We must not shy away from talking about this issue,” he said.

Being frank about the degree of Christian persecution does not detract from the persecution suffered by other religious minorities, such as Yazidis, he said. Studies from organizations such as the Pew Forum and Aid to the Church in Need, and statements by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks and Pope Francis, show “the situation in the Middle East and in Africa is acute.”

Canada needs to be “much more robust in championing the plight of persecuted communities,” especially that of ancient apostolic churches “facing a serious existential threat to their very existence” in the Middle East, he said.

Bennett said the past three years as Religious Freedom Ambassador have given him a “greater humility” given the scope of the problems and challenges in some parts of the world that will require “multi-generational commitments by people of goodwill” to bring about respect for human dignity and religious freedom that will end persecution of minorities for their beliefs.

“We’ve only just begun,” he said, noting he was speaking “without prejudicing the decision Minister Dion might choose to take.”

“We still have as human beings and as Canadians a responsibility to help these people,” he said.

Bennett said the experience of meeting people who have experienced persecution first-hand has “opened my eyes to the immensity of the challenge and how pervasive persecution is in this world.”

His work has put him in touch with a range of belief communities, from religious groups to athe-



CCN/D. Gyapong

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM — Religious Freedom Ambassador Andrew Bennett remains uncertain whether his three-year term will be renewed, but says he will continue to fight for religious freedom if his position ends.

ists and secular humanists who have also faced persecution.

He recalled a meeting with Yazidi men who showed him photographs of what they had experienced in Iraq. “Most of them were in tears,” Bennett said. “It affects you as a human being, never mind as a foreign policy actor.”

“You gain a great love for these people who are suffering,” he said.

Religious freedom advocates say they hope Bennett and the office will remain.

On Jan. 22, Canadian Jewish, Sikh and Ahmadiyya Muslim leaders issued a joint letter to Minister Dion in support of the Office of Religious Freedom and Ambassador Bennett.

“The Office of Religious Freedom, under the capable stewardship of Ambassador Bennett, has proven an effective advocate in highlighting the issue of religious persecution, partnering with Diaspora communities in Canada, and raising our country’s profile as a world leader in human rights promotion on the international stage,” said the letter signed by Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA) CEO Shimon Koffler Fogel, World Sikh Organization of Canada president Amritpal Singh Shergill, and Ahmadiyya Muslim Community of Canada national secretary-public relations Asif Khan.

“Today, hundreds of millions of people around the world are the target of threats, discrimination, state persecution, or violence every day simply on the basis of their religion,” they wrote. “While we acknowledge that diverse communities are subject to persecution as a result of multiple factors, the suffering of religious minorities in numerous countries is particularly acute and often qualitatively different from other forms of discrimination.”

The leaders pointed out many Syrian refugees are “religious minorities targeted by ISIS on the basis of their faith.”

Other leaders have also weighed in.

Peter Bhatti, president of Inter-

national Christian Voice (ICV), noted former prime minister Stephen Harper created the Office of Religious Freedom in response to the assassination of his brother Shahbaz Bhatti, who served as Pakistan’s first cabinet minister tasked with defending religious minorities.

“In honour of his legacy, it’s important they continue this office,” to promote religious freedom, Bhatti said. ICV defends the rights of Pakistani Christians and other minorities both in Pakistan and among the Pakistani diaspora.

“In the beginning, it took a lot of effort to get this thing in place,” Bhatti said. “(Bennett) did a lot of work to introduce religious freedom. I think he should be given the chance to fulfil his goals.”

Imam Abdul Patel, who founded the Canadian Council of Imams and now serves as their interfaith director, has served on the Office of Religious Freedom’s advisory board.

“It would be a good idea to keep it but with a broader focus, both inside Canada and outside,” Patel said. He would also like to see the Office of Religious Freedom granted more power. “Right now it has no teeth.”

The office needs to play a bigger role in ensuring religious freedom inside Canada. He said the previous government “stigmatized or went after faith communities,” particularly Muslim communities, Patel said.

Patel noted the major role faith communities have played in building Canada. Canadians cannot go abroad preaching religious freedom if “we can’t practise religious freedom for everyone, for all faiths in Canada,” he said.

“On the surface nothing much appears,” he said. “We have more persecution of minorities continuing around the world. The office has no real power to influence any governments.”

However, if the Office of Religious Freedom gets more power, Patel thinks Bennett should stay on. “He is the best man for the job.”

“Go into all the world and, preach the gospel, if necessary, use words”
- St. Francis of Assisi

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Going Home Star: dancing toward reconciliation

By Jean Ko Din
The Catholic Register

Part of the road to reconciliation has to involve a change in culture and nothing moves culture forward more than art.

So while the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada has been collecting art to express the experiences at Indian residential schools, it has commissioned and supported artists across the country to commemorate this part of Canadian history.

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet, in partnership with the TRC, created *Going Home Star — Truth and Reconciliation*, an original contemporary ballet about the Indian residential school system.

The ballet premiered in Winnipeg last October. Following its local success, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet is taking the production across the country. It began Jan. 28 in Ottawa.

“From (the TRC’s) point of view, no matter what the ballet would be, their message would reach people that normally wouldn’t be reached,” said Mark Godden, choreographer and co-creator of *Going Home Star*. “It’s a subject matter that we have talked about in the past . . . and even though I’m not of Aboriginal



Samantha Katz

GOING HOME STAR — Dancers with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet perform in *Going Home Star — Truth and Reconciliation*. The ballet partnered with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on the contemporary ballet about the Indian residential school system.

descent, it was something the company really wanted to do.”

Godden said while most of the cast and crew of the production are not of Aboriginal descent, they were all eager to immerse themselves in the culture. In collaborating with the TRC, honorary witnesses and elders often visited the rehearsals and shared their insights with the ballet company.

One obstacle Godden encountered for himself was the idea of incorporating Aboriginal history and tradition.

“I was kind of despairing of the fact that we might somehow be exploiting these people again for

our own personal art form,” said Godden. “I wanted to be true to these stories, but I also wanted to be true to the ballet world.”

Eventually, Godden found the bridge in the music. He contacted Juno award-winning composer Christos Hatzis. Hatzis brought with him famed Inuk throat singer

Tanya Tagaq, Steve Wood and the Northern Cree Singers. The music became the spirit of the Aboriginal history and tradition, which freed Godden to be true to the classical movement of ballet. All that was left was the story.

In researching the story, Godden’s first impulse was to connect with the TRC as it collected first-hand accounts from residential school survivors. He watched hours and hours of live-stream footage from town hall meetings across the country.

“Once I witnessed so many of these stories, I realized that these (stories) were still raw. It’s still an open wound,” said Godden. “I was pretty devastated listening to it.”

Godden said he started out wanting to capture the real emotions from real witnesses. But in hearing testimony, he realized these stories were so personal and raw that it didn’t feel right exploiting their experiences for the ballet.

Instead, he decided to work with Canadian author and TRC honorary witness Joseph Boyden to create a fictional story that reflected the life of residential school survivors but through a contemporary perspective.

— STORY, page 17

As our society shifts, how we understand things shifts as well

By Caitlin Ward

Recently my sister told me not to watch the film *Withnail & I* ever again. It might seem like a strange request, if you knew us in our early 20s. I’m not sure how many times we watched that film, but we were invested enough to know that the narrator who went by the first-person singular pronoun (& I) was actually named Peter Marwood. When we met a fellow from Liverpool, we immediately asked if he’d ever been to Penrith, a tiny northern English town where the bulk of the film’s action takes place. When my administrative assistant drinks

Bigger Boys and Stolen Sweethearts Arctic Monkeys

coffee out of a handled soup bowl, I try not to laugh at him, because I know he’s not meaning to reference the film’s opening scene, in which Marwood sips coffee out of a soup bowl using a spoon.

What I mean to say, I guess, is that *Withnail & I* has been a fundamental part of my life, and also my sister’s. We both have a copy of the film on DVD, and even now, we occasionally quote the movie to one another in passing. It’s one of the building blocks in our adult relationship, part of a series of inside jokes and common interests that has informed

Ward is a Saskatoon-based freelance writer who spends her days (and most nights) working at a small Catholic college. Her less eloquent thoughts can be found at www.twitter.com/newsetofstrings

our sense of humour and our respective interests.

I understood what she meant when she said I shouldn’t re-watch it, though. She’d shown it to her now-husband shortly before they got married, which made sense. It’s one of her favourite films, after all. But at 32, the film wasn’t the same as it had been at 22. There were shades of nuance she’d missed at the younger age that made what once seemed funny quite tragic, and experiences that turned some of the scenes from exciting to terrifying. The fond memories she has of that film are now coloured by the realization of how difficult and sad the film actually is.

I haven’t rewatched the film. In our conversation about it, I wasn’t sure if it would have quite the same effect on me that it did on her, but at this point I value the memories of our shared love of that film enough that I don’t want to risk it.

Part of this, I think, is simply growing older, experiencing more, and by extension understanding more. The other part, though, is that as our society shifts, how we understand things shifts as well, and that’s not necessarily a function of growing older.

I had a similar experience myself, recently, which has caused me to think about it more. I haven’t listened to Arctic Monkeys much in recent years except for a few of their older songs that I listen to while I run. This week, though, I decided to seek out one of my old favourites of their songs, *Bigger Boys and Stolen Sweethearts*. I seemed to recall having some success last year with listening to the band again and feeling nostalgic and all that jazz.

The thing I liked about early Arctic Monkeys songs were about how real they were. Alex Turner, their lyricist, sang in his own thick Northern accent about the world he understood with a surprising degree of nuance for one so young. It’s easy for lyricists, especially young lyricists, to revert to cliché and bad rhymes, but he tended to avoid that, and it was one of the things that drew me to the band in the first place.

Bigger Boys and Stolen Sweethearts, though, was much less insightful than I remembered it. Or, more likely, I have higher expectations about how insightful people are supposed to be. You see, on the one hand, it’s kind of pitifully funny. The speaker is trying to make the best out of a depressing situation (“at least he hadn’t got a Nova or a Burberry hat”), and the turn at the end where he admits he’s talking about himself is rather poignant.

But here’s the problem I developed with this song: why, in a song about a girl who’s left the speaker, is he talking about the boy she left him for? Why is he not talking about her? Why is he sad to see her go? The only reason he mentions her in the song is to say that she’s doing things with other boys. And then he kind of implies she’s a slut, which is casting a rather childish judgment on her that doesn’t seem to be related to why he’s upset in the first place.

All of this suggests to me that it’s much less about loving this girl, and far more about being upset that she left him for a boy with higher status than he has. Unlike songs like *A View from the Afternoon* or *Dancing Shoes* by the same band, this one does-

n’t have the self-awareness to understand how unfair or silly he’s being. When it’s about an abstract woman, as the two aforementioned songs are, he can be self-aware and self-mocking, but when it’s about a specific person, he’s mean and self-pitying.

The trouble with all of them, mind you, is that none of these are really about women at all. They’re about him, and how he feels about women and what he thinks about women. At 21, I think I had some sympathy for a guy going through rough times and trying to navigate it without success. At 31, though, I don’t

There’s always somebody taller
With more of a wit
An easy quip to enthrall her
And her friends think he’s fit
And you just can’t measure up
no
You don’t have a prayer
Wishing you had made the
most of her
When she was there

CHORUS
They’ve got engaged
No intention of a wedding
He’s pinched your bird
And he’d probably kick your
head in
Bigger Boys and Stolen
Sweethearts
You’re better off without her
anyway
You said you wasn’t sad to see
her go
Yeah but I know you were
though

He might be one of those boys
That’s all pretty and vain
Likes to go in the sunbed
And stays out of the rain

really care what he thinks about women because it’s clear he’s never bothered to sing about one like she’s a human being instead of a prize.

Of course, that song came out more than 10 years ago, so it’s very possible Alex Turner has grown up a bit, as well. A cursory glance of his more recent lyrics suggests he hasn’t started to talk about women any differently, though. So I don’t think it can just be about getting older. Not for both of us, anyway.

What this means for me, though, is that I am definitely not watching *Withnail & I* ever again.

So that he don’t get his hair
wet
You wouldn’t want that
At least he hasn’t got a Nova
Or a Burberry hat

CHORUS
Have you heard what she’s
been doing?
Never did it for me
He picks her up at the school
gates
At twenty past three
She’s been with all the boys
But never went very far
She wagged English and
Science
Just to go in his car

They’ve got engaged
No intention of a wedding
He’s pinched my bird
And he’d probably kick my
head in, oh
Now the girls have grown
But I’m sure that they still
carry on in similar ways

CHORUS

Explorations in the dark side of human behaviour

Screenings & Meanings

Gerald Schmitz



Today is Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent, the ashes a visible reminder of our human mortality, sinfulness and need for repentance. It's as good a time as any to reflect on the conditions under which ordinary human beings sometimes lose their moral compass and become accomplices to evil. We like to think of ourselves as basically good people. We would never do really bad things to others. But most of us have never really been tested either.

Son of Saul (Hungary)
The Stanford Prison Experiment (U.S.)
Experimenter (U.S.)

About the greatest collective evil that can be imagined is that of genocide — the deliberate extermination of a group of human beings simply because of their race, religion, ethnicity or similar defining characteristic. The most terrible genocide in world history is that of the Holocaust carried out by Nazi Germany's totalitarian regime. It could not have happened without a large degree of mass acquiescence. The "final solution" required a vast apparatus, murder on an industrial scale. There were those careful to see no evil, those who saw and did nothing, and those who participated — "Hitler's willing executioners" in the words of historian Daniel Goldhagen.

The monstrous evil of the Nazi death camps even involved some Jewish prisoners in the gruesome tasks associated with the machinery of genocide. These were able-bodied male prisoners temporarily spared from extinction in order to do the sordid work of sorting through clothing and belongings for items of value from those destined to be gassed, then removing bodies and transporting them to the crematoria. Could there be a greater sign of evil than the ashes which resulted?

These groups of Jewish prisoners were known as *sonderkommandos*. A member of one working in Auschwitz-Birkenau is the subject of my most important, and best, film of 2015 as already

briefly described in several previous columns. This is *Son of Saul*, the remarkable first feature by 38-year-old Hungarian director László Nemes, which is favoured to win the foreign-language Oscar later this month.

Nemes, a descendant of family members who died in Auschwitz, provides a deeply personalized vantage point on the nature of the Holocaust by focusing on the fate of a single human being. That singular concentration proves more powerful than the familiar statistics of mass murder. Saul Ausländer (Hungarian-born Géza Röhrig) is a Hungarian *sonderkommando*, the back of his coat marked with a red X to indicate his status. His eyes are downcast and furtive as he goes about the grim tasks. Rumours circulate among different squads of *sonderkommandos* about which might next be marked for execution. Life reduced to barest survival is surrounded by the spectre of death.

The camera keeps tightly on Saul, hovering over his shoulder so that we witness everything as he does. Backgrounds are often blurred, their horrors starkly evident without being so graphic as to be unwatchable. Then Saul comes upon the body of a boy who could be his son. With whatever shred of dignity is left he becomes obsessed that this dead boy not be mere indiscriminate ashes. He is desperate to find a

In a question and answer session following the film's North American premiere at the Toronto film festival, Nemes spoke about his aim of creating a visceral immediate sense of being a *sonderkommando* in the death chambers. (The only comparison I can think of is to Tim Blake Nelson's 2001 Auschwitz drama *The Grey Zone*, though it used mostly American actors speaking English.)

Röhrig, whose performance as Saul is unforgettable, told the Toronto audience that he had to overcome skepticism about Holocaust portrayals to be convinced to take the part. What made the difference was the depth of the role's personal witness to evil, one that dares enter its most dire moments. Inspired by their connections to that terrible past, Nemes and Röhrig, both practising Jews, realize a vision that is utterly convincing.

At the same time, *Son of Saul* resonates beyond historical drama, presenting the story of humanity in the grip of genocide as if in the here and now. It may be comforting to think "never again." But as Nemes put it: "The Holocaust is a permanent possibility."

Next week I'll give highlights from the 2016 Sundance Film Festival. Before that let me recall two excellent selections from the 2015 festival, also based on actual events, that probe controversial post-war psychological experiments venturing into territory that Hannah Arendt famously referred to as "the banality of evil."

Director Kyle Patrick Alvarez's prize-winning *The*

mal young student types. One "guard" had actually wanted to be a prisoner because as he said "nobody likes guards."

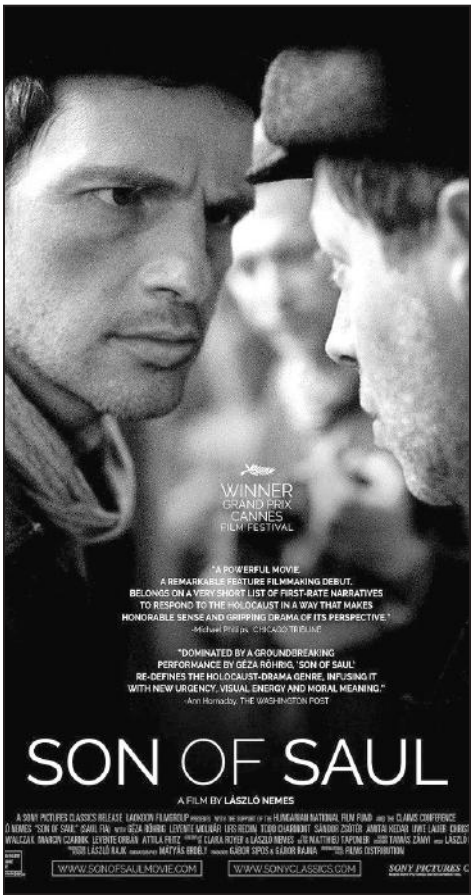
Yet the role-playing very quickly started to become serious. That reluctant guard developed a swaggering persona, taking to the "job" of keeping "prisoners" in line with relish. Afterward he would explain: "I enjoyed becoming everything I've hated for so long." A violent confrontation occurred on the first day. The prisoners were referred to by numbers, stripping away some of their individuality. As in a real prison, guards were put in charge of giving orders and prisoners expected to follow them. A few protestations aside, the power imbalance went to the heads of the guards, resulting in escalating abuses to the point of causing psychological breakdown. The experiment, partly funded by the U.S. military, was supposed to last several weeks but had to be stopped after six days before someone was badly injured or even killed.

Remember that the subjects knew it was just an experimental setup with all actions under video surveillance. Yet the power of the situation induced a level of depersonalization and dehumanization the rapidity and consequences of which shocked everyone. Zimbardo, who was consulted on the film, was accused of going too far though he was never sued or sanctioned. He later admitted he had been at fault for letting things get out of hand and became an advocate for prison reform. The study still stands as a landmark on how surprisingly easy it is to turn ordinary people into monsters.

Writer-director Michael Almereyda's *Experimenter* tells of the equally contested Yale university study conducted a decade earlier in 1961 by an ambitious social psychologist and professor of social relations, Stanley Milgram (Peter Sarsgaard). The aim of Milgram's experiment was to test obedience to authority figures. Two subjects were brought together in a divided room and assigned the roles of "teacher" and "learner." The learner would be seated on one side and hooked up to a machine designed to give electric shocks. The teacher was seated in front of a console and asked to quiz the learner on word-association pairs. For every wrong answer the teacher was to administer an electric shock of increasing intensity. The teacher was initially given a mild shock to give him a sense of that. The teacher could not see the learner but was able to hear cries of pain. A member of the experimental team sat behind the teacher and if there was any hesitation would quietly but firmly insist that the quiz continue.

In fact, unknown to the "teachers," the learner was a staff member and the cries of pain and pleas to stop were simply recordings. Milgram was observing the teacher and making notes from behind a two-way mirror. What he observed was startling and contradicted the consensus of the psychology profession.

With very few exceptions, the



teachers never refused orders to continue even when they thought they were giving dangerously severe shocks. At first the subjects were all white males. But when women and people of colour were tested the results were similar.

This was a time that coincided with the trial of Nazi bureaucrat Adolph Eichmann in Jerusalem and Milgram, of Romanian-Hungarian Jewish descent, was keenly interested in the genesis of genocide and the extent to which ordinary people would "just follow orders" in inflicting harm on others. Supported by his wife Sasha (Wynona Rider) Milgram became an academic celebrity but also a controversial figure provoking investigations of his professional ethics. Some condemned the experiment as an exercise in deceitful manipulation. Still, Milgram's 1974 book *Obedience to Authority* became a landmark in the field.

The film is visually inventive (including an actual elephant in the room) and Sarsgaard is brilliant as the self-regarding professor who often confides how clever he is directly to the camera. Milgram moved on to Harvard, then, when denied tenure, to the City University of New York. He produced more groundbreaking research, notably that which led to the popular notion of "six degrees of separation."

What sticks in the mind from viewing *Experimenter* are those recreated psychological tests on some 800 subjects from over a half-century ago. In the same situation would we have reacted differently? Would we have refused to follow orders? The roots of evil may be closer than we think.



G. Schmitz

FILM DIRECTOR — Stanford Prison Experiment director Kyle Patrick Alvarez at the Sundance Film Festival 31 Jan. 31, 2015.

rabbi who can perform proper burial rites. Greater risks follow as Saul takes part in a prisoner uprising in which a group escapes, crossing a river into a forest. Another young boy enters the picture and there is a last moment when a brief spark of human spirit alights on Saul's face before the darkness closes.

Nemes has explained that: "By making a portrait of a man in the midst of hell, we give the measure of humanity, to see whether there can be humanity beyond inhumanity. There's nothing left. Can there still be an inner God?" His interest is in "a sort of evil that cannot be understood at a glance or represented."

Stanford Prison Experiment effectively recreates the atmosphere of a notorious 1971 university psychology department experiment undertaken by Professor Philip Zimbardo (Billy Crudup) involving two-dozen male subjects. After being interviewed half were assigned roles as guards and half as prisoners. The young men were aware that hidden cameras were recording the situation being monitored by the professor and his assistants, one of whom had been a real-life convict at San Quentin. Those assigned to be guards were not chosen because they exhibited any authoritarian traits; if anything the contrary. All were seemingly nor-

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Author uses 12 steps as guide into reconciliation

By Ramon Gonzalez
Western Catholic Reporter

EDMONTON (CCN) — Archbishop Sylvain Lavoie's childhood wasn't a happy one. He had what he needed, except for what he wanted most — the love of his dad. His father was a workaholic farmer who spent his life working the land.

Sylvain, who grew up in a French Canadian farming family of eight in Saskatchewan, spent most of his teen years doing what he could to earn his father's love — to no avail.

As he grew older, he realized his family lacked the closeness and affection he saw in other families. Uncomfortable feelings of anger and envy emerged within him. Unable to deal with his emotions, he repressed them and buried them as deeply as he could.

Lavoie, archbishop emeritus of Keewatin-Le Pas and an Oblate of Mary Immaculate, is the author of *Walk a New Path: Forgiveness, Grieving and the Twelve Steps*.

In it, he explains how the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and the Medicine Wheel guided him into reconciliation with his father.

Lavoie has written two other books, *Together We Heal* and *Drumming from Within*, and has given retreats and workshops on addictions awareness and the 12-step program for more than 35 years.

By age 16, Lavoie could no longer repress his feelings and became an angry, self-righteous youth who left home convinced

his dad had raised him the wrong way. He was determined to straighten his father out. He started writing angry letters to his dad complaining about how he had failed to raise his children properly.

For the next 15 years, he conducted the battle against his father, writing angry letters to him or avoiding going home. If he visited, he would spend the time arguing with his father.

His 1974 ordination to the Oblate priesthood only increased the tensions. Because he had studied theology, he felt he had even more reason to believe he was right and his father wrong. So resentful was Lavoie he began to wonder if he would be able to attend his father's funeral when that time came.

Became like Dad

This lack of fatherly love was all-pervasive and had a great impact on Lavoie's life, including his priesthood and his relationships with his parishioners. Unknowingly, he was becoming like his father.

As he arrived at his first parish assignment as a young priest in Beauval, Sask., Lavoie thought he knew everything.

"In reality I didn't even know myself," he admitted in a recent interview. "I didn't know that I was a workaholic, that I had a messiah complex and that I was Mr. Fix It."

As soon as he was put in charge of the mission of 500 people, Lavoie got to work. In little time he had started a youth group,

ladies' group, parish council, Marriage Encounter, Engaged Encounter, Christopher Leadership course and many more groups. The parish couldn't cope with him.

"I was the only young priest in the area, and I had all these new ideas they didn't know about and so it was fantastic. I loved it."

Growing unhappiness

"But I worked myself to the bone and after about a year I was not happy. I was frustrated. Things were not going the way I thought they should. I was getting burnt out, I guess."

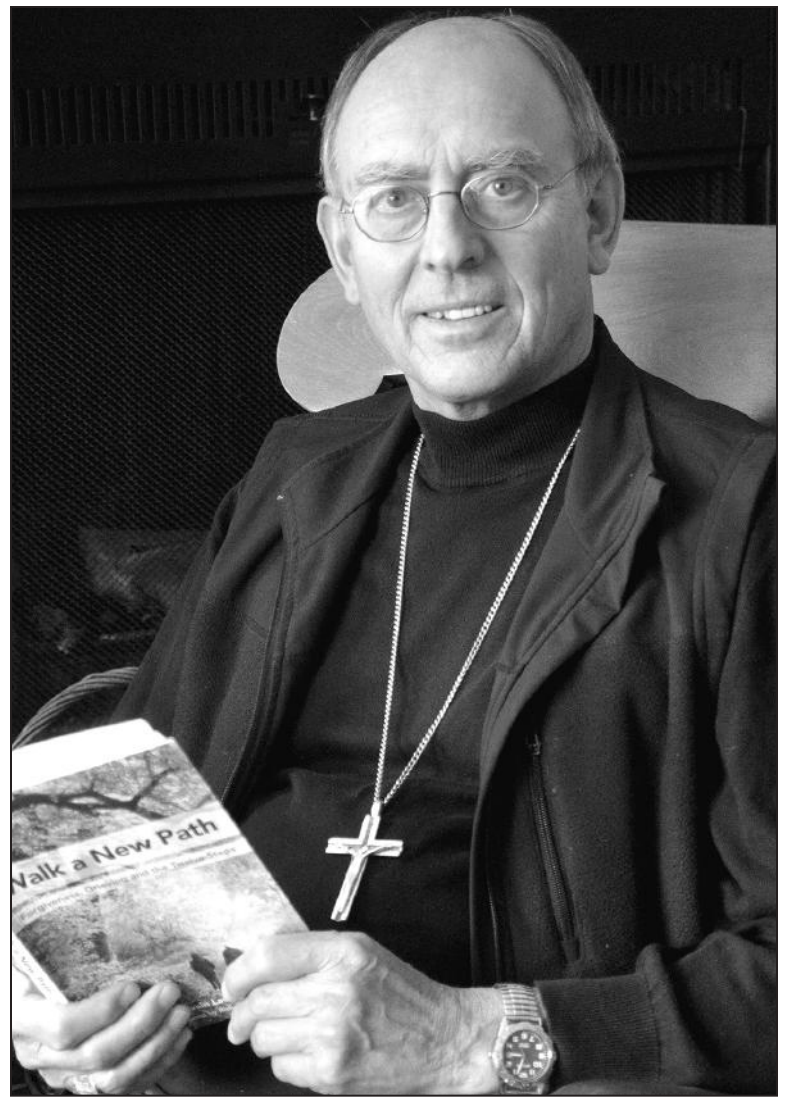
Lavoie was ready to quit the priesthood. His former spiritual director at St. Joseph Seminary convinced him to stay.

Through that encounter, Lavoie realized he "didn't know how to love people. That was my failure," he said in the interview.

Hesitantly, he joined the parish AA group, where he was required to stand up and share his story in front of everybody. "I was scared. I thought I would be rejected," he recalled. "I thought they wouldn't want me as a priest (after they heard my story)."

On the contrary, they welcomed him and made him feel like a part of the group. In no time he became the speaker of choice at workshops throughout the region.

"I started giving workshops here and there on the 12 steps, and I started working the steps for myself. I started working on my own defects of character. One of the first ones was my impatience and then my stubbornness. I was



WCR/Gonzalez

NEW BOOK — Archbishop Sylvain Lavoie is the author of *Walk a New Path*, published by Novalis.

healing. It was helping me to become more human."

How to forgive?

Still, Lavoie couldn't forgive

his father. "Should I quit the priesthood? How could I preach love and forgiveness if I could not forgive my own father?"

Suddenly, following a weekend retreat, Lavoie was able to make a quantum leap and got inside his father's emotions. "It dawned on me that if I was acting like my father, perhaps he was feeling like me."

For the first time in his life, Lavoie knew and understood his father. By then, his father was 78 and, like Lavoie, he was full of bottled-up, painful emotions.

He then followed steps eight and nine of AA: making amends. He drove home after the liturgy that Sunday, sat down at the kitchen table with his father, shared his new understanding with him and asked his father to forgive him.

"I even told him that I loved him — the first and only time in my life I ever did that."

Lavoie spent two good years with his father and is forever grateful to the 12-step program that guided him into reconciliation with his father. He believes anyone can use this program to experience forgiveness, healing and reconciliation in their lives.

Walk a New Path is published by Novalis and can be purchased through Amazon.ca

Biopic of black preacher the toast of Sundance

By Kimberly Winston
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Reserve the hashtag #Oscars soblack for next year's awards.

That's because if viewer

Winston is a national correspondent for RNS.



G. Schmitz

AWARD-WINNING FILM — Nate Parker accepts awards for *Birth of a Nation* at the Sundance Film Festival Jan. 30, 2016.

response is any indication, *The Birth of a Nation*, an independent biopic about a black slave preacher and rebel-leader, seems destined for Academy Award nominations in 2017.

Audiences apparently roared their approval of the film's director, writer and star, Nate Parker, after it was shown Jan. 25 at the Sundance Film Festival, and Fox Searchlight Pictures quickly purchased the movie for \$17.5 million.

The price is a record for Sundance, which has served as a proving ground for critically acclaimed films, including *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Beasts of the Southern Wild* and *Winter's Bone*.

The Birth of a Nation tells the story of a historical figure, Nat Turner. Turner was a slave and a preacher who organized an uprising against white plantation owners in Southampton County, Va., in 1831 — three decades before the Civil War. The movie reportedly focuses in part on how he reconciles

his faith with the violence he must do to free himself and others.

The real Turner reported he had "visions" that told him to rise up against slave owners. During his trial, he wrote he "heard a loud noise in the heavens, and the Spirit instantly appeared to me and said the Serpent was loosened, and Christ had laid down the yoke he had borne for the sins of men, and that I should take it on and fight against the Serpent, for the time was fast approaching when the first should be last and the last should be first."

The movie's title is a direct reference to D.W. Griffith's 1915 silent film *The Birth of a Nation*, which depicted the Ku Klux Klan as protective angels of Southern womanhood. That film has been lauded for its groundbreaking cinematic techniques and condemned for its racist depictions of African-Americans.

Parker — who grew up in Virginia — told *Filmmaker Magazine* he named his film after the Griffith classic to make a point. "Not only did this film motivate the massive resurgence of the terror group the Ku Klux Klan and the carnage exacted against people of African descent, it served as the foundation of the film industry we know today."

Turner has had his turn in the fictional spotlight before. His story was turned into the 1967 novel

The Confessions of Nat Turner, which won a Pulitzer Prize for author William Styron. The book was controversial with some black readers who felt Styron, a white Southerner, should not have crafted a book based on a black slave's inner voice. The controversy troubled Styron to his death in 2006.

Parker is not a fan of Styron's book.

"By the time Styron's ink dried, no longer was Nat Turner the measured, self-determined man of faith, whose courage and sacrifice left him a martyr," he told *Filmmaker*. "He was now an impotent and cowardly, self-hating Uncle Tom (whose) ambitions regarding rebellion had little to do with the rampant torture and degradation of his enslaved people, but instead was seeped in his desperate sexual desires of white women. The consequence of this defamation? A Pulitzer Prize."

*Gerald Schmitz, who recently returned from the Sundance Film Festival, will have more to say on this film in future columns.

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Liturgy has much to say about life’s anguished times

Liturgy and Life

Gertrude Rompré



This column is entitled Liturgy and Life. Usually, when I begin writing it, I focus first on the liturgy. This time I’d like to start with the “life” part of the equation. As I write, our community is reeling with the news of the violence and pain suffered by the people of La Loche. Our hearts our broken on their behalf and I wonder: What does the liturgy have to say in these anguished moments of human life?

As it turns out, liturgy has quite a lot to say. Liturgy shines in the midst of our sorrow. It stands as a beacon of God’s great promise of unconditional love and radical solidarity with our human condition. This week’s liturgy is no exception.

In the entrance antiphon the psalmist begs God to remember God’s compassion and mercy. That sort of desire can only emerge from past encounters with God that were indeed compassionate and merciful. Compassion and mercy are God’s essential character traits. The psalmist knows this and so his next prayer also makes sense: *Redeem us from all our distress*. Again, if God had not acted in such a redemptive manner in the past, it would make no sense for us even to ask!

Looking at life today, then, we can harken back to those past experiences where our ancestors have encountered a compassionate, merciful God, a God who redeems us from

Rompré is the director of Mission and Ministry at St. Thomas More College in Saskatoon.

our distress. It’s to that God that we turn when our hearts are broken. We believe because others before us have believed — and experienced — redemptive mercy and compassion that heals wounded hearts.

We move on to the story of Abram making covenant with the Lord. Abram engages in the ritual that his people commonly used to make covenants with each other. Animals were cut in two to symbolize that such would be their fate if they broke the promises they made. Keeping the covenant meant living in right relationship with each other. By using these common rituals with regard to God, Abram (later Abraham) committed himself and his people to living in right relationship with God. When we live in right relationship, Scripture tells us, everyone prospers.

Second Sunday of Lent	Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18 Psalm 27 Philippians 3:17 - 4:1 Luke 9:28b-36
February 21, 2016	

It’s interesting to note that the Hebrew word *eduth* can be translated in two ways. It can be translated as “covenant” or as “treaty.” Perhaps, as we reflect on our own lives today, it would be helpful to think of our own treaties we have made as peoples in Canada. We have entered into treaties as indigenous peoples and newcomers to this land. We have made a covenant with each other so that we could live in right relationship. But, as the prophets in Hebrew Scripture knew all too well, when covenants are broken, disasters happen. Could that be what we are living today? Could it be that we have not lived up to the promises we made in our own treaties, that we have not lived in right relationship with all peoples in Canada? Scripture tells us that living up to the covenants we make leads to health and well-being for all. How can we, as Canadians, live up to the treaty promises we have made so that we can all truly share in the prosperity of this land?

Finally, in the gospel we hear that great story of encounter and transformation: the transfiguration. The disciples go up the mountain with Jesus. There they have a run-in with God and Jesus becomes radiant, his clothes a dazzling white. In Hebrew Scripture, that radiance is a sign of encounter with God. When Moses would go up the mountain to converse with God, he would come down and his face would shine so brightly that he had to wear a veil! Encounters with God change us.

What can this gospel story of encounter tell us about our lives today? Again, the translations can give us a clue. When the voice comes from the cloud, in some translations, it reminds us that Jesus is God’s “chosen” and that we should listen to him. Other translations use the word “beloved.” Both words reveal something profound. The word “chosen” harkens back to the idea of the Israelites being a chosen people. Being chosen, in that case, meant being chosen to reveal God’s mercy to humanity. So it is with Jesus. Jesus is chosen to live in radical solidarity with our broken, weeping humanity and to reveal God’s compassion and mercy to us. Jesus is God-with-us reminding us that we are not alone in the most sorrowful moments of our lives (and likely in the most joyous moments as well!). But the word “beloved” also alerts us to a great truth. Just as the word “chosen” harkens to the past, the word “beloved” engages with the future. The voice from heaven calls Jesus “beloved” and, from that moment on, we, as brothers and sisters in Christ, know that God wants to call each and every one of us “beloved” as well. As beloved, chosen people, we can move forward through sorrow in hope.

Liturgy and life walk hand in hand. Liturgy reminds us of the encounters we humans have had with God throughout history. It shows us that, in all things, God has been faithful to us, reminding us that we, too, are God’s beloved sons and daughters. It calls us to be faithful, in turn, to the covenants we have made with both God and each other. By living in right relationship, we are told, we will share fully in the abundance of God’s mercy and compassion in the days ahead.

Book is for those who think they are too sick to be helped by a doctor

In Exile

Ron Rolheiser, OMI



They say that the book you most need to read finds you when you most need to read it. I’ve had that experience many times, most recently with Heather King’s book *Shirt of Flame, A Year with Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*.

The title of the book is borrowed from T.S. Eliot’s, *Four Quartets*, where he famously suggests that Love itself, God, is behind the torment we often feel in our fiery desires and that the burning we feel there is an “intolerable shirt of flame.”

King writes this book from a fiery context within her own life: she is a freelance journalist and writer, single, divorced, an alcoholic in recovery, reconciling some darkness in her past, dealing with a paralyzing obsession because the man she is in love with will not respond to her, risking the financial stability of a career in law for the insecurity of being a freelance writer, and struggling with the sense of being an outsider to normal family, marriage, and community, an orphan at all the banquets of life. And so she sets off for a year to immerse herself in one of the most intriguing saints of all time, Thérèse of Lisieux, in an attempt is to see whether Thérèse might be a moral and spiritual compass by which to sort out her own life. The result is a powerful, deeply insightful adult book.

King recognizes in Thérèse’s soul, inside the soul of a saint, inside someone who could seemingly give up everything for God, the same fiery desires that she feels within her own soul. And King recognizes too that those fires can both purify or destroy, redeem or torment, turn someone into a great saint or a great sinner. So she lets Thérèse’s fire shed light on her own fires. And since what is most personal and private inside of us, if revealed, is also the most universal, by revealing her own deep, private struggles, her book sheds light on the universal human struggle. However, the book is self-revealing but never exhibitionist, a tricky formula that she handles well.

For example, drawing upon a famous incident in Thérèse’s life when, as a little girl, asked by her older sister who presented her with a velvet sewing-basket full of colourful balls to pick one thing from a basket, Thérèse said: “I choose all!” and took the entire basket and walked away. King reflects upon her own struggle to, as Kierkegaard said, will the one thing.

Here’s the parallel she draws to her own life: “ ‘I choose all!’ said Thérèse, and the further I progressed, the more I saw that the human dilemma is to want it all. I wanted to be celibate, and I wanted wantonly to give myself to a spouse, I wanted dark secrets, noise, lights, mania, and the stimulation of a city, and I wanted to plant a garden, tend animals, and live on a farm. I wanted to live in the same place all my life, and I wanted to travel every inch of the globe before I died. I wanted to sit utterly still, and I was also driven to be constantly on the move. I wanted to be hidden and anonymous, and I wanted to be famous. I wanted to be close to my family, and I wanted to leave my family behind. I wanted to devote my life

to activism, and I wanted to devote my life to contemplation. I wanted to give everything to God, and I didn’t know how! I longed to give my undivided self, and I couldn’t!”

Reflecting on Thérèse’s vow of poverty, King writes: “Poverty is never, never voluntary. Poverty consists precisely in all the ways you absolutely don’t want to be poor.” Drawing upon the German poet Gertrud von le Fort who wrote that when her soul was most in anguish everything around her in effect said: “But you are nothing!” King writes: “At last someone had told my story. For the last 10 years especially, I had been in anguish and ‘they’ — my husband, the person I loved, the legal profession, the medical profession when I had cancer, the publishing industry — had said in so many words: ‘But you are nothing.’ Everywhere I turned: a blank wall. Everything I had hoped for: ashes. Everything I had worked for: ‘But you are nothing.’ . . . One morning in the shower, I wept to Christ: ‘I don’t love you and you don’t love me either!’ ” We’ve all been there.

If you are struggling with faith, with brokenness in your life, with an obsession, with an addiction, with a gnawing sense that your life is not what it should be, with the sense of being the outsider, an orphan at all the banquets of life, and, most of all, with the sense you don’t love Jesus and he doesn’t love you either, that you are nothing, then let this book find you. It’s a book for those who think they might be too sick to be helped by a doctor.

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Sealed with a kiss: the religious history of X and O

By Nadine Epstein
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When I was a young girl, my mother taught me to add “x” and “o” — a kiss and a hug — after my signature. So deeply embedded was this English-language tradition that it never crossed her mind that these symbols had anything to do with religion. I never thought about it myself until she passed away a few years ago and I found myself emitting streams of “x’s” and “o’s” like a binary love code in the countless emails that consume much of my daily life.

From where do these emoticons that English speakers of all faiths sprinkle so liberally come? Let’s start with the “x” — a simple, easily drawn shape that got its start in western civilization as the ancient Phoenician letter *samekh* for the consonant sound “s.” In early Hebrew, “x” was the letter “taw” and makes an appearance in the Book of Ezekiel as a mark set “upon the foreheads” to distinguish the good men of Jerusalem from the bad.

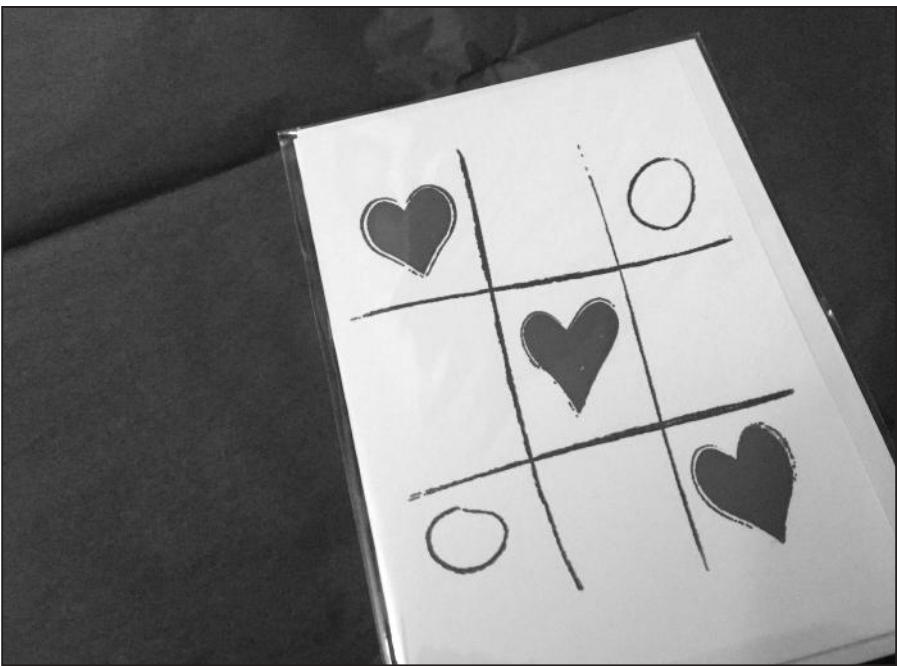
With the advent of Christianity, “x” came to stand for Christ. “In Christian texts, one abbreviation of the Greek *christos* — meaning messiah — used the first two Greek letters of *christos*, *chi* (X) and *rho* (P), combined into one

Epstein is the editor of Moment Magazine.

shape,” says Stephen Goranson, a historian of religion at Duke University who studies the etymology of symbols and words. “So both orientations of crossed lines — the ‘x’ shape and the more-or-less lower case ‘t’ shape — took on religious significance among Christians.”

Once it was a sacred symbol, the “x” represented “faith and fidelity,” says Marcel Danesi, a professor of linguistic anthropology and semiotics at the University of Toronto. It became the signature of choice in the Middle Ages, when few could write and documents were sealed with an x embossed in wax or lead. This may be when the “x” first became associated with the kiss: It was customary to close books with a kiss, and oaths of fealty to kings were sealed with a kiss.

“Symbols have a way of jumping from one domain to another, and it’s a small step to come from sealing a letter to sealing a love affair,” says Danesi, who wrote The History of the Kiss: The Birth of Popular Culture.



LOVE TRADITIONS — Where does the tradition of adding an “x” and an “o” after a signature as a sign of love and affection come from, wonders Nadine Epstein. Especially at Valentine’s Day, they are often seen on greeting cards.

He speculates that “x” underwent a conversion in an act of medieval romantic rebellion. “Romantic love becomes an obsession, and the kiss became empowering.” This may have been particularly true for women, who had less say than men over the choice of lovers. “The kiss became ‘If I kiss that man, then this is the man I love and want,’” says Danesi. “So much was packed into that symbol of a kiss. . . . It has become a kind of collective memory. We use ‘x,’ even if

we don’t know why.”

There’s another theory about how “x” crossed over into kissing territory. According to Goranson, “x” was a symbol for a blessing, and blessings and kisses have long been intertwined in the human psyche. “Mystics went back and forth on the love of God and love of a beloved spouse going way back,” he says. “Just look at The Song of Songs. The same song could be one person’s devotional hymn and another’s love poem.”

A Woman of Valor, the Hebrew poem recited by Jewish husbands to their wives before the Sabbath evening meal, is also understood to be an expression of love of God.

When the circle — “o” — came to signify a hug is another unknown. I stumbled across an unexpected Jewish angle postulated by the late Leo Rosten in his

1968 book, The Joys of Yiddish. Rosten suggests that the “o” evolved in connection with the word “kike.” Jews refused to sign entry forms at Ellis Island with the customary “x,” which they interpreted as a crucifix and a symbol of oppression. Instead, they drew a circle, leading immigration inspectors to call Jews *kikel* (or “circle” in Yiddish) or *kikeleh* (“little circle”), which was shortened to “kike.”

Most scholars consider this theory apocryphal. Linguist Ben Zimmer says it is far more likely that the “o” stems from an entirely non-religious source: the ancient Egyptian-Roman game of tic-tac-toe. The game was originally played with pebbles or coins and only incorporated the easy-to-master symbols of the “x” and “o” when paper became plentiful. Zimmer also believes this explains why “x” and “o” are used together.

Despite their relatively recent appearance on Valentine’s Day cards, the “x” long ago shed its religious significance, and the “o” likely never had one. And so I — an editor of a Jewish magazine — plan to continue signing off with hugs and kisses. XO!

We are guided by a divine pilot light

Outlooks from the Inner Life

Cedric Speyer



*Sail forth — steer for the deep waters only,
Reckless O soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou with me,
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.*
— Walt Whitman

“I think my naiveté is my strength . . . I didn’t set out to start L’Arche. I think we do nothing in this world if we think we know what we’re doing.” — Jean Vanier

What is a Catholic saint? On the outside, it’s a servant of God recognized by the church as having enough heroic virtue to be declared *venerable* either by an act of heroic charity (martyr) or miraculous intercession (confessor) which in turn allows for blessed beatification. Then, with

at least two posthumously confirmed miracles to their credit, it is someone who eternally enjoys the beatific vision as a saint, assigned a feast day and a mandate and who remains actively responsive to petitions and devotion of the faithful. Outside the Christian tradition, the Jewish *tzadik*, Islamic *mu’min*, Hindu *swami* or *rishi*, and Buddhist *bodhisattva* are also referred to as saints.

On the inside, there’s no such spiritual fame. A saint is characterized by unselfconscious surrender to guiding grace as their *raison d’être* under any circumstances. A saint is not someone who has transcended the cares of this world, as in being “above it all.” Many saints, if you read their biographies, would probably be given some kind of diagnosis today from a psychological point of view.

So it’s not that they don’t suffer from the same flaws and defects

in human nature that the rest of us do. What differentiates a saint is that none of the dysfunction, their own or that of others, has “the last word” or the power to define the true nature of a person. When it comes to the redemptive effects of love and grace, a saint has bet his or her life on the side that’s winning, in spite of any and all appearances to the contrary.

Someone once said that the difference between being buried and being planted is the expectation of what happens next. In a saint’s life, no matter how outwardly tortuous or inwardly tormented, darkness cannot overcome the light. In this sense, a saint can be “destroyed but not defeated,” as many of them have been, in terms of worldly well-being and survival. So we can look to saints, those who embody hope in their very being, to find our own way in a world gone wrong.

Whenever tempted to feel like a victim of circumstances, remember what every saint would want you to know: you are not named by sin or life situation. You are not named by what’s wrong with you. You are named by what’s right with you. You are guided by a divine pilot light within. In knowing the saints, you can trace back the radiance that inner flame creates.

“The purpose of Benedictine spirituality is to gather equally committed adults for a journey through earthen darkness to the dazzling light that already flames in each of us, but in a hidden place left to each of us to find.” — Joan Chittister

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Ecumenism, interfaith harmony: what's the difference?

Ecumenism & Interfaith Relations

Thomas Ryan, CSP



We recently came out of the Jan. 18 - 25 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, then headed into the Feb. 1 - 7 Interfaith Harmony Week, which was added to the calendar for annual observance in 2010 by the General Assembly of the United Nations. How are the two different?

The question is real in the minds of many. During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity I led a five-day retreat at the Providence Spirituality Centre in Kingston, Ont., on the theme of Together in Christ. Although the primary focus was on the importance of an increasingly more visible unity among us as Christians, given the tensions in the world today between people of different religions, toward the end I devoted a few of our conference sessions to inter-religious relations as well.

In doing so, the questions from participants indicated a fogginess concerning the difference between the goals of work for Christian unity and the goals of inter-religious dialogue. Some referred to other denominations of Christian faith as “other religions.”

But Lutherans, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Evangelicals are not “other religions.” They are simply traditions of faith in the religion called Christianity. Denominational names like Roman Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox, Pentecostal are all adjectives. The noun is “Christian,” and grammatically the noun is called the substantive in the sentence because that’s where the most substance is. It’s not in the adjective or qualifier.

The substance of our Christian faith is expressed in the Nicene

Ryan directs the Paulist North American Office for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations in Washington, D.C. (www.tom-ryancsp.org)

creed and that substance is embraced by every denomination of Christian faith. These different denominations represent the variety of traditions in that *one faith*, so it is not appropriate to think of them or refer to them as “other religions.” We are all members of the same world religion called Christianity.

But while our unity with one another through our common baptism into the one Body of Christ is real, it is also incomplete. In 1991, the Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Canberra, Australia, described the marks of what it called "full communion."

"The common confession of the apostolic faith; a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one eucharistic fellowship; a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognized; and a common mission witnessing to the gospel of God's grace to all people and serving the whole of creation."

It further specified that full communion would be expressed on the local and universal levels of the church through councils and synods. In other words, we would also make important decisions *together*. These are the goals of the movement called "ecumenical." The very word comes from the Greek word *oikumene* referring to the whole faith of the church as opposed to that which is partial.

How is this unity different from what we seek with those who genuinely do belong to other religions — Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists? We do seek unity and solidarity with them, but the bar is raised less high. The goals of inter-religious or inter-faith relations are mutual understanding and respect, with collaboration in meeting the challenges we commonly face in the society and world in which we live.

Analogically, a way of putting that would be that other Christians are members with us of the one Body of Christ by virtue of our common baptism. And members of other religions are brothers and sisters in the human family, but not members of the particular body of which we are a member, the Body of Christ.

To be sure, there is a level of intimacy and solidarity with all our brothers and sisters, but the intimacy and solidarity we have with other members of our own body is of a special nature and even deeper.

Think of it in terms of the difference between your relationship with your own arm or leg and your

relationship with other members of your family. Both are special, no question, but the level of connection you have with the members of your own body is deeper, more personal and more intimate.

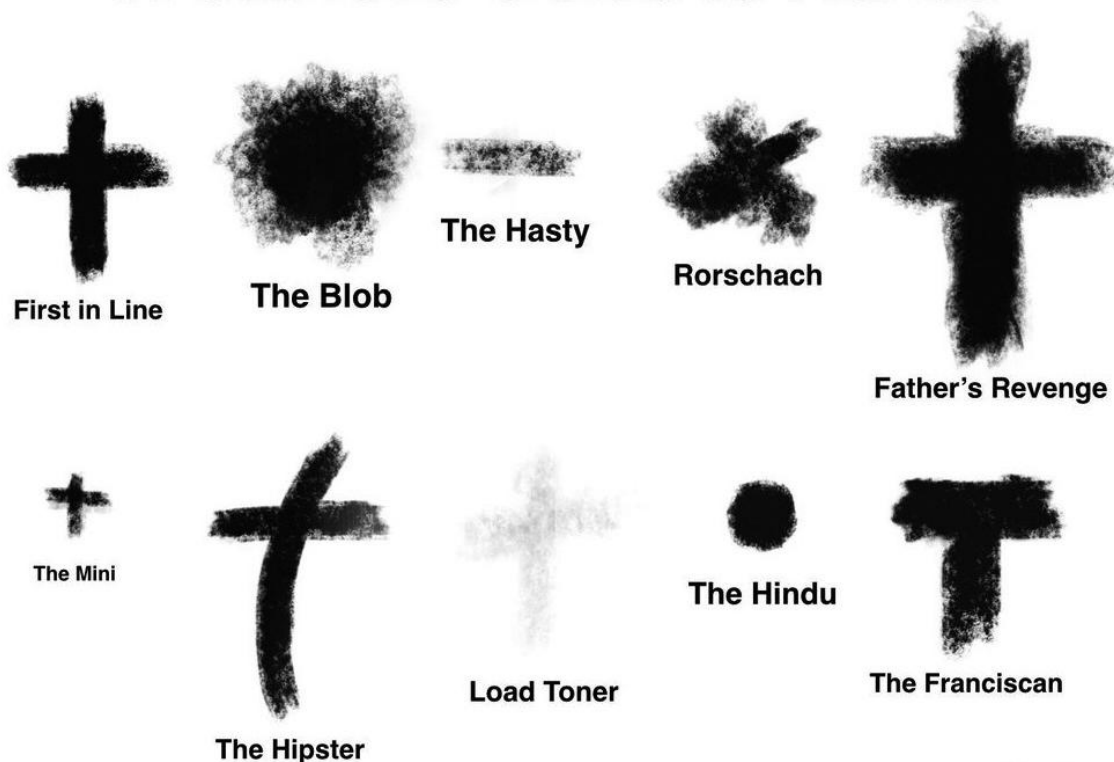
And the body that we are — the Body of Christ — has been given a special mission in the midst of the human family: to witness to God's love for all by responding as Jesus did to their concrete social needs by caring for the sick, clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, visiting the imprisoned, and burying the dead.

Jesus has opened the gates of heaven to all, even to those who do not know him. And the Holy Spirit

is at work at large in the world to turn hearts to God. Those who make up the Body of Christ are called and sent to share the good news of God's love for all. To witness to what God has done for us all. And to share God's call to us all to live as brothers and sisters, members of God's one human family.

Ecumenism and interfaith harmony are certainly related, but they are distinctive movements, each with its own goals. Ecumenism is about unity in faith, life, worship, ministry and mission. Interfaith relations are about mutual witness and enrichment, peace and harmony among people, and collaboration in service.

A Catholic Guide to Ashes



@BillDonaghy

Courtesy of Bill Donaghy

Hope inevitably arises from ashes



Figure of Speech

Dr. Gerry Turcotte

"I am but dust and ashes!"
— Genesis 18: 27

Recently I came across a humorous graphic by Bill Donaghy entitled *A Catholic Guide to Ashes*. What follows is a series of examples of the signs priests place on worshippers' foreheads during Ash Wednesday services. These include a pristine cross labelled "First in Line," a massive cross entitled, "Father's Revenge," a messy little blur called "The Hasty," and a barely there impression that says, simply, "Load Toner." I will leave it to you to discover "the Hindu," "the Mini," "the Hipster," and "the Rorschach," though I'm sure you can guess what they might look like.

Turcotte is president of St. Mary's University in Calgary.

Over the years I have had any number of queries from non-Christians about the messy smudge on my forehead and like many, I suspect, my explanations about these have ranged from the cryptic to the comic, but as with so many things, I never sat down to understand where this tradition actually came from. In the Bible references to ashes are plentiful, though the most famous such example, “ashes to ashes, dust to dust,” only appears in The Book of Common Prayer.

The application of ashes to foreheads has been a common practice for over 1,200 years to mark the *dies cinerum* or day of ashes. The Gregorian Sacramentary, dating back to the eighth century, refers to this practice where the faithful are marked with ashes derived from the burning of the previous year's palms. Typically the practice is

linked to the idea of penance. And even though Ash Wednesday is not referred to in the Bible, there are nevertheless over 40 references to ashes in connection with the practice of mourning and penance. As Job tells us, “Therefore I reprehend myself, and do penance in dust and ashes” (42: 5–6).

For me Ash Wednesday was always connected to fasting since it marked the beginning of Lent. And it was a strangely popular gathering time at mass even though it wasn't a holy day of obligation. Even as a school-aged child I found the ritual meaningful, and once I even replicated the practice by dipping my hand in the long dead remains of a fireplace. To say my parents weren't impressed with the resulting charcoal carnage that covered not just my forehead but also every article of clothing I was wearing would be an understatement. In my heart of hearts, however, it seemed like the right thing to do. And perhaps my seriousness was appropriate, because that's what Ash Wednesday is about. It's about acknowledging our Lord and it's about preparing for a sombre 40-day journey toward Easter, where our hope, through the resurrection, inevitably rises from the ashes.



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Blackstock earns victory for First Nations children



Pulpit & Politics

Dennis Gruending

Since the June release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's preliminary report on the history of Indian residential schools, there has been heightened talk about how non-indigenous Canadians can become better neighbours to those who are indigenous. Now, a ruling issued by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) on Jan. 26 provides yet another illustration of the shared road ahead.

The CHRT was responding to the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, which — along with the Assembly of First Nations — initiated a complaint in 2007. Although the process was long and arduous, the tribunal eventually ruled that

Ottawa's funding formulas provide between 22 and 34 per cent less to child welfare services for First Nations people. That's compared to what provincial governments pay for similar services provided to other children. It's a discriminatory practice that has gone on for as long as anyone can remember.

Cindy Blackstock, executive director of the Child and Family Caring Society, has been the most prominent advocate in the case. Blackstock says that the discrimination means services are fewer — and often of lesser quality — on reserves. And there's another consequence of discriminatory funding models: it creates an incentive to place children in foster care because their communities and families have fewer resources to provide needed services for them.

As a result, says Blackstock, there are more First Nations children in foster care today than there were at the height of the residential school era. The excellent Globe and Mail columnist Andre

Picard writes, "(This) is a continuation of racist (and in some cases genocidal) policies like the Indian Act, residential schools and the Sixties Scoop."

Blackstock estimates that the Harper government spent more than \$5 million fighting the technicalities of her group's allegations before the tribunal. But it didn't stop there. Government employees were ordered to collect personal information about her and spy on her. In response, Blackstock submitted a complaint to Canada's privacy commissioner, who concluded that, indeed, her privacy had been invaded. She then launched a second complaint concerning the harassment by government officials. In 2015, the Aboriginal Affairs department was ordered to pay her \$20,000 for the pain and suffering they caused her. Blackstock gave the money to children's charities.

Regarding the funding of child welfare services, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal has the power to order Ottawa to end its discriminatory practices. But it has not yet done so. Meanwhile, the initial response from Liberal cabinet ministers to the ruling has been positive. Ministers Carolyn Bennett and Jody Wilson-Raybould welcomed the tribunal's decision and promised to work, collaboratively, toward solutions. "This government agrees that we can and must do better," they said.

During the federal election



Courtesy of Cindy Blackstock

WORKING FOR CHILDREN — Cindy Blackstock is the executive director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society.

campaign last fall, the Liberals promised to work with First Nations to tackle their many challenges. They also promised to implement all 94 recommendations of the Truth and Recon-

ciliation Commission. Despite these expressions of goodwill, however, politicians will likely do only what Canadians will support — and that's where good neighbours can help.

Jesuit ecologist makes a name for himself studying lichen

By Michael Swan
The Catholic Register

TORONTO (CCN) — For gymnasts it might be a twisting tumble, for astrologers a star, for politicians a sandwich. But for Jesuit ecologist Rev. John McCarthy that ultimate accolade — confirmation of a lifetime of scientific research — is to have a lichen named after him.

Acarospora maccarthyi (Latin spelling rules dictate the extra "a") is now the internationally recognized moniker for a previously unknown species of lichen. McCarthy discovered the new lichen near Port-au-Port, Newfoundland, about an hour's drive

southwest of Corner Brook.

"I was quite surprised," McCarthy told The Catholic Register of the honour of having a species bear his name.

Modest and self-effacing, McCarthy considered protesting to the California and Czech Republic-based lichenologists Kerry Knudsen and Jana Kocourkova over their decision to give the new species his name.

"If you're going to name something, name it after a morphological or chemical feature that's distinctive to the species," is the Jesuit's philosophy on scientific naming.

But not only was McCarthy the first to collect and investigate the

species, it is also only found in his native Newfoundland.

Looking for help in classifying the new lichen, McCarthy was referred to Knudsen and Kocourkova, a married couple of scientists specializing in lichens — particularly the *Acarospora* genus. Kocourkova teaches in the faculty of environmental sciences at the Czech University of Life Sciences in Prague, where her husband is also a researcher. Knudsen is a world-leading expert in *Acarospora* and California lichens, and keeper of the herbarium at the University of California Riverside.

While at a meeting of Jesuits in Los Angeles last year, McCarthy was able to visit his lichenologist colleagues with his bag of rocks for a day of comparing notes.

"(Knudsen) knew right away that this is new," recalled McCarthy. "Because he knew the genus very well. In terms of evolution, it kind of fit in-between other species. They were quite happy to be able to describe it."

Lichens are unique organisms that are a combination of algae and fungi. It is estimated only about half the lichens in the world have been classified, described and named — about 28,000 of them. The discovery of new species isn't a rare event. New species are found every year, said McCarthy.

But they're not found by an army of well-paid, full-time scientists who can dedicate themselves to a deeper understanding of nature for its own sake, said Knudsen in an email.

"There are very few jobs for

lichenologists," he said. "Father John, like many of us, has fallen in love with these fascinating organisms and studies them out of a passion for life itself. His work — which is serious, scientific work — is also a prayer of adoration for the Creator and a rejoicing in the wonder and beauty of the creation."

In fact, McCarthy's full-time job is socius (principle adviser to the provincial superior) of the Canadian Jesuits. While at a recent meeting of Jesuits in Rome to prepare for the General Congregation, McCarthy was able to sneak away to Frankfurt to meet with a German lichenologist.

Science and ecology is part of McCarthy's official duties as a Jesuit. Next to his office, where he wades through paperwork, planning and meetings, is a small laboratory where thanks to a donor McCarthy is able to keep a couple of microscopes and related equipment so he can spend an hour or more most days on research. He and a lichenologist from New Brunswick are currently cataloguing all the known species of lichens in Newfoundland.

"That's how I do it, kind of between the jigs and the reels," said McCarthy.

It's work that these days fits with Pope Francis' intense interest in the environment, science and the future of the human race. The pope referred to "biodiversity" more than a dozen times in last year's encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

"Biodiversity is considered at most a deposit of economic resources available for exploitation,

with no serious thought for the real value of things, their significance for persons and cultures, or the concerns and needs of the poor," wrote the pope.

Knowing the natural world — just for the sake of understanding it and delighting in it — is important in the Jesuit spirituality of both McCarthy and Pope Francis because as creatures of God we cannot know God, or ourselves, without knowing God's creation.

And there's a lot more to know, said Knudsen.

"Most of those 50 million species (of plants and animals on earth) have not been studied or named by man. The main reason is that they are of no economic value to humans at this time," he said. "This is changing for lichens. With cancer studies and biotechnology, any organism may have a gene that is valuable economically."

Lichens in fact have a role to play in helping science understand how humans are changing their environment, said McCarthy. Lichens are being used in Europe and the United States as a kind of ecological thermometer that can measure climate change and pollution.

"If the earth is polluted, they will be affected more directly than plants will be," he said. "They're kind of like the canary in the mineshaft, if you will."

Having named and described the *Acarospora maccarthyi*, Knudsen and Kocourkova have contributed McCarthy's sample to one of the largest collections in the world in Uppsala, Sweden.



Courtesy of Rev. John McCarthy

NEW DISCOVERIES — Jesuit Father John McCarthy, living off the land during his scientific pursuits.

Those who live with depression need support

Soul Searching

Tom Saretsky



I was walking across a vacant parking lot one day and noticed a crushed Starbucks cup. It was a rather lonely site — this waste lot and a broken cup of emptiness. The cup, once a vessel holding an elixir of comfort for its owner, was nothing more than a broken dance partner for the breeze.

I stared at the cup for a long time, wanting to know its story, but it revealed nothing and simply drifted into a weed pile. I felt compelled to liberate it from its capture, but it seemed to need some companionship, even if it was only weeds in a vacant lot. Do you ever look at the crushed cups littering the streets and vacant lots of our city and wonder what their stories are? They all have one. We all have one.

They might be the stories of a person needing an energy boost. Perhaps they hold the story of a person needing a mixture of sweetness, because they were having a difficult day. Some cups might hold the story of a person needing caffeine because of news they received or decisions they were contemplating. Some are the cups of struggle and loneliness, while others are the cups of happiness and joy.

Saretsky is a teacher and chaplain at Holy Cross High School in Saskatoon. He and his wife, Norma, have two children.

We're all vessels holding something. Unfortunately, many are cracked, some are broken, and some feel like they're nothing more than that discarded cup left to the vagaries of a restless wind blowing across a vacant lot. But what was it about that cup and that forsaken lot that made me so sad?

Have you ever felt like you were on the verge of tears even though there was nothing to be sad about? How can the most innocuous things in life bring a person to an emotional edge? Perhaps it was my emotional state. I live with depression. I don't suffer from it. I live with it. Depression isn't something you get over. You're simply compelled to accept it, befriend it, and hope it plays nicely with you. Depression is not a welcome houseguest, and it doesn't take kindly to eviction notices.

The insidious thing about depression is how cold rains can fall when the sun shines brightly, or how bitter winds blow when the day is calm and pleasant. It's been said that, "Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass. It's about learning to dance in the rain." When the storm hits, I make sure my house is shuttered and secure. I'll dance when the storm passes.

Mental illness is a growing concern in Canada where one in five people will suffer from some kind of mental illness in their lifetime. Because of the stigma



M. Weber

A SOMETIMES LONELY ILLNESS — "Mental illness is a growing concern in Canada where one in five people will suffer from some kind of mental illness in their lifetime," writes Tom Saretsky. "Because of the stigma attached to mental illness, however, one-third of Canadians won't seek treatment. Depression is one of those mental illnesses."

attached to mental illness, however, one-third of Canadians won't seek treatment. Depression is one of those mental illnesses.

It's unfortunate that depression has such a negative label. It is sometimes viewed as a weakness — something to be embarrassed about. It's an illness that can be frustrating for caregivers, parents, spouses, and friends. Patience wears thin because of the frustration: "Why can't you just be happy?" "I can't figure him out. He's always so glum." "She's always crying, and I just can't be around unhappy people." "Lighten up and suck it up. You have nothing to be sad about."

Depression isn't a sentence. It's an illness, because it is more

physiological than emotional. With the proper care of a physician or a therapist, along with parental, spousal, family and friend support, this illness doesn't have to be journeyed alone. One can live with it and even lead a healthy and happy life. Take it from me, the skies aren't always cloudy, and the rain doesn't always fall. I have plenty of light, love, laughter and colour to swallow up my greys and blacks.

My days aren't always sunshine and rainbows, and they're definitely not always full of rainclouds and wind. I have lots of support and this gives me strength and keeps me balanced. I pray that all of you who live with depression will experience that same support. May you never be tossed by the winds of despair, but held by the comforting and steady hand of those who will stand with you when depression's storms besiege you.

Story rooted in experiences

Continued from page 10

"Understanding how to write for a ballet was the hardest part," said Boyden. "I didn't have to do a lot of research on the First Nations. That's what I've been doing for all of my writing life . . . I've never written for a ballet before and I wasn't sure how to go about it. I was nervous, but also intrigued."

While he was on a book tour for his last novel, *The Orenda*, Boyden was struck with the idea. The heart of the ballet would centre around the Aboriginal teachings of the four directions and the traditional First Nations colours they represent.

The main character, Annie, is a young, urban First Nations woman. She represents South and red. She is a free-spirited, contemporary woman living in the city.

Annie passes Gordon every day in the subway. He is North and represents the colour white. He is a homeless guy, but tough. As the ballet progresses, Gordon introduces Annie to two others through a window that flashes back to the residential schools. Niska represents West and the colour black. She's a young Aboriginal woman who comes from a family of healers. Her family was forced to give her up and places her in a residential school. She is earthy and strong-willed and fights the priests and nuns at every turn.

Charlie is a child of the East and represents yellow. He is also imprisoned in a residential school of the past, but he believes if he follows the rules, he will eventually see his family again.

Throughout, the characters must wrestle for their souls and their identities. It is a dramatic struggle that ends in hope for healing in the future.

Godden and Boyden agreed the story and emotion had to be rooted in the real-life experiences of school survivors, but the story is also meant to be uplifting.

"I didn't want to approach this story from just one angle of the residential school in the past," said Boyden. "I wanted to tell a story that captured the here and now . . . and approaching it that way, I was able to try to paint a picture of a real possibility of reconciliation."

Boyden adds a ballet needs a dramatic story to carry the music and the movement forward. He hopes this story will not only speak to the survivors or audience, but also to the young people who are inheriting the responsibility of the reconciliation.

"I don't necessarily think that there's a disconnect between young people and what has happened, but they certainly see the fallout from their parents and grandparents," said Boyden. "I want the audience member to understand that this is not just something in the past, that reconciliation is going to be an ongoing issue for this country for a long time to come and that we're all a part of this."

Upcoming performances on the national tour include: March 21 in Brandon, Man.; March 22 in Regina; March 23 in Saskatoon. For more dates in Canada visit rwb.org for tour details.

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Moscow to meet Rome

The Feb. 12 meeting in Cuba between Pope Francis and Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill of Moscow takes on historic significance when viewed in its historical context.

The Vatican announced the meeting a week ahead, on Feb. 5. Three days later it released an updated itinerary changing Pope Francis’ trip to Mexico. He will leave Rome five hours earlier to accommodate the side trip to Cuba.

This makes it seem that the meeting was a last-minute decision, but it is anything but.

Pope John Paul II had urged a meeting with the Moscow patriarch decades earlier. He made it his mission to heal the millennial-long division between the Orthodox Church and Rome. Many Orthodox patriarchs accepted his requests for meetings and many frosty relationships were warmed up, but Moscow always held out.

Pope Benedict also tried to meet the Moscow patriarch; he also failed.

Far from being a last-minute decision, the historic meeting in Cuba took two years of secret negotiations “conducted well by great bishops,” Pope Francis said in an interview published Feb. 8 in the newspaper *Corriere della Sera*.

There are several irritants that need to be mended. What this meeting will accomplish remains to be seen.

One of major objections Moscow has always raised is the status of the Ukrainian Catholic Church. The church was established when the Orthodox Church of Kyiv broke relations with the Eastern Orthodox Church at the Union of Brest in 1596 and entered into communion with Rome. It was liquidated under Stalin in 1946 with the complicity of the Russian Orthodox Church and re-emerged in 1989 after decades in the underground.

Russian Orthodox Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, director of foreign relations for the

Moscow Patriarchate, told reporters the activity of the Ukrainian Catholics that prevented the Russian Orthodox from agreeing to a meeting in the past is still a problem today.

In a statement on his website, he referred to Ukrainian Catholics with the pejorative term “uniates,” and said, “Regrettably, the problem of the uniates is still there, with uniatism remaining a never-healing, bloody wound that prevents the full normalization of relations between the two churches.”

In reaction to the Feb. 12 meeting, the head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk of Kiev-Halych, commented: “I do not expect that the meeting of Pope Francis with Patriarch Kirill will bring any particular changes. Although it is good that the meeting will take place.”

“I am pleased,” he said, that “we are no longer considered an obstacle and aren’t being used to justify one’s unwillingness to engage in such dialogue.”

A second major irritant is the rivalry between the patriarch of Moscow and the patriarch of Constantinople. The patriarch of Constantinople is the traditional head, the first among equals, and spiritual leader of the 300 million Orthodox Christians worldwide. He demonstrates this when he sends an ecumenical delegate to Rome for the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul June 29, and the pope returns the favour by sending a delegate to Constantinople for the feast of St. Andrew on Nov. 30.

The Moscow Orthodox Church is much bigger than the Constantinople Orthodox Church and the Moscow patriarch wants to have more influence and power among the Orthodox family.

Paul Gavrilyuk, Aquinas Chair in Theology and Philosophy, theology department, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minn., says it’s all a matter of politics. “Byzantine politics is alive and well in the Russian Orthodox Church,” he wrote in *Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations*, Global Orthodoxy, Feb. 6. The meeting with Pope Francis was announced just a

week after the leaders of the Orthodox churches announced their commitment to hold the Pan-Orthodox Council on the island of Crete in mid-June 2016. Such a meeting has been discussed for more than 50 years, but has failed due to a variety of factors, “most notably the rivalry between the patriarchate of Moscow and the patriarchate of Constantinople,” he says. This historic event will now be overshadowed by the meeting in Cuba.

Complicating the meeting is the geo-political context of the Russian annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 and the ongoing war in Eastern Ukraine. The timing of the meeting would seem to indicate that Kirill hopes to place Russia in a positive light at a time when it has been marginalized internationally.

“It is likely that during the meeting of the pope with the patriarch they will also speak of the present situation in Ukraine,” Shevchuk said. “I hope that His Holiness Pope Francis, who always raises his voice in defence of the wronged, will be a voice for Ukrainians, who are engaged in a battle for the unity and integrity of their land.”

Rev. Peter Galadza, acting director of the Sheptytsky Institute at St. Paul University in Ottawa, said he hoped the pope not only would raise the issue of Russian aggression against Ukraine, but also the support some Russian Orthodox leaders have given to “the notion of a ‘Russian World’” or *Russkiy Mir*, which sees the entire former Soviet Union as an area needing the special protection of Russia. Galadza said the notion “has hampered inter-ethnic harmony and understanding” and “evokes the Russification policies of the USSR.”

Will the meeting make much of a difference? It will make news worldwide, no doubt. But something more important will be needed. Perhaps the secular feast two days later will offer a solution. Feb. 14 is Valentine’s Day. It’s a celebration of human love. St. Paul says you can move mountains, but without love it amounts to nothing. Here, there’s more than mountains that need to be moved. — PWN

Message for Lent 2016 focuses on crucial choice facing Canadians

By Bishop Douglas Crosby, OMI, president of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

My brothers and sisters in Christ,

The readings of the liturgy for the opening days of Lent invite us to focus on some basic questions as we begin our journey through this sacred season. What does it mean to repent and believe the Good News? What difference should faith make to our living and dying? How do we convert hearts and lives?

The Old Testament reading for the Thursday after Ash Wednesday has particular significance this year for us as God’s people and as a country: *I call heaven and earth to witness . . . that I have set before you life and death. . . . Choose life, so that you and your descendants may live. . . .* (Deuteronomy 30:19)

The Supreme Court of Canada a year ago, in its decision in the case of Carter vs. Canada, invited those in our land to choose death. Any adult suffering from an illness, disease or disability would have the option of physician-assisted suicide. Already, various voices in our country have argued in favour of this even being extended to minors.

Appalling as that is, it is not surprising. Children as well as incapacitated adults are being euth-

anized in the handful of other countries where assisted suicide and euthanasia are now legal.

Throughout the church’s funeral rite, we are reminded that each life and each death has an important impact on the life of others. In the words of Saint Paul, *We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves* (Romans 14:7). A consequence of this for Christians is that our mission and our glory is to defend and protect life from conception to natural death as a sacred gift from God, Source of all life.

This year, the Thursday after Ash Wednesday is also the World Day of the Sick. In his message for this day, Pope Francis reminds us that when we experience suffering, pain and vulnerability, our *faith in God is on the one hand tested, yet at the same time can reveal all of its positive resources. Not because faith makes illness, pain, or the questions which they raise, disappear, but because it offers a key by which we can discover the deepest meaning of what we are experiencing; a key that helps us to see how illness can be the way to draw nearer to Jesus who walks at our side, weighed down by the Cross. And this key is given to us by Mary, our Mother, who has known this way at first-hand.*

During this lenten season, together with my brother bishops, I invite our community of faith and all its members to ponder deeply on this important and crucial juncture which our country is facing. Will we prefer palliative and home care, or assisted suicide

and euthanasia?

The choice is simple. Do we collaborate as communities of loving concern, supporting and encouraging one another to live our lives fully and in Christ’s footsteps until God calls us to our heavenly

reward? Or do we abandon the vulnerable, the elderly, the sick, the handicapped, the dying and the depressed, leaving them to stumble through loneliness and despair into the tragedy of dying by suicide?

Do we defend health care practi-

tioners and institutions from being forced into becoming collaborators, obliged to condone or administer death by suicide? Or do we instead provide a system of social well-

— WITNESSES, page 19



CNS/Paul Haring

FAMILY DAY RALLY IN ROME — People hold signs during the Family Day rally at the Circus Maximus in Rome Jan. 30. Hundreds of thousands of people attended the rally which was held to oppose a bill in the Italian Senate that would allow civil unions for homosexual and heterosexual couples. The sign in Italian says: “Wrong is wrong even if it becomes law.” Most of the participants were families, many carrying signs defending the rights of children to be raised by both a mother and a father. The event’s organizer, Massimo Gandolfini, told the crowd that the rally’s aim was not “to make war against anyone” and that traditional families are the backbone of society.

Crosby is Bishop of Hamilton.

Victim calls offender to conversion

Continued from page 1

said. The one who is wronged goes directly to the one who is guilty “in order to invite him to conversion, to help him to understand that he is doing wrong, to appeal to his conscience.”

Through this act of persuasion, the one guilty of wrongdoing “can open himself to the forgiveness that the injured party is offering him. And this is beautiful,” the pope said.

This is the way that families try to work out their conflicts, he said. The one who has been offended “loves the culprit and wants to salvage the relationship that binds them, not cut off this relationship,” he said.

But it is not an easy path to take, he added. “It requires that the person who was wronged be

ready to forgive and desire the salvation of and what’s best for the one who has wronged him.”

These reciprocal acts of forgiveness and conversion are the only way true justice can triumph, the pope said, because “if the guilty one recognizes the evil committed and stops doing it, then the evil is no more and the one who was unjust becomes just.”

“This is how God acts with us sinners,” he said. God constantly offers forgiveness and helps people recognize their sin in order to set them free.

That is because “God doesn’t seek our condemnation, but our salvation. God doesn’t want to condemn anybody,” not even those whom many think deserve it like Pontius Pilate or Judas, he said. “The Lord of mercy wants to save everybody.”

God’s immense heart “goes beyond our small concept of justice” and opens up people’s horizons to his limitless mercy, he said.

This is the kind of paternal heart people want to encounter in the confessional, the pope said.

While the priest may seek to help the penitent understand the evil committed, “we all go to the confessional to find a father, a father who helps us change our life, a father who gives us the strength to go on, a father who forgives us in the name of God.”

That is why the sacrament of penance or reconciliation is such a big responsibility for the priest, the pope said, because the people “who come to you are just looking for a father” and the priest in the confessional is there “in the place of the father who brings justice with his mercy.”



D. Gamache

Patience

Heron stands alone
at water’s edge,
motionless, as minutes pass.
Then long neck
flashes downward,
snaps up tiny minnow,
gulps — and waits again.
O to have his patience!

By Donna Gamache

Choose to be witnesses to God’s mercy

Continued from page 18

being and health care that protects the dignity of human life and the inviolability of conscience?

In urging you to be in full communion with the Holy Father and your bishops on this fundamental question, I invite you:

- To pray that the Holy Spirit enlighten and persuade the hearts and consciences of our members of Parliament, provincial, territorial and municipal leaders, and those engaged in providing health care, so the lives of all the vulnerable are protected from conception to natural death;
- To become more knowledgeable about the negative moral and social consequences that euthanasia and assisted suicide will inevitably have on society and on individual lives;
- To express to your political representatives your concerns and your convictions about the necessity for palliative and home care, the need for national and local strategies to prevent suicide, and the evil

of euthanasia and assisted suicide;

- To share with your family, friends, community and co-workers the resources developed as part of the *Life-Giving Love* National Campaign for Palliative and Home Care: Against Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide (<http://www.lifegivinglove.com/>);
- To sign the ecumenical/inter-faith Declaration on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide which has been endorsed by Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical Protestant, Jewish and Muslim faith leaders, together with more than 13,000 other Canadians (<http://www.euthanasiadeclaration.ca/declaration/> / <http://www.euthanasiadeclaration.ca/fr-declaration/>).

The fullness of life means choosing to be merciful and attentive to the needs of others; to pray and care for the sick, the suffering and the dying; and to accompany and comfort each of our brothers and sisters until death does us part.

By choosing to be witnesses to and collaborators in God’s saving mercy, we then choose — as Pope

Francis reminded us earlier in this Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy — *to be reborn, to overcome the indifference which blocks solidarity, and to leave behind the false neutrality which prevents sharing.* Through the grace of Christ, we can co-operate *with him in building an ever more just and fraternal world, a world in which every person and every creature can dwell in peace, in the harmony of God’s original creation.* (Homily for the Solemnity of Mary and the 49th World Day of Peace, Jan. 1, 2016.)

My brothers and sisters, as with Adam and Eve at the beginning of time, ours is the choice of eating of the tree of life, or from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which will surely lead to death. Just as Moses put before the Hebrews entering the Promised Land the life-altering choice of deciding to live as children of the living God, the One who is Lord, so we too, at the brink of such societal change, are called to choose life, truth, goodness and true mercy. The choice is set before us.

Woman to head Vatican office

By Cindy Wooden

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The director of the new theological-pastoral department of the Vatican Secretariat for Communications is Natasa Govekar, a theologian who specializes in the communication of faith through images.

The Vatican announced Pope Francis’ nomination of Govekar, a Slovenian, Feb. 9. At the same time, the pope named Francesco Masci, a 37-year-old official at the Vatican Internet Office, to direct the secretariat’s technical office.

The communications secretariat was established by Pope Francis to co-ordinate and streamline Vatican communications. The organizational structure also is expected to include an editorial department, but that director has yet to be named.

Msgr. Dario Vigano, prefect of the secretariat, issued a statement highlighting the youth of the two appointees as well as the pope’s choice of a woman theologian to

handle the theological-pastoral aspect of Vatican communications activities. Govekar, who holds a doctorate in missiology from the Pontifical Gregorian University, is a member of the staff of Rome’s Centro Aletti, a study and research centre focused particularly on the art and spirituality of Eastern Christianity.

“The Holy Father appointing a woman as head of the theological-pastoral department is an affirmation that attention to the pastoral is not exclusive to pastors, but involves the practices and ways of being church today,” Vigano said. “The church is the gathering of men and women disciples of Jesus Christ. I am certain that in reflecting on the role of communications in the church, she will be of great assistance.”

The secretariat’s responsibility includes co-ordinating the work of the Vatican website, Vatican Television centre, Vatican Radio, the Vatican newspaper and the Vatican press office.

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Jordan cannot continue to bear brunt of refugees

By Dale Gavlak

AL-KHALDIYA, Jordan (CNS) — As a donors conference to stem the Syrian refugee crisis opened in London, Syria’s neighbours, which have hosted hundreds of thousands of refugees for the past five years, say they cannot continue to bear the brunt of the burden.

King Abdullah II of Jordan, one of dozens of world leaders who participated in the Feb. 4 gathering, warned that his country is now at a “boiling point.”

“Sooner or later, I think, the dam is going to burst,” he told the BBC, saying the refugee influx engulfing Jordan is draining it of funds, vital social services, education and health care.

And it’s not just Syrians coming: Iraqis and others fleeing violence in the aftermath of the Arab Spring uprisings still seek shelter in the cash-strapped, oil-poor kingdom.

The Syrian crisis has cost Jordan \$6.6 billion over the past five years, Jordanian officials recently reported. In 2016 alone,

Jordan can expect to spend \$2.7 billion on refugee assistance. But officials said that international aid pledges for the refugees have remained underfunded.

It’s not just governments that are going into the red over the continuing crisis. Humanitarian agencies, like the World Food Program, have faced mounting financial challenges to keep up assistance.

Last autumn, the World Food Program cut back on food aid to the refugees, some of whom responded by heading to Europe or returning to Syria. The program said it now has funds to help feed 526,000 vulnerable Syrian refugees in Jordan until May.

The international Catholic charity *Caritas*, operating in Jordan, has tried to pick up the shortfall with food aid. But it, too, is dependent on funds from *Caritas* partners worldwide and government assistance to help provide Syrian and Iraqi refugees with shelter, education and winter items.

Omar Abawi, head program

manager for *Caritas Jordan*, said operations assisting Syrian and Iraqi refugees for 2016 are projected to cost \$21 million.

“By this first quarter, we received around \$14 million, so we have a gap of \$7 million - \$8 million this year,” Abawi told Cath-

olic News Service. “Although we are still in the first quarter, we expect that 90 per cent of the needed funds will be received.”



CNS/Sister Carol Hoverman

BILLBOARDS SUPPORT POPE’S MESSAGE — Participants pray a silent blessing during a Jan. 27 gathering in Dubuque, Iowa, for more than 20 billboards placed by women religious in strategic locations throughout Iowa, southwest Wisconsin and western Illinois. The billboards, posted in January and into February, carry the message Standing with Pope Francis; Caring for Our Common Home.

Vatican itinerary for Mexico includes visit with Moscow patriarch

By Cindy Wooden

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Pope Francis is scheduled to have more than two hours alone with Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill of Moscow in Cuba in addition to signing a declaration with the patriarch before flying on to Mexico for a Feb. 12 - 17 visit.

The Vatican announced the pope-patriarch meeting Feb. 5 and, on Feb. 8, released an updated itinerary for Pope Francis’ trip. The pope will leave Rome almost five hours earlier than originally scheduled so that the meeting in Havana with Kirill will not impact his schedule in Mexico.

Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, Vatican spokesperson, told reporters that in addition to official events on the schedule in Mexico, the papal motorcades are expected to be long and lively. For example,

he said, the route from the airport to the nunciature in Mexico City, where the pope will sleep, is about 20 kilometres, and people are expected to line most of the route when he arrives from Cuba.

The trip was designed for the pope and his entourage to return each night to Mexico City and avoid having to sleep in a different city each night, “something which is rather tiring and complicated,” the spokesperson said.

Another key in the design, he said, was to fulfil Pope Francis’ desire to visit cities and dioceses that did not have a chance to host either St. John Paul II or Pope Benedict XVI.

The pope’s outdoor morning mass Feb. 14 has been delayed by one hour. The mass will be celebrated in Ecatepec, a diocese just outside Mexico City; the indigenous name Ecatepec means

“windy hill” and overnight temperatures are frigid. Lombardi said the mass was delayed until 11:30 a.m. to allow people to arrive in the morning without

attempting to spend the night at the site.

Pope Francis has made it a tradition to invite a lay Vatican employee to join his entourage on

trips abroad. This time, Lombardi said, it will be one of the Vatican firefighters. “Let’s hope he won’t have to work,” the spokesperson joked.

Honduran cardinal speaks on Zika virus

By David Gibson

SUYAPA, Honduras (RNS) — Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga of Honduras, a top adviser to Pope Francis, has denounced the idea of “therapeutic abortions” — which are carried out because of fetal abnormalities — as a response to birth defects caused by the mosquito-borne Zika virus that is setting off alarms throughout Latin America.

Rodriguez’s comments, which came at mass on Feb. 3 in the pil-

grimage city of Suyapa, are some of the most direct from church leaders in the heavily Catholic region and may reflect a growing concern in the hierarchy about the ramifications of the public health debate over how to deal with the potential epidemic.

Although all forms of abortion are illegal in Honduras, Rodriguez said he was saddened to read a medical professional’s writing apparently in support of “therapeutic abortion,” which is one that is carried out if the life of the mother is in danger or if there is risk of fetal abnormality.

“We should never talk about ‘therapeutic’ abortion,” the cardinal said in his homily, according to Honduran media reports.

“Therapeutic abortion doesn’t exist,” he said. “Therapeutic means curing, and abortion cures nothing. It takes innocent lives.”

The Zika virus, which health officials say can also be transmitted by sex in some cases, is blamed for an apparent spike in the number of babies diagnosed with microcephaly. Infants with microcephaly have small heads and abnormal brain growth and suffer from a range of other health problems.

While it’s not clear how widespread the virus is and how likely it is that a fetus will develop abnormalities if exposed to the virus, the World Health Organization de-

clared an international public health emergency Feb. 1.

But since December, government officials in various Latin American countries have been warning women to delay pregnancy until the virus is brought under control. In El Salvador, one health official said women should avoid getting pregnant this year and next year.

The advice to delay pregnancy raises questions for Catholics about using artificial birth control, which is against church teaching except in certain circumstances. Because discerning those circumstances is like threading “a fine theological needle,” as one theologian told CNN, the bishops in many countries have so far largely avoided making blanket statements on the issue.

The question of aborting fetuses with abnormalities, however, takes the issue to another level.

Abortion rights supporters have been using the crisis as an argument for liberalizing the region’s generally strict abortion laws, and that is putting pressure on church leaders to remind the flock that direct abortion is never acceptable.

“This is just a way to push laws for the legalization of abortion,” Danelia Cardona, head of the pro-life office of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Colombia, said in an interview published Feb. 4.



CNS/Ritchie B. Tongco, EPA

TAIWAN EARTHQUAKE — An earthquake survivor is seen on a crane Feb. 8 in Tainan City, Taiwan. Pope Francis sent condolences following the quake that hit as the island prepared to celebrate Chinese New Year.

Suffering is the sandpaper of our life. It does its work of shaping us. Suffering is part of our training program for becoming wise.

— Ram Dass