

Mprairie Messenger



CATHOLIC JOURNAL

Vol. 93 No. 26

Single Issue: \$1.00

Publication Mail Agreement No. 40030139

December 16, 2015



Matt Cardy/©2014 Getty Images

Iraqi Christian children look at a Nativity scene that was displayed in a tent erected in the grounds of Mazar Mar Eillia Catholic Church, in Ankawa, northwest of Erbil (see page 12).

Receive, we pray, into the arms of your mercy all innocent victims; and by your great might frustrate the designs of evil tyrants and establish your rule of justice, love, and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

— Collect for the Holy Innocents, Episcopal

Vatican document reflects new relations with Jews

By Cindy Wooden

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Catholics are called to witness to their faith in Jesus before all people, including Jews, but the Catholic Church “neither conducts nor supports” any institutional missionary initiative directed toward Jews, says a new document from a Vatican commission.

How God will save the Jews if they do not explicitly believe in Christ is “an unfathomable divine mystery,” but one which must be affirmed since Catholics believe that God is faithful to his promises and therefore never revoked his covenant with the Jewish people, it says.

In the statement, *The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable*, the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations With the Jews gives thanks for 50 years of Catholic-Jewish dialogue and looks at some of the theological questions that have arisen in the dialogue and in Catholic theology since the Second Vatican Council.

The topics covered in the document, released Dec. 10, include: the meaning of “the Word of God” in Judaism and Christianity; the relationship between the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament; the relationship between God’s covenant with Israel and the New Covenant; the meaning of the universality of salvation in Christ in view of “God’s unrevoked covenant” with the Jewish people; and what evangelization means in relation to the Jews.

The document explicitly states

that it is not a “doctrinal teaching of the Catholic Church,” but a reflection based on doctrine and flowing from Vatican II’s declaration *Nostra Aetate* on Catholic relations with other religions.

Like *Nostra Aetate*, the new document condemns all forms of anti-Semitism and affirms that Christianity’s relationship with Judaism is unique in the field of inter-religious dialogue because of the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. In addition to believing that the Jewish Scriptures are God’s revelation, Jesus and his disciples were practising Jews, and many elements of Catholic liturgy developed out of formal Jewish prayer.

“One cannot understand Jesus’ teaching or that of his disciples without situating it within the Jewish horizon in the context of the living tradition of Israel,” the document says. “One would understand his teachings even less so if they were seen in opposition to this tradition.”

The Jewish roots of Christianity, it says, give the Christian faith its necessary “anchoring in salvation history,” showing how the life, death and resurrection of Jesus are part of the story of God’s saving work since the beginning of time, and that Christianity is not a system of religious belief that appeared out of the blue with the birth of Jesus.

Because Catholics recognize their faith as having its roots in the faith of the Jews, the document says, dialogue and joint study bring obvious advantages to Catholic knowledge of the Bible

and faith in the one God.

The first Jewish Christians continued to go to the synagogue and, the document said, historical evidence indicates the break between Christianity and Judaism — between the church and synagogue — may not have been complete until the 3rd century or even the 4th century. In addition, modern rabbinical Judaism developed after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in the year 70, the same time as Christianity was developing. For those reasons, the document says, Jews, too, can learn from Christian historical studies.

Within Catholic theology over the past 50 years, some scholars have hypothesized the existence and validity of two “covenants,” one that God made with the Jews and one made through Jesus. The new document, however, insists “there can only be one single covenant history of God with humanity.”

At the same time, however, the document says God’s covenant with humanity developed over time: it was first forged with Abraham, then the law was given to Moses, then new promises were given to Noah.

“Each of these covenants incorporates the previous covenant and interprets it in a new way,” the document says. “That is also true for the New Covenant which for Christians is the final eternal covenant and, therefore, the definitive interpretation of what was promised by the prophets.”

The covenant sealed with the death and resurrection of Christ, it said, is “neither the annulment nor



CNS/Dima Otervertchenko

RABBI ATTENDS VIGIL AT CATHEDRAL— Rabbi Hillel Cohn from Congregation Emanu El in Redlands, Calif., embraces a government official during a Dec. 7 interfaith service at Our Lady of the Rosary Cathedral in San Bernardino. Although Catholics are called to witness to their faith, the church “neither conducts nor supports” any institutional missionary initiative directed toward Jews, according to a new document from a Vatican commission.

the replacement, but the fulfilment of the promises of the Old Covenant.” However, one expert in Jewish-Christian relations said a belief that Jews have been replaced by Christians in God’s favour still “is alive and well in the pews.”

Speaking at a Vatican news conference Dec. 10, Edward Kessler gave “a warning” that the Christian sense of “fulfilment easily slides into replacement,” which sees Christians as “the successor covenant people, elected by God to replace Israel because of the latter’s unfaithfulness.”

The expert in the study of

Jewish-Christian relations and founder and director of the Woolf Institute in Cambridge, England, welcomed the new document and said he hoped the progress being made in Catholic-Jewish relations would not be “limited to the elite,” but trickles down to everyday Catholics and Jews. The Vatican document also rejects the notion that there are two paths to salvation, one for Christians and one for Jews. “Confessing the universal and therefore also exclusive mediation of salvation through Jesus Christ belongs to the core of Christian faith.”

African farmers influence Paris climate talks with their stories

By James Martone

PARIS (CNS) — Thandiwe Chidarume, who farms sweet potato, nuts and corn in Zimbabwe, travelled nearly 5,000 miles to be in Paris for the UN climate change conference. She wanted to tell negotiators there of the problems she and thousands of other Zimbabwean farmers face due to adverse weather conditions.

For the past couple of years, her crops have gotten either too much rain or not enough. That has meant no money at market and no income to support her three children.

“Our presence is just to show the negotiators that whatever they come up with, they should know that we are here, we are watching them,” said Chidarume, 42. “They should make decisions, decisions that are going to make us happy, not to make us suffer.”

Chidarume was one of thousands regulated to the sidelines of the UN conference on the outskirts of Paris. By Dec. 11, negotiators from 195 countries hoped to produce a global accord on climate change and on what to do about it.

Key issues under negotiation at the talks are loss and damage, and adaptation and mitigation, all of which relate to how much compensation should be given to the world’s mostly poorer nations for damages incurred due to climate change, or for those nations to be able to “adapt” to using greener but more costly energy sources, instead of fossil fuels, which are the largest



CNS/Siphiwe Sibeko, Reuters

AFRICAN FARMERS SUFFER FROM CLIMATE CHANGE — A farmworker sits on a water tank Nov. 9 as he supplies his livestock with water at a drought-stricken farm outside Utrecht, South Africa.

source of the greenhouse gas emissions causing global warming.

Chidarume, backed by UN and other official statistics, blamed bigger, wealthier nations like the United States and China for producing the most carbon gases, and said it was therefore up to these richer countries to guarantee a climate change agreement that took her and millions of the world’s other poor farmers into consideration.

“As farmers, first thing we are asking for is adaptation funds,

and funds for mitigation, but the first thing is adaption funds, because we are already suffering because of climate change,” Chidarume told Catholic News Service Dec. 7.

“We need funding, we are small-scale farmers (and) we don’t have much resources. How do we adapt,” she asked, from inside an antiquated and ornate room belonging to a Paris syndicate. She sat surrounded by other, mostly African women farmers and their advocates who, like

Chidarume, had travelled thousands of miles to France in an attempt to sway UN negotiators.

They were brought together in Paris as part of an experience-sharing workshop, organized by CIDSE, an alliance of Catholic development agencies, and its partners.

“Farmers are no longer able to produce the way they used to . . . because the climate is changing, and it is a reality,” said Flaida Jose Macheze, who travelled to the workshop the night before

from Mozambique, where the civil society organization she works for, UNAC, represents the rights of her country’s small-scale farmers. Macheze said most small-scale farmers were women.

“You may plant and a drought comes, or you may plant and the rains come, so either it’s floods or it is drought and we feel it. So we think that coming to this space, maybe whoever is negotiating the issues of climate, can hear our voice, and maybe they can bring slight changes,” said Macheze, stressing the “maybe” both times.

Macheze, Chidarume and the roughly 40 others present at the workshop said they had no formal invitations to the negotiations at Le Bourget, the Paris suburb where high-level talks continue. But they were planning to show up at some point outside the venue, in hopes of meeting and convincing some of the negotiators to take their concerns to heart.

“We are trying to meet the people who are negotiating on our behalf, so that we can put forth our views,” said Susan Chilala, a sweet potato, groundnuts, pigeon peas and maize farmer from Zambia, who was also at the workshop.

“There are so many problems that we have faced, especially now with the climate change. We have tried to look for alternatives, but one thing that we have discovered of late is that even alternatives do not consider climate change,” she said.

CCCB, Rabbinic Caucus start interfaith discussions

By Michael Swan
The Catholic Register

TORONTO (CCN) — Rabbi Baruch Frydman-Kohl reckons it was the first kosher meal ever served in the 190-year history of Ottawa's Notre-Dame Cathedral Basilica, though it's hard to say for sure. But the first meeting of the national Canadian Catholic-Jewish Dialogue certainly marked a new chapter in Christian-Jewish relations in Canada.

With a three-year pause still in effect on the Canadian Christian-Jewish Consultation, the new bilateral discussion between Catholics and Jews kicks new life into interfaith conversation in Canada.

The official dialogue between the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Canadian Rabbinic Caucus, sponsored by the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, has already begun discussions on issues of religious freedom, physician-assisted suicide, anti-Semitism, the importance of Israel to Canadian Jews, the legacy of the Second Vatican Council, the threat to Christian populations in the Middle East

and social justice in general.

CIJA spokesperson Steve McDonald calls the new program "more than a dialogue."



Catholic Register/Michael Swan

Rabbi Baruch Frydman-Kohl

"We actually launched a declaration committing the two organizations to work together in educating our own communities about the change made in the relationship post-*Nostra Aetate*," he said, refer-

ring to the Vatican II declaration on relations with non-Christian religions. "And also to speak as one voice on issues of common cause, whether it's religious freedom in Canada or social justice."

In the past, the CCCB has resisted moves toward a bilateral dialogue with Jews, preferring to work with the Canadian Council of Churches on the broader national consultation that included Anglicans, Lutherans and the United Church on the Christian side. That dialogue began 35 years ago with the Canadian Jewish Congress, predecessor of CIJA.

The consultation ran into a major snag in 2012 when the general council of the United Church of Canada recommended its congregations boycott products produced in the occupied territories of the West Bank but claiming to be from Israel.

The rabbis withdrew from the dialogue with the churches, claiming the boycott unfairly targeted Israel and created an atmosphere in which political disagreement with Israel quickly escalates into contempt for Zionism and for Jews.

Though the United Church said it was willing to withdraw from the

Canadian Christian-Jewish Consultation rather than see it cease, the other churches involved in the consultation did not want to go forward without Canada's largest Protestant church. On the Jewish side, CIJA is anxious to see the consultation continue but won't sit down with the United Church.

Toronto Auxiliary Bishop John Boissonneau, who co-chairs the Catholic-Jewish Dialogue and officially sits on the Canadian Christian-Jewish Consultation, is hopeful the broader consultation will continue.

"The death knell hasn't been rung on that one," he said.

In the meantime, there could be no more appropriate way of marking the 50th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* than launching a new Catholic-Jewish Dialogue in Canada, Boissonneau said.

"It gives it a more specific focus," he said.

The dialogue will meet twice a year, with the next sitting scheduled for the spring. Each side designates six delegates. They are to be as broadly representative as possible stretching from coast to coast, operating in both official languages and including men and women. On

the Catholic side the dialogue partners include Boissonneau, Gatineau Archbishop Paul-André Durocher, Congregation of St. Joseph scholar and administrator Sister Anne Anderson, Oblate Father Martin Moser, Ursuline scholar of the Qumran texts Sister Eileen Schuller and Dominican theologian Rev. Hervé Tremblay. The Jewish co-chair is Toronto's Frydman-Kohl, accompanied by Robert Daum, Dr. Victor Goldbloom, Rabbi Reuben Poupko, New Testament scholar Adele Reinhartz and historian of the Second Vatican Council Norman Tobias.

For Boissonneau the new dialogue is an opportunity for Catholics to learn more about themselves and their relationship with the people Pope John Paul II called "our elder brothers in faith."

"I hope Catholics hear that the fruit of Vatican II is continuing to be received in the church, that conversation continues with religions outside of Christianity," he said. "That's an encouragement because there are a lot of local, Jewish-Christian dialogues going on across Canada. It's an encouragement to continue that conversation."

Catholic families reflect on their experiences in Philadelphia

By James Buchok

WINNIPEG — The World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia in September attracted more than 18,000 people, including a group from the Archdiocese of Winnipeg, making it the world's largest gathering of Catholic families.

They will never forget that joyous experience, and now their challenge is to share their new insights with their fellow parishioners and all the faithful of the archdiocese.

Winnipeg Archbishop Richard Gagnon invited those who attended the gathering to meet and share reflections of those four days, and talk about the present and future of the Catholic family.

The archbishop began by asking, "What was the World Meeting of Families like for you? What did you take away from it?"

"Just the sheer number of people, all valuing the importance of family," said Rachel Suarez-Banmann. "I really appreciated that the whole family was encouraged to take part. It made me realize the value of family as the foundation of everything else."

For Zalde Santos it was seeing so many people "who still believe in the essence and importance of family. The people who attended really wanted to fight for the family in a society where family is not always given importance, where even the idea of family is sometimes being attacked."

"Everything starts in the family," said Joi Vasquez. "And when the family is happy, the community is happy, the world is happy and God is happy."

Judith Vasquez couldn't help but wonder why she and her husband were so fortunate. "How did God choose us to be in Philadelphia?" At the same time, as the trip approached, she worried

about leaving her children. "My husband said God wants us to go because when you really serve, you serve uncomfortably." In the end, she said, "we were so helped by our community."

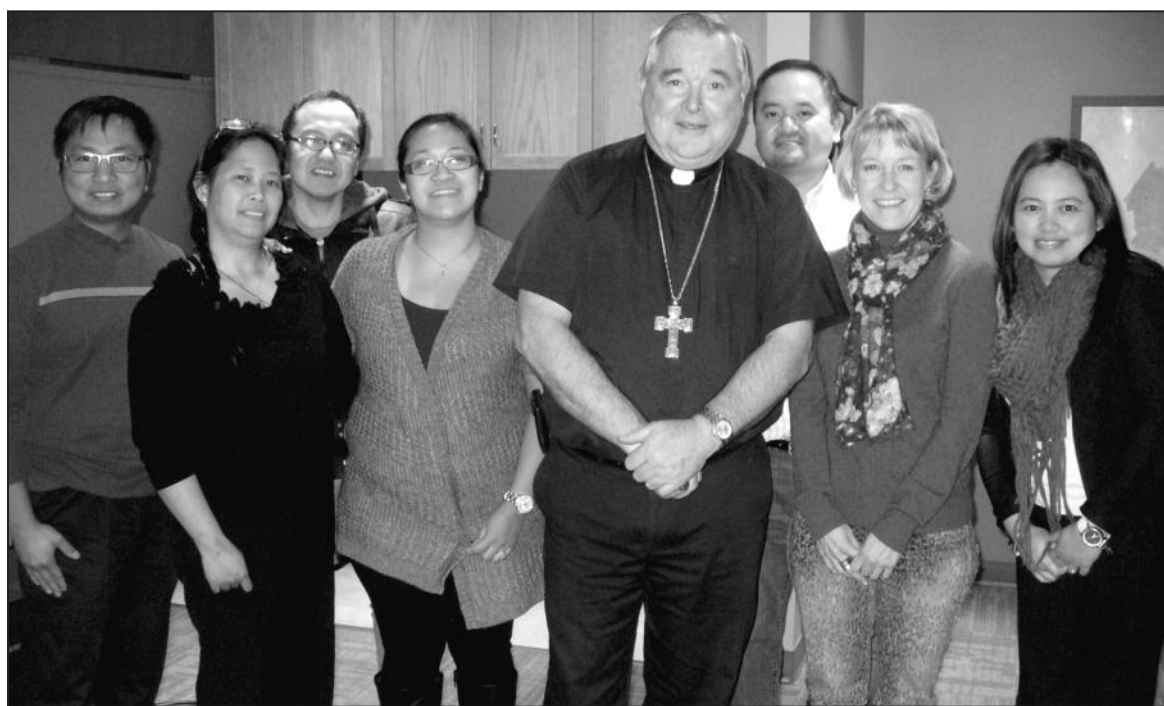
Monique Gauthier said it was the image of the wounded heart "that really stayed with me. All of the things that break us down, that prevent us from hearing God. There are so many families that could never come to Philadelphia; how do we take this back to them?"

Maui Zamora was at the World Meeting of Families with his wife Cheryl, who was in her eighth month of pregnancy with their third child, which they knew would be the case when they decided in February they would make the trip. "But we went, and we thought we're here for a reason and we need to be hopeful, we're bringing a new life into this world, and if we have a good relationship together, the stronger our marriage will be and the better for our children. It's the first time we have left the kids for 10 days. Grandparents stayed with them and we could Skype with our daughters to pray every night, and we didn't miss a night."

Gagnon asked, "How can we help our families in the archdiocese? Pope Francis has said that everything is connected together in the family. When its spirit is wounded, the infection contaminates everyone."

Monique said membership at her church has doubled "and they are Catholic in name but many of them are 'unchurched.' They want a baptism or a wedding and we can show mercy and provide sacraments but is that a disservice? Can we look at how we prepare for sacraments and how the family can get involved?"

"After confirmation nobody stays, even after RCIA," Zalde said. "What program can we en-



FAMILIES REFLECT — Winnipeg Archbishop Richard Gagnon invited couples who attended the World Meeting of Families in September to share reflections of those four days, and talk about the present and future of the Catholic family. From left: Maui Zamora, Judith Vasquez, Joi Vasquez, Rachel Suarez-Banmann, Gagnon, Zalde Santos, Monique Gauthier and Khristine Santos.

hance, how do we have an impact? Maybe the materials we give to them are not relevant anymore. How do we evangelize the men? That would lead to more family members staying in the church. We have adult catechism, but it's mostly attended by women."

"How can we plant a seed in a relationship of a husband and wife for them to share it with youth?" asked Maui. "If we have something like renewal of vows every five or 10 years, if youth see that, they will see that marriage is important."

"If a family wants renewal you have to start with praying together as a family," said Joi. His wife Judith agreed. "It's not always solemn prayer, with a six-year-old maybe rolling around on the floor or shouting," she said. "And even if we can't always be together, we can be together in spirit. We can pray together wherever we are."

"How do we involve parents in preparing children for sacraments, not just catechism?" asked Zalde.

Judith noted that a lot of churchgoers are not parishioners. "They're not registered, so there is no commitment. We need to educate our churchgoers that you should be registered. There is a lot of harvest possible, but workers are few."

"We have a vibrant welcoming ministry and we require all who want sacraments to register," said Rachel. "We want them to know 'we're a community and we want to know you.'"

Gagnon pointed out that people are inundated by demands and they are leery about being taken advantage of, so they ask, "What do I get out of being a parishioner at this church? I'm a 'roamin' Catholic.'"

"They will gain a sense of com-

munity and love," said Judith.

"It's about a relationship with God and other Christians," said Monique.

"We have a parish covenant," said Rachel. "It states what we are offering to you as a parishioner our promise of what we will give to you, but also, this is what we need from you."

"When we evangelize, we need to ask, 'How can you help us?' We're all pieces of the puzzle," said Judith. "And children must always be welcome. Crying children or running around, these are signs of life."

"And all others must be welcomed," said Rachel, "those with special needs, and single people."

Gagnon expressed the hope that the gathering "might serve as the beginning of an ongoing discussion on the needs of Catholic families in the archdiocese."

Christian solidarity gives Syrians, Iraqis hope

By Michael Swan
The Catholic Register

TORONTO (CCN) — The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity will culminate next month with a final liturgy uniting Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Christians at the Chaldean Cathedral of the Good Shepherd in the northwest corner of Toronto.

Archbishops, bishops, moderators, priests and ministers of every sort will unite in prayer with a congregation of Iraqi and Syrian Christians who have fled violence and left behind friends and family. This time the prayers and the pews will be connected to the refugee camps, the terrorist attacks, the ransoms paid to keep family together and those who have died.

For the Chaldeans of Toronto — Arabic-speaking, Eastern Rite

Catholics who once dominated life in Iraq's second city of Mosul — the solidarity of other Christians is no mere gesture, said McMaster University life science student Rita Waseem. For her friends in Syria, just the idea that all kinds of Christians are praying for them half a world away will be a sign of hope.

"It gives them reason to believe in God again," said Waseem.

For many of the Canadian student's young friends in Syria, faith has come to seem absurd when they are faced with constant violence in the name of faith.

"They tell me what they think, what they feel. The question is, where is God?" said Waseem. "I understand that."

As a member of the St. Peter's Chaldean senior youth group in Oakville, one of nearly 40 young

people who gather on Friday nights for prayer, catechesis and social time in an old house on the edge of town, Waseem senses that she's the one who has to keep the faith for her friends, who have no sure sense of a future or of a home.

"Prayer is communication with God," said York University student Mary Anton as she gets ready for the Chaldean youth group meeting. "You're reaching out to your Father saying, 'We need you to create unity.' We don't know how to be loving people. But God is love."

The idea that Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox will all be there with the Chaldeans to pray for the Christians of the Middle East has Anton excited.

"Being there with us, standing there with us, is really important," she said.

"Prayer is underestimated too often," said St. Peter's pastor Rev. Niaz Toma.

But prayer, said Toma, implies action.

"It should go hand-in-hand with tackling human rights in the Middle East," he said.

Democracy is the only way Christians and their culture will survive in the countries where Christianity was first preached and received, said Toma. But that's not a quick solution. The 2003 American invasion unleashed the violence that now dominates life in Iraq and Syria. In the chaos Muslim fundamentalism has no limits within a previously developed and peaceful Iraq. The whole experiment proves that democracy cannot be imposed, Toma said.

Education, constitutional structure and democratic values have to be learned from the family on up through the school system, and those are processes that have to work within Arab and mostly Muslim culture, according to the Chaldean priest.

There are about 40,000 Chaldeans in Canada, 25,000 in the Greater Toronto Area. It's a fast growing community. If you're looking for Christians willing to buy into the ecumenical dream, look no further, said Toma.

"We have one faith, one destiny, one journey together," he said. "We believe in one God, one Jesus

Christ. The time has come once again for the church to realize that she needs more than ever unity."

The theme for the 2016 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was based on 1 Peter 2:9 and chosen by an ecumenical team in Latvia, where Catholics, Lutherans, Orthodox and others both still reeling, but at the same time experiencing a rebirth, after half a century of Soviet rule. The First Letter of Peter states: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."

Christians in Latvia played a prominent role when Latvia regained its independence in 1991. They prayed in the once desolate churches of Riga, then went out into the streets, unarmed, and set up barricades against Soviet tanks.

But after two generations grew up in an atheist police state, the Latvian journey back to faith has not been instantaneous or overwhelming. However, there is a quiet resurrection. Latvian Christians have learned to pray together and for each other.

The modest and struggling church of Latvia has proposed to the Christian world that we pray together because we are "called to proclaim the mighty acts of God."

Iraqis and Syrians plan to respond to that call with your help.



CCN/D. Gyapong

INQUIRY ANNOUNCED — Indigenous Affairs Minister Carolyn Bennett, Status of Women Minister Patricia Hajdu and Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould announced the launch of an inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women. They were joined by an Algonquin elder (far left) who led the announcement with a traditional prayer.



God's infinite love . . .

What better gift than this?

A Blessed Christmas to all!

Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary

Welcome, Wisdom of God ...

*giving birth to Mercy
in a season of hope*

Christmas Blessings

www.sistersofcharityic.com SISTERS OF CHARITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Queen's House Retreat and Renewal Centre

Retreats & Workshops

Maranatha Yoga — Kate O'Gorman.

Mondays, Jan. 4 - March 21, 7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
Cost: \$96/12 weeks or \$10 drop-in.

The Book of Exodus — Paul Fachel, OMI.

First Wednesday of the month, 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. Jan. 6, Feb. 3 March 2.
Cost: \$15.

A Day Away — Gisele Bauche.

Second Wednesday of the month, 9:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. Jan. 13, Feb. 10, March 9. Cost: \$25, w/lunch.

An Introduction to the Enneagram

Sarah Donnelly and Sister Marie Gorsalitz.
Saturday, Jan. 30, 9:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. Cost: \$55, includes lunch.

Silent Directed Retreat: "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps 46:10) — Dianne Mantyka and Bishop Gerry Wiesner, OMI.

Friday, Jan. 29, 7 p.m. - Sunday, Jan. 31, lunch.
Cost: \$345, live-in only (please register by Jan. 18).

Ongoing Events at Queen's House

Centering Prayer: Monday evenings 7 p.m. ♦ **Taizé Prayer for Christian Unity:** Second Tuesday of the month, 8 p.m. ♦

Personal Day(s) of Private Prayer: Book anytime ♦

Queen's House Weekly Celebration of Holy Eucharist:
Wednesdays, 3 p.m. (call to confirm time — all are warmly welcome!) ♦

24-Hour Eucharistic Adoration:

Fourth Monday of the month, 12 p.m. - Tuesday, 12 p.m.

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION Have you considered inviting a spiritual director to journey with you as a trusted companion? The **spiritual director** is a dedicated traveller of the interior pathways and has the skills to accompany another person who is experiencing the joys and challenges of life. The director listens, encourages, supports and assists the seeker in paying attention to their life. Queen's House has a number of trained spiritual directors who come from the ecumenical Christian community and offer a wide variety of interests and experience. To learn more about spiritual direction please visit our website or contact our coordinator, Sr. Adeline Behm, 306-242-1916 x234.

For program details visit www.queenshouse.org

To register please call 306-242-1916

or email: receptionist@queenshouse.org

601 Taylor Street West, Saskatoon, SK S7M 0C9
tel: (306) 242-1916 fax: (306) 653-5941

DO YOU NEED A FACILITY FOR:

Inservices, seminars, workshops, retreats, or any occasion? **BOOK QUEEN'S HOUSE TODAY!**
(306) 242-1925 or bookings@queenshouse.org

Chaplain General describes Christmas in Afghanistan

By Deborah Gyapong

OTTAWA (CCN) — When Canada’s new Chaplain General Brigadier General Guy Chapdelaine spent Christmas in Afghanistan in 2006, he planned ahead for his possible death.

He said he “prepared all his things” and even visited the now retired Archbishop of Sherbrooke to tell him if anything happened to him, he wanted his funeral in the Sherbrooke cathedral, though the archbishop did not want to hear about his plans.

“It’s a complex ministry in the face of death or threats” in the field of operations,” Padre Chapdelaine said in an interview at his Ottawa office. “We have this service. Our life can end at any time.”

But this willingness to embrace God’s will no matter what had nothing dour or fearful about it. Instead, the Chaplain General exuded peace as he described his work as a priest in the military, a calling that brings him great joy.

“This is part of our life,” he said. “When we go into operations,

especially in Afghanistan, when outside of the wires in 2006-2007, they did not have the Chinook helicopters then, so travel was by road and very dangerous.”

“I don’t know how other chaplains cope with that but it was part of my spiritual preparation to be ready,” he said. “A friend gave me a rosary. I had always the rosary with me. Faith, it’s not magical. It doesn’t remove us from passing through difficult times, but faith is there to help us pass through difficult times.”

“What I experienced in the theatre of operations is to keep always hope in the middle of despair, always light in the darkness, to see good things in the hearts of the soldiers,” he said.

In Afghanistan, the day after Christmas, soldiers were to return to the field, he said. This unit had lost a couple of soldiers the previous month, so their supervisor asked Chapdelaine to speak with them because some were nervous.

The chaplains are there to speak to the troops, to “give them comfort and reassurance,” Chap-

delaine said. “If something happens, the chaplains are able to support their families.”

Chapdelaine spent six weeks in Afghanistan to give two chaplains there a break. It gave him an opportunity to be with the troops, to help them cope with difficult situations such as the death of a friend.

“I discovered a lot of faith in these men and many signs of faith,” he said. He recalled seeing written on a pillar holding up the roof of an observation post the words: “Even if I pass through the valley of death I will fear no evil.”

“It was not a chaplain who wrote that, but a soldier,” he said. “It’s wonderful to see the faith of the people.”

“In Canada it is difficult to talk about faith,” he said. “In the theatre of war it is very easy to talk about faith, about religion. Here in Canada very difficult people are very reserved, even with us as chaplains.”

He recalled one soldier came to him and told him, “My mother asked me to come see you to ask for a blessing.”

“I found that request so moving,” he said. “Another asked me to baptize him. It was not an easy request in the middle of the desert!”

Chapdelaine began the man’s preparation for baptism that continued after he returned to Canada. “I knew in my heart he had the baptism of desire.”

He had long conversations with soldiers about prayer, especially after they were seeing other soldiers praying five times a day. That would bring them to consider their own faith and “to question the meaning of life.”

Many spoke of their loved ones and expressed fear they might never see their children or their wives again, he said. “The chaplain is a friend — a person with whom we can talk, when they cannot talk with other soldiers.” Sometimes the conversation concerns news from home, concerning their families. “The chaplain is there to encourage them.”

Chapdelaine, who was appointed last August, is the first Roman Catholic Chaplain General in 10 years. He leads chaplains of all faiths in the Canadian military and faces challenges in recruiting chaplains to serve in an increasingly diverse military. Now that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau plans to bring back the fighter jets from bombing ISIS targets in Syria, replacing them with trainers for Peshmerga troops on the ground, the Chaplain General has to consider how to serve the spiritual needs of these trainers.

Though the military is not permitted to ask the religion of its service men and women, Chapdelaine estimates the number of Catholics mirrors that of the Canadian population: roughly 40 per cent. The bishop of the Military Ordinariate, Bishop Donald Theriault, recruits priests for service as priest chaplains. Seventy per cent of them will retire in the next 10 years. In an era of priest shortages, it is a big sacrifice for a diocesan bishop to give one of his priests to the military, Chapdelaine said. The Chaplain General tries to make sure there is a Catholic chaplain

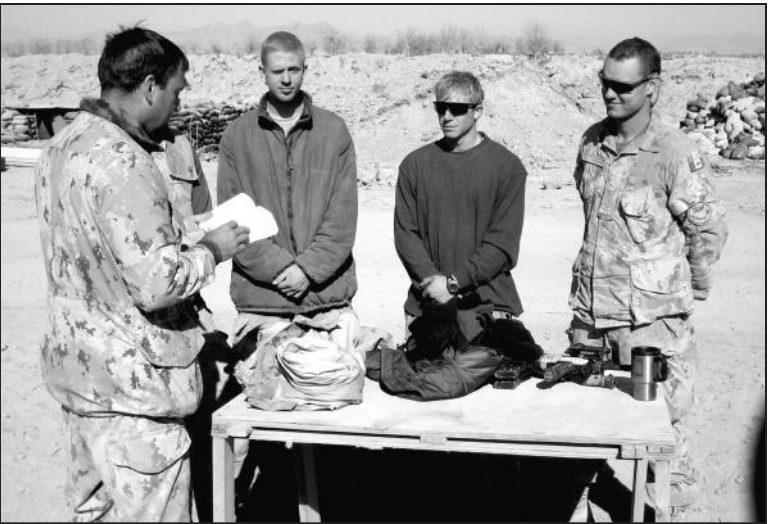


Photo courtesy of Chaplain General’s Office

CHRISTMAS IN AFGHANISTAN — Padre Guy Chapdelaine, now Canada’s Chaplain General, spent Christmas 2006 in Afghanistan. Military chaplains must be prepared to minister to soldiers of all faiths and none.

deployed in the field so Catholic troops can receive the sacraments. They might work with lay chaplains and those of other faiths, but finding a balance is challenging, he said.

Chaplains who are sent into the field of operations not only need to be fit and trained so as not to be a burden on the troops, but also they must be prepared to minister to those of all faiths or none, be bilingual, prepared to work with women and possibly even have a female supervisor, Chapdelaine said. Female chaplains are also needed to serve the women in the military.

Chapdelaine loves Pope Francis’ image of a field hospital, a “hospital after battle.”

“It’s not time to check cholesterol, but time to take care of peoples’ wounds, to go to the margins and meet with them,” he said.

Unlike priests in a parish who get little opportunity to be with their people where they work, chaplains in the military are “there to build a ministry of presence and to establish and build bridges. They are bridge makers, pontifiers,” he said. “If they trust you, if they learn to get to know you, they will come to you in times of difficulty.”

Chapdelaine said his call to the military came before his call to the priesthood, even though when he was 11 or 12 he entertained the idea of becoming a priest. He came from a Catholic family that regularly attended mass, but during his teenaged years, the thought of being a priest faded away.

While looking for a summer job at age 17, he joined the 52nd Medical Company, now the 52nd Field Ambulance Company, as a reservist.

He loved the social aspect of military life, the teamwork, the community life. A year afterward he was invited to begin officer training. He recalled he began that training in May 1980, the day of the referendum on sovereignty. But not long afterward, a member of his unit died in a car crash.

“It was my first time dealing with death up close,” he said. “The chaplain came to be present with us.”

The chaplain, a priest from the Quebec archdiocese, “did a wonderful ministry to help us cope with the death.” Chapdelaine recalled being “fascinated” by the joyful presence of the chaplain and thought, “I

would like to be like him.”

“I was called into the military even though I was not full time until 1998,” he said. “My call was for the military, and in the military I decided to enter seminary in 1981.” A year after that, he approached the Sherbrooke archdiocese to begin the process that led to his ordination in 1989.

He served part time in the military and in seminary and was thus able to pay his way and exercise ministry as a student chaplain or pastoral associate during his training.

Upon his ordination, Chapdelaine was promoted to the rank of captain and began service full time in the military in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Chaplain’s branch. In 2004 he was sent to Rome to study for a licentiate in ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue, another passion of his.

As he travels to various CAF bases in Canada, he meets with religious leaders to promote dialogue and build rapport. Chapdelaine said he is concerned about radicalization and home-grown terrorism. Society needs to be on guard for extremism of any kind, he said. “Any ideology can become extreme.”

Though not a problem in the military, extremism can be a problem in wider Canadian society, he said.

“It’s important for the Canadian Armed Forces to be open to Muslims so we can work together to building a better understanding of the role of faith,” he said. “In the military we take a holistic approach to the human being; faith is a part of that.”

The CAF cares about the “physical fitness and spiritual fitness of our soldiers,” he said.

The CAF has three Muslim chaplains and two rabbis, he said. He would like to have even more diversity among chaplains. Chapdelaine noted the new Minister of National Defence is a Sikh, and he would like to have Sikh chaplains. All chaplains, regardless of their faith, minister to all and if there is a specific religious need, such as access to Catholic sacraments, the chaplain will help the soldier find the help he or she needs, he said.

“I say always chaplains must be grounded in your faith,” he said. “We are on loan from our faith communities. I’d like to return these people in good spiritual health to them.”



CCN/D. Gyapong

MILITARY CHAPLAIN — Brigadier-General Guy Chapdelaine, the Chaplain General of the Canadian Armed Forces, seen in this 2014 photo, led prayers for God’s blessing and guidance at the Remembrance Day Ceremony at the National War Memorial in Ottawa Nov. 11, 2015. He also invited people to use the moment for personal reflection if they so wished. The appointment of Chapdelaine, a Roman Catholic priest of the Archdiocese of Sherbrooke, was announced on Feb. 11, 2015. He has served as military chaplain in Kosovo and in Afghanistan.

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



Live in hope. Live in love. Live in Shalom.

Campus ministry growing in knowledge, numbers

By Michael MacLean

SASKATOON — Students in the St. Thomas More College community have benefitted from STM campus ministry ever since Rev. Ulysses “Bud” Pare, CSB, established the first campus ministry team at STM, which included ordained, religious and lay people working together in collaboration at St. Thomas More College in the 1970s.

The idea was that a balanced team, complete with diversity and variety, would be the most comprehensive way to serve the needs of students.

The present campus ministry team features Michael MacLean, Madeline Oliver and Rev. André Lalache, who presides at Divine Liturgy Fridays in the STM chapel. The team has the support of Rev. Ron Griffin, CSB, who presides at celebration of the eucharist Tuesday to Thursday in the STM chapel at 11:30 a.m. and on Sunday at 11:00 a.m. This fall, the St. Thomas More College campus ministry team also welcomed new part-time team member Rev. Mark Blom, OMI.

Blom is the vocations director for the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. He is able to continue his work in vocations while serving the community at



Jacque Berg

STM CAMPUS MINISTRY — Members of the campus ministry team at St. Thomas More College in Saskatoon include (from left): Rev. Mark Blom, OMI, Rev. André Lalache, Gertrude Rompré, Michael MacLean, Madeline Oliver and Rev. Ron Griffin, CSB.

STM by presiding at the 5 p.m. Sunday celebration of the eucharist, and at the 11:30 a.m. weekday mass on Monday morning. Blom has an interest in discernment and spiritual direction, and he incorporates whatever he can (including props) to

make the Gospel come to life in his homilies.

In a recent report to the STM Corporation, director of Mission and Ministry Gertrude Rompré stated, “At STM, paths of dialogue are created in our interactions with students.” Rompré added that the STM campus ministry team is on the front lines of this encounter, offering a ministry of presence to all students seeking to nurture both their faith and intellectual lives.

She also referred to “innovative programming” — like TED Talk time at STM — as a means to engage students in dialogue. According to its website, “TED is a platform for ideas worth spreading. Started in 1984 as a conference where technology, entertainment and design converged, TED today shares ideas from a broad spectrum — from science to business to global issues — in more than 100 languages. Meanwhile, independent TEDx events help share ideas in communities around the world.”

This year is the third for TED Talk time at STM. It consists of gathering students together to screen a TED talk and engage in discussion, while enjoying snacks provided by the host group. Campus ministry has acted as host a number of times since TED Talk time’s inception in 2013. Other groups to host the event include the department of Religion and Culture, Student Services, Engaged Learning, the

Newman Centre, STMSU, Friends of Sophia, the Knights of Columbus, and *In Medias Res*.

The talks range in their scope, from Education (Sir Ken

Robinson’s talk on schools and creativity) to Religion (AJ Jacobs’ talk on *My Year of Living Biblically*) to living authentically (Brene Brown’s talk on *The Power of Vulnerability*).

The nature of TED talk time is to develop partnerships, and one such relationship that developed this year was with the university’s committee that created events for Sexual Assault Awareness week. In conjunction with the other events that week, STM hosted TED Talk time that was devoted to this topic, screening Jackson Katz’ talk, “Violence against women — it’s a men’s issue.” The entire complement of Peer Health mentors joined the regular audience for pizza and discussion, making that TED talk the highest attended session to date.

Whether it is engaging in dialogue at TED Talk time, chatting in the hallway or cafeteria, or having a one-on-one encounter in the campus ministry office space, all of the STM team members are willing to lend a listening ear with a positive ministry of presence.

For more information see <http://stmcollege.ca/> or Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/campusministry.stm>

Hanukkah celebrated in Regina

By Frank Flegel

REGINA — More than 250 people showed up on a warm Dec. 7 evening to celebrate Hanukkah, the Jewish Festival of Lights, with the ceremonial lighting of a six-metre tall menorah in front of the Saskatchewan Legislative Building.

Rabbi Avraham Simmonds of the Chabad Jewish Centre along with Regina Qu’Appelle Valley MLA Laura Ross and Dr. Jeffrey Judelson perched atop a crane-raised bucket took part in the ceremonial lighting. Ross, representing the premier, who had other commitments that evening, received the honour of lighting the Shamesh, the candle used to light the other candles.

Regina Mayor Michael Fougere also could not be present and sent a letter of good wishes which was read at the reception.

Judelson, a Regina eye doctor the Chabat Centre was honouring that evening, lit the first two lights, as Dec. 7 was the second day of Hanukkah.

Following the lighting, Rabbi Jeremy Parnes of Beth Jacob Synagogue led the singing of traditional Jewish music. Gathering inside one of the building galleries the crowd enjoyed latkes and other traditional Jewish foods.

Hanukkah commemorates the miracle of the Hanukkah oil, in which a one-day supply burned for eight days.



C.J. Katz

HANUKKAH — A giant menorah is lighted as the Regina Jewish community celebrates the Festival of Lights.

Comparison the thief of joy: Yasinski

By Janice Trudel

ALBERTVILLE, Sask. — Ken Yasinski gave simple and practical messages, challenging those who gathered at St. James Parish in Albertville Nov. 16 - 18 to realize their full potential in life.

Known as founder of Face Ministries, which began in Saskatchewan, Yasinski is also a musician, and author of the book *The Fullness of Purpose*. Since a dramatic conversion at a young age, his passion has been to lead others to Christ.

“Experiences in life are useless unless decisions have been made,” he said. “Many of us have experienced God on a personal level. More often than not, we go home without making conscious efforts to change, and if our commitments aren’t conscious, they aren’t concrete.

“When things are used in contradiction to their design, they break,” he continued. “What did God create us for? When we are working in accordance with our design, we will recognize the



Trudel

Ken Yasinski

fruits, such as peace and joy. When we do not recognize our giftedness and instead look to our neighbour and start to compare ourselves, we are not realizing our purpose. Comparison is the thief of all joy.”

During the presentation the second evening, Yasinski explained that a person feels the weight of sins until they are forgiven.

“A parent who loves their child regardless of the things they have done would never turn their back on their child,” Yasinski said. “What parent wouldn’t say to their child, ‘I do not care what you have done, my son; I love you, please come home’? Have we ever considered that our heavenly Father will show us more mercy than any earthly parent is capable of? Would God not desire us to come home?”

The evenings were filled with laughter, ending with the sacrament of reconciliation.

Soup and sandwiches served at the Outpost

By Louis Hradecki

PRINCE ALBERT — On Nov. 21, volunteers from St. Joseph Parish and Sacred Heart Cathedral prepared soup and sandwiches for the hungry at the Outpost. The restaurant-style building is located next to the Salvation Army Thrift Shop on Central Avenue in downtown Prince Albert.

Soup and Sandwich (SOS) is an organization based at Fresh

Start Ministries. Volunteers from multiple denominations prepare and serve lunch on Saturdays on a rotational basis.

Louis Hradecki, social justice co-ordinator for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Prince Albert, has invited all parishes and volunteers to sponsor and participate in SOS at different times throughout the year. The last event was sponsored by the Bishop’s Annual Appeal (BAA).

Riffel High School once again tops in Canada

By Frank Flegel

REGINA — They did it again, for the fifth year in a row. Students at Riffel Catholic High School collected 20,375 pounds of food for the Regina and District Food Bank through the Farm Credit Corporation (FCC) Drive Away Hunger campaign, beating last year’s record of 19,132 pounds, and again were tops in Canada.

Cash donations are also accepted, with each dollar converted into \$3 of buying power. Using that calculation, the total food collected amounted to 27,308 pounds. With this year’s collection, the Riffel community has brought in close to 90,000

pounds for the Regina Food Bank.

FCC Drive Away Hunger national co-ordinator Julie Graham said this is the 12th year for the program. “Schools have always been involved, and this year 402 high school and elementary schools across Canada participated in the program. Riffel has been participating for five years and has topped the country in each of those years.”

Riffel was one of 30 elementary and high schools in Regina that collected food for the campaign.

The food collected at Riffel filled 29 barrels, which were officially weighed at the end of the annual campaign, then loaded

onto an FCC trailer at the back of the school. There was so much food that the Regina Food Bank truck was also called into service. The collection included 90 flats of soup and 300 pounds of baby food.

One of the school activities that encouraged food bank donations was a push-up-a-thon in which donations were received for each push-up completed by participants. Most participants were school athletes.

At the Nov. 26 school assembly, students and staff cheered loudly as 16 brave young men had their legs waxed clean of hair — a result of a promise if the school reached its modest goal of 15,000 pounds.

Regina Food Bank CEO Steve Compton said in an interview that Riffel’s participation has had a positive impact, and not just for the food collected. “Their enthusiasm and school spirit has carried out into other schools and the

community. It has created a competition with other schools and that has helped increase the food collected by other schools.”

What Riffel does, said Compton, is really something special.



Flegel

DRIVE AWAY HUNGER — Students at Riffel Catholic High School collected 20,375 pounds of food for the Regina and District Food Bank through the Farm Credit Corporation Drive Away Hunger campaign.

Diocese bids farewell to Perrault

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

SASKATOON — Celebration of the eucharist, a blessing from the bishop, and a reception with colleagues and friends were features of a celebration held Nov. 30 to bid farewell to diocesan director of pastoral services, Leah Perrault, who has accepted an executive position with Emmanuel Care

lived example.”

Her contributions have included the co-ordination of strategic planning for the Catholic Pastoral Centre and the diocese as a whole, he said. “Her ability to think strategically and structurally has meant that she has spearheaded processes by which we as a diocese have discerned how we can best and most effectively

exercise our ministries. Her theological acumen has meant that she has been able to contribute greatly in the theological discernment processes of recent years.”

Perrault’s theological insights into how God is at work in the human condition have greatly enriched the diocese in many ways, the bishop added,

describing Perrault as “the most creative young theologian in the country.”

Perrault expressed gratitude for the “stroke of grace” that led her to the Diocese of Saskatoon, hired by LeGatt after graduating with a master of arts in pastoral theology from the University of St. Michael’s College in Toronto.

“I was thinking that someday — probably a long time in the future — I would love to be involved in administrative ministry, ministering to people who minister. I thought it would be 40 years away,” Perrault recalled.

Instead, she came to the diocese as a 23-year-old — four months pregnant with her first child. “God led me to understand that I would be able to make space in myself for the People of God, just as I was making space in my body for Robyn,” she said.

“I have great enthusiasm and excitement for the next challenge, but also sadness at leaving,” Perrault begins Dec. 12 as executive lead of Governance Continuation for Emmanuel Care, taking up regular office



Yaworski

PERRAULT FAREWELL — Leah and Marc Perrault at celebration of the eucharist Nov. 30, part of a farewell celebration for Leah, who is leaving her position as co-director of pastoral services in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon for a new role at Emmanuel Care.

(formerly known as Catholic Health Ministry of Saskatchewan).

Since 2007, Perrault has overseen pastoral services in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon, first under Bishop Albert LeGatt and then under the leadership of Bishop Donald Bolen.

Since 2012 diocesan pastoral services offered through the Catholic Pastoral Centre have been co-directed by Perrault and Blake Sittler. Sittler will continue as director after Perrault’s departure Dec. 11. Transition plans for the office include the eventual hiring of a human resources co-ordinator to assist the director.

“Leah Perrault has made an exceptional contribution to the Diocese of Saskatoon over the past eight years. Her influence has gone well beyond the position she has held as director, then co-director, of pastoral services,” said Bolen during his homily at the eucharistic celebration in the Queen of Peace Chapel.

“Leah has been a strong advocate of lay people being able to live fully their vocation in the church, modelling this in her own

hours in the New Year.

Originally from Elrose, Sask., Perrault is also the author of two books, *Theology of the Body for Every Body*, and *How Far Can We Go? A Catholic Guide to Sex and Dating*. She is also the co-founder of Tobias and Sarah Ministries, a columnist/blog author, and well-known speaker. She and husband Marc have three children.

STM honours distinguished alumni

By Karen Massett

SASKATOON — The Annual November Corporation event at St. Thomas More College (STM) in Saskatoon is also the occasion to honour distinguished STM alumni, selected from submitted nominations.

The STM Distinguished Alumni Award is awarded annually to a female and a male graduate of STM whose lifetime accomplishments and achievements have been outstanding, who have made a significant contribution to their community, and who have continued to celebrate their relationship with STM since their graduation.

This year’s recipients were Sister Irene Poelzer and Dr. Jim Dosman, examples of individuals whose life-work

federated Catholic college at the University of Saskatchewan.

Poelzer arrived on the University of Saskatchewan campus in 1947. After graduating from STM, she received her BEd in 1964. She then went on to complete her MA through the College of Education in 1969. Her thesis was entitled *Henry Carr, CSB, 1880 - 1963, Canadian Educator*.

The majority of Poelzer’s career was served as a professor at the University of Saskatchewan’s College of Education. She is considered a pioneer in the field of feminist scholarship in Western Canada. Along the way, she and good friend Margaret Dutli co-founded Friends of Sophia, an interdenominational group of women dedicated to nurturing Christian feminist spirituality.

As a faculty member and leader on the University of Saskatchewan campus, Poelzer has commanded great influence, and her support and commitment to the college remains steadfast over many years. She was awarded the St. Thomas More Medal in 1994.

Dosman was recognized as STM’s 2015 Distinguished Alumnus for his commitment to respiratory medicine, research, public health of rural populations, agricultural and rural environmental exposures, community development and mentorship work that has had a profound impact within Saskatchewan and around the world.

Dosman began his relationship with STM in 1957; he became actively involved in the college and was elected presi-

dent of the STM student body in 1958. He was admitted into the U of S College of Medicine in the fall of 1959, and graduated



Dr. Jim Dosman

with his MD in 1963. He completed his internship at St. Paul’s Hospital and then established a successful family practice in Saskatoon.

Dosman’s interest in medicine then took him to McGill University in Montreal, where he completed his residency in internal medicine, as well as respiratory medicine. Returning to Saskatoon in 1975, he became the founding head of the Division of Respiratory Medicine, College of Medicine, at the University of Saskatchewan.

As a devoted, accomplished and world renowned pioneer in agricultural medicine, Dosman has also received other accolades over the years, which include the Saskatchewan Order of Merit and being named an Officer of the Order of Canada.



Sister Irene Poelzer

and commitment reflect the values and benefits of the education they received from the

Pope Francis leaves no one out in this jubilee year

By Michael Swan
The Catholic Register

The daily pilgrimage of every prisoner takes on new meaning this year, thanks to Pope Francis and the Jubilee Year of Mercy that began on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, Dec. 8. From now until the end of November 2016, each time a prisoner walks across the threshold of his jail cell mercy and relief from the pain of sin awaits.

Pope Francis has made every jail cell door into a holy door for the Year of Mercy.

“May the gesture of directing their thought and prayer to the Father each time they cross the threshold of their cell signify for them their passage through the Holy Door, because the mercy of God is able to transform hearts, and is also able to transform bars into an experience of freedom,” the pope wrote in a letter to Archbishop Rino Fisichella, president of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization. The Sept. 1 letter lays out conditions the faithful must fulfil to obtain a plenary indulgence during the Year of Mercy.

“When I read that, I tweeted that everywhere,” said an excited Rev. Ted Hughes. “Like everything Pope Francis is doing, if people are informed of it I think it has meaning in their life — especially for prisoners, for sure.”

Hughes is a Catholic representative to the federal prison system’s interfaith chaplaincy advisory board and a regular speaker on prison life and prison ministry.

The concept of an indulgence may be more than a little foreign to most convicts, but that doesn’t mean the extension of mercy to

prisoners is not meaningful, said Hughes.

“Prisoners wouldn’t really know what indulgences were per se,” conceded Hughes. “But the fact the pope said that there’s something special about this — like it’s in the cathedrals, it’s in St. Peter’s, it’s in some basilicas and it’s in your jail — it certainly would make them think.”

In fact, the concept of indulgences is a little hard to grasp for many Catholics, not just the jail-

house population.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains it as “remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints.”



Catholic Register/Michael Swan

HOLY DOOR — Even the prisoner can partake in the Year of Mercy. Pope Francis has decreed that the inmate’s cell door is equal to a holy door for this Year of Mercy.

In lay terms, indulgences begin with the understanding that there are always consequences for sin — whether we’re aware of them or not. A plenary indulgence, an expression of God’s mercy on sinners, is a way to mitigate those consequences by lessening time in purgatory or relieving a repentant’s spiritual suffering on earth.

Like indulgences that have been declared for jubilee years over the centuries — there have been 26 ordinary jubilees and three extraordinary; this Year of Mercy is extraordinary — the usual procedure for obtaining an indulgence is to make a pilgrimage that ends by passing through a designated holy door, making confession, receiving communion (it’s better but not essential that this be done at mass) and praying for the pope’s intentions.

The language of the church is often grandly metaphorical because the reality of our salvation cannot be squeezed into ordinary words.

Freedom is difficult to understand unless we attach it to the act of being set free. For the earth bound, freedom only exists in contrast to its opposite. But for God, freedom pre-exists the prisons we build for ourselves and others. Freedom came before the things that tie us down — our punishments, our sins, even death. Mercy exists even before our oppression, our bondage, our limitations, our difficulties. Our punishments, our pain, our struggles are the exception in a universe God created in love and for love.

So we talk of mercy and indulgence, but God talks of love and freedom.

The metaphors of Christian life are never restricted to words. They extend to our actions and our way of being. Thus the tradition of indulgences in the Catholic Church is wound up intimately with the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

— RICHNESS, page 9

No Ordinary Man

The Memoirs of Alphonse Gerwing

The heart-warming and humorous memoirs of a great friend of the *Prairie Messenger* and the poor. **\$20**

To order contact:
Ted Gerwing: tedgerwing@sasktel.net 306-374-9771
Steve Buttinger: sbuttinger@sasktel.net 306-374-3345

To make a tax deductible donation make cheques payable to:
The Al Gerwing Foundation, 14 Harvard Cres., Saskatoon SK S7H 3R1
To donate online visit: The Alphonse Gerwing Foundation website.

“I bring you good tidings of great joy!”

Merry Christmas and warm wishes for a blessed new year from Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools.

www.gscs.sk.ca

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

*On the occasion of the joyful Feast of the Nativity of our Lord, we extend to all the readers of the *Prairie Messenger* the wonderful tidings of Emmanuel, that God is with us and understand this all you nations! For unto us a Child is given!*

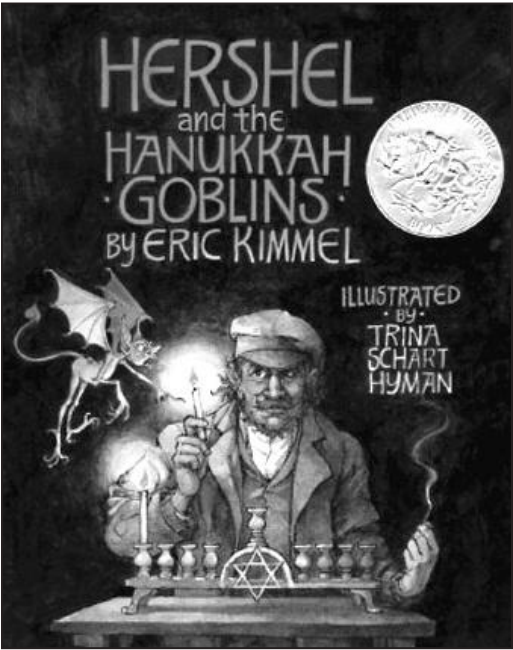
May this Child bring you and yours joy, health, peace and spiritual blessings at Christmas and throughout the year!

Bishop Bryan Bayda, CSsR,
Bishop Emeritus
Michael Wiwchar, CSsR,
the clergy,
the religious members
and all the faithful of the
Eparchy of Saskatoon

Books that bring inspiration and ideas to gift lists

By RNS STAFF
©2015 Religion News Service

Hunting for books of faith, spirit, and social significance for Christmas or Hanukkah? Here are gift-worthy suggestions compiled by the RNS staff. Check this of list of new books (and one classic).



Imagined worlds

The Book of Strange New Things by Michel Faber. From Frankenstein to I, Robot, literary scholars have seen science fiction as a genre where religion and theology can be explored. Faber follows Peter, a Christian missionary (like Jesus’ disciple), sent by a big corporation to evangelize aliens living on a planet the corporation wants to mine. He comes to question the role of faith, the nature of good and evil and the responsibilities of a righteous individual. (Hogarth Press, \$28)

The Secret Chord by Geraldine Brooks. Vacation Bible School meets literary fiction! Pulitzer Prize-winner Brooks (March) imagines the life of King David, complete with his many loves, only one of which was

music and one of which was a dude. Brooks has an amazing ability to express the inner voices of her characters, particularly the women. The voices of David’s wives really sing. (Viking Press, \$27.95)

Inspiring looks

Radical Love by Toni Greaves. Photographer Toni Greaves documents the growth of an unexpected religious calling in the life of a college student named Lauren — and her countercultural decision to dedicate her life to God. This gorgeous photo book follows Lauren’s transformation into Sister Maria Teresa of the Sacred Heart, amid her cloistered community of Dominican nuns in Summit, N.J. (Chronicle Books, \$40)

The Art of Grace: On Moving Well Through Life, by Sarah Kaufman. Why does watching Cary Grant makes us swoon? His secret is grace: what we tell each other with our posture, our motion, our eyes and our ways of relating to each other, body — and soul — says Kaufman. She’s a dance critic who won a Pulitzer Prize for social commentary. Her celebrity-packed book of essays is joyful, thoughtful and helpful, too. (W.W. Norton, \$24.95)

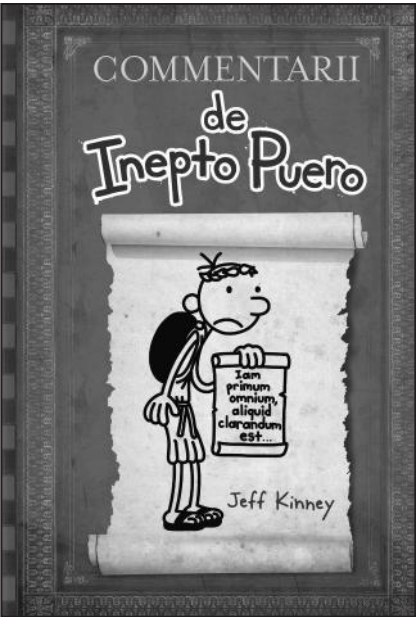
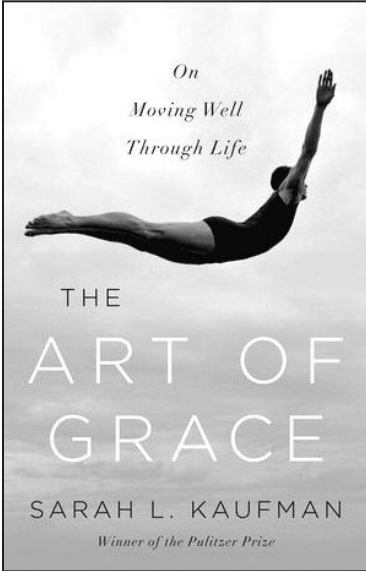
Opening the Good Eye: A Path to True Seeing, by Michael Wood. Seeing the beauty of the world “directly and unconditionally,” without judgment, can be a spiritual practice, and Wood, one of the originators of the contemplative photography movement in modern photography, is a world-class guru.

Opening the Good Eye teaches how to break out of our tired, routine, ways of seeing the world and discover a way that is clear and pure. It’s based on 32 years of teaching contemplative photography workshops worldwide. (Miksang Publications, \$24.95)

Challenging

Faithfully Feminist: Jewish, Christian & Muslim Feminists on Why We Stay, edited by Gina Messina-Dysart, Jennifer Zobair and Amy Levin. The three women who edited this compilation — one Christian, one Muslim, one Jewish — offer essays from 45 women on why they persist in their faith when it can treat women as less than equal to men. Many in this diverse group of essayists confess to having seriously considered chucking faith, or at least their own religious tradition. Some of them actually did leave, only to return. (White Cloud Press, \$8.98)

Ferguson & Faith: Sparking Leadership & Awakening Community by Leah Gunning Francis. Gunning Francis, an associate dean at a seminary in St. Louis, had a front seat to the unrest in Ferguson, Mo., after the fatal shooting of Michael Brown, an



unarmed black teen, by a white police officer. Clergy and young activists in the St. Louis area told Francis about the risks and challenges in their new work together and offer suggestions for how other faith communities can work to foster racial justice. (Chalice Press, \$15.99)

Merchants in the Temple by Gianluigi Nuzzi. For those fascinated by secrecy, wealth and power, look no further than Nuzzi’s new book. Using leaked documents and recordings of high-level Vatican meetings, Nuzzi reveals Pope Francis’ struggle to reform the Holy See administration and its murky finances. Consequently, Nuzzi and another journalist who published a similar book have been put on trial at the Vatican, alarming press freedom groups. (Macmillan, \$28)

Our Kids by Robert Putnam. Public policy expert Putnam, “a nice Jewish formerly Methodist boy,” writes about social change and the next generation. His fact-laden book that reads like a tent meeting revival, complete with an “altar call” for action at the end. He wants to awaken and inspire people to “save” young people from a soul-killing spiral of fractured families, poor schooling, and grim economic futures. (Simon & Schuster, \$28)

Not in God’s Name: Confronting Religious Violence by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (see review, this issue). The rise of religiosity in the 21st century alarms Sacks, the former chief

rabbi of Great Britain, because it often expresses itself violently. But religious terrorists do not act in God’s name, Sacks writes. He offers religion as an antidote to the radical and a path to peace, and calls on moderates within every faith to teach this tolerance to those within their own folds. (Penguin Random House, \$28.95)

Black Earth by Timothy Snyder. It’s not easy to write a book that posits a new way of looking at the Holocaust, and some critics say Snyder does not entirely succeed. But he does draw our attention to the horrific way it played out in eastern Europe. (Penguin, Random House, \$30)

Young readers

Commentarii de Inepto Puero by Monsignor Daniel B. Gallagher. If you know an intelligent, inquisitive kid who happens to love Diary of a Wimpy Kid, why not pick up the Latin version? Commentarii de Inepto Puero translation tells the same boyhood tale with a 21st-century take on Latin. Gallagher — who happens to write Pope Francis’ Latin tweets — said he wanted to show children how the ancient language can still be relevant to modern-day life. (Amulet Books, \$16.95)

Hershel and the Hanukkah Goblins: 25th anniversary edition by Eric A. Kimmel. Unlike all the new books on this list, Kimmel’s book was originally published in 1989. But, as noted by last year’s anniversary edition, this Caldecott honour book is still in print. And it still offers one of the best, true-to-Jewish-theology children’s tales. Hershel cleverly outwits goblins that have extinguished the candles and darkened Jewish village’s Hanukkah celebrations. By his wits and dedication, he restores the lights of the faithful. (Holiday House \$17.95)

I Am Malala by Malala Yousafzai. An inspiring book by this young Nobel Prize winner who was shot for advocating education for girls, introduces your child to a conflict in another part of the world that affects us all. (Little, Brown and Company, \$26)

PROGRAM TEAM MEMBER

Are you a dynamic and energetic person who wants to make a difference in people’s spiritual growth? Do you thrive on being part of an energetic and enthusiastic team? Do you love to create, organize and try new things?

We are looking for a team player who enjoys working with people, and likes to not only plan, but also bring plans to fruition. An integral member of the program team, this person will collaborate with other team members in planning, creating and administering spiritual programs and retreats in keeping with the Mission of Providence Renewal Centre. He or she will be both a creative and practical person, who can take a lead role in marketing and advertising program events, implementing program offerings and growing our retreat community.

Qualifications:

The successful candidate should have:

- Excellent marketing and project management skills
- Experience in program development and coordination
- Outstanding communication skills and experience facilitating groups
- Ability to work in a multi-task team environment
- A Certificate, Diploma or Degree in Theology or a related field
- Training as a spiritual director would be an asset

Starting salary is negotiable, depending on qualifications and experience. This is a full-time position with some evening and weekend work.

Deadline for applications is **January 18, 2016.**

Please submit applications to: **Executive Director
Providence Renewal Centre
3005 119 Street NW, Edmonton AB T6J 5R5
cking@providencerenewal.ca**

Only those candidates considered for an interview will be contacted.

Providence Renewal Centre is an ecumenically based retreat and conference centre committed to Christian hospitality, Christ-centred spirituality, fostering personal and communal renewal and holistic growth. Providence Renewal Centre is owned and supported by the Sisters of Providence.

Richness to be discovered

Continued from page 8

Pope Francis hopes Catholics will “rediscover the richness encompassed by the spiritual and corporal works of mercy” this year.

“Each time that one of the faithful personally performs one or more of these actions, he or she shall surely obtain the Jubilee Indulgence,” he wrote Sept. 1. “Hence the commitment to live by mercy so as to obtain the grace of complete and exhaustive forgiveness by the power of the love of the Father who excludes no one.”

It isn’t just prisoners whom the pope has singled out for special treatment. Pope Francis also wants women who have had abortions to know that neither God nor the church has abandoned them.

“I am aware of the pressure that has led them to this decision,” he wrote. “I know that it is an existential and moral ordeal. I have met so many women who bear in their heart the scar of this agonizing and painful decision. What has happened is profoundly unjust; yet only understanding the truth of it can enable one not to lose hope.”

During the Year of Mercy, by special permission, every priest who hears confessions may forgive the sin of abortion and fulfil that forgiveness with “words of genuine welcome.”

Such a welcome would erase the automatic excommunication of those who actively seek an abortion — a function normally reserved to the bishop or priests specially designated by the bishop for this duty.

Christmas doesn't ever have to be a charade

By Caitlin Ward

So the pope cancelled Christmas this year. Well, not quite. Shortly before the Advent season began, he said that this year, “it’s all a charade. The world has not understood the way of peace. The whole world is at war.”

I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day

Johnny Marks, from the poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Of course, Pope Francis was speaking in a particular context — it was mere days after the Paris attacks and the bombings in Beirut. The world was reeling from a series of very violent and very public acts of terrorism, and the response from the West implied retaliatory violence that has now come to pass.

It’s true that events are particularly chilling right now. Nations in the west have responded to isolated acts of terror not with compassion for those who might be in similar situations, but with vengeance. The humanitarian efforts to give Syrian refugees safe haven are stalling, thwarted by fear, suspicion, and bigotry. The Republican primaries are giving me night terrors. Some candidates, who shall not be named because I shan’t give that wretched man more press than I have to, have suggested a ban on bringing Muslims into the United States because . . . reasons. I guess poet Emma Lazarus wasn’t refer-

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

ring to refugees fleeing a wartorn homeland when she asked for “your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free” in the New Colossus, a sonnet carved in bronze at the foot of the Statue of Liberty. She must not have been referring to Mexicans, either, because I hear they’re going

to build a wall, or something.

By contrast, the efforts to gain retribution have been going swimmingly. On the other side of the Atlantic on Dec. 3, MPs cheered in the British House of Commons as they voted to bomb ISIS targets in Syria, surely knowing full well that there would be a substantial amount of collateral damage — and by collateral damage, of course, we mean dead civilians. The vote to bomb a country seems disturbing at the best of times, but

I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, goodwill to men

I thought, as now this day had come
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rung so long the unbroken song
Of peace on earth, goodwill to men

Peace on earth, goodwill to men

And in despair I bowed my head
There is no peace on earth I said
For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, goodwill to men

Then peal the bells more loud and deep
God is not dead, nor doth he sleep
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail
With peace on earth, goodwill to men

the idea that people would be doing it so gleefully makes me very worried for the future of our communities and frankly, for our souls, as well. We’re really missing the mark on this peace on earth and goodwill toward all business this holiday season.

As I write this, though, I wonder if Francis was only referring to *this* year’s Christmas season as a charade. This is hardly the first year that the world has been consumed with violence over Advent, and arguably it’s not the worst it’s ever been, either. The lyrics of I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day, a lesser-known mid-century Christmas carol, come from a poem written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow around 1863. The poem is somewhat longer than the lyric, and it places this feeling of despair within the context of the American Civil War: “Then from each black, accursed mouth / The cannon thundered in the South.”

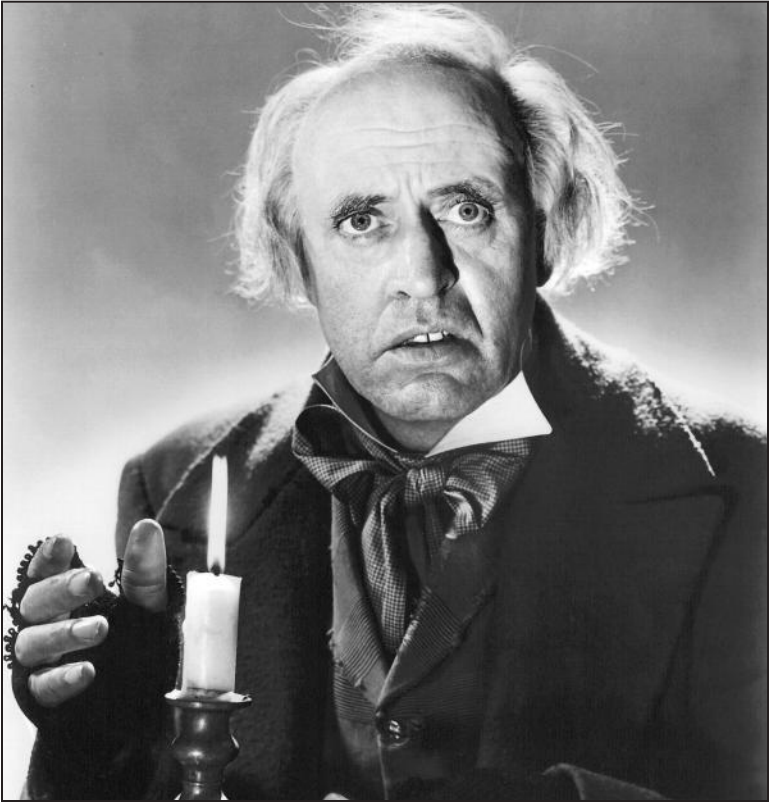
Pope Francis is clearly not the first person who felt Christmas was a bit of a charade. Unfortunately, history has already set a precedent that the world does not understand the way of peace, and I am reminded of a line by Seamus Heaney: “it is difficult at times to suppress the thought that history is about as instructive as an abattoir; that Tacitus was right and that peace is merely the desolation left behind after the decisive operations of merciless power.”

Because, you know. It’s the Christmas season. What better time is there to ruminate on the failures of humanity?

Actually, I don’t know

if there is a better season to ruminate on those failures — but not in the sense that we fill ourselves with self-loathing and refuse to celebrate the season. Rather, let us ruminate on why we reverence Christmas at all. As we move through the Advent season and approach Christmas Day, we prepare to celebrate the Incarnation. We prepare to celebrate the Divine made human so he could declare the kingdom, institute the eucharist, and bear the weight of human sin on our behalf.

So really, Christmas doesn’t have to be a charade this year, or any year, regardless of what’s going on in the wider world. It only becomes a charade if we forget why we celebrate it. God didn’t send his only Son because we get it right; he sent him because we get it so terribly, tragically, almost comically wrong so often. That’s not to say, of course, that violence is inevitable, or that we are incapable of choosing the better part. It’s just that we can’t do it alone.




VCJ Entertainment

A CHRISTMAS CAROL — A Christmas Carol (1951) starring Alastair Sim (seen here) as Ebenezer Scrooge is the definitive version of the Dickens classic — the most faithful to the novella. Enjoy some family time on a dark December night and watch what some film critics have called the greatest film ever made.

May the wonder and joy
of Christmas
bless our families,
associates and friends.


The Ursulines of Bruno



Emmanuel
Care

A Catholic Health Organization

With you on your journey toward health,
healing and a better quality of life.




A light will shine on
us this day:
The Lord is
born for us!

Psalm 97

Merry Christmas & Blessed New Year


From Board of Directors & Staff
of Emmanuel Care
formerly the Catholic Health Ministry of Saskatchewan



Queen's House

Retreat and Renewal Centre

Want to keep Christ in Christmas?



Feed the Hungry,
Clothe the naked,
Forgive the guilty,
Welcome the unwanted,
Care for the ill,
Love your enemies,
And do unto others
As you would have done unto you.

The Staff of Queen's House with the
Oblates of Mary Immaculate,
wish you Christ's peace, joy and love this Season.

601 Taylor St. West, Saskatoon SK S7M 0C9
www.queenshouse.org Ph: 306-242-1916

For Christmas: a challenge to Abrahamic faiths

Readings & Meanings

Gerald Schmitz



This penetrating volume from the author of more than 25 books (see www.rabbisacks.org) makes for timely reading as the terrible consequences of terrorist outrages claiming religious justification contrast so cruelly with a season celebrating the birth of the “Prince of Peace.” If Sacks’ message can

sis in original).” We must ask how the God of Abraham speaks to Jews, Christians and Muslims today. Sacks observes that violence has been endemic in human society ever since our ancestors first formed into groups, competed and conflicted over territory and

Not in God’s Name: Confronting Religious Violence
By Rabbi Jonathan Sacks
(Penguin/Random House ©2015; 320 pages)

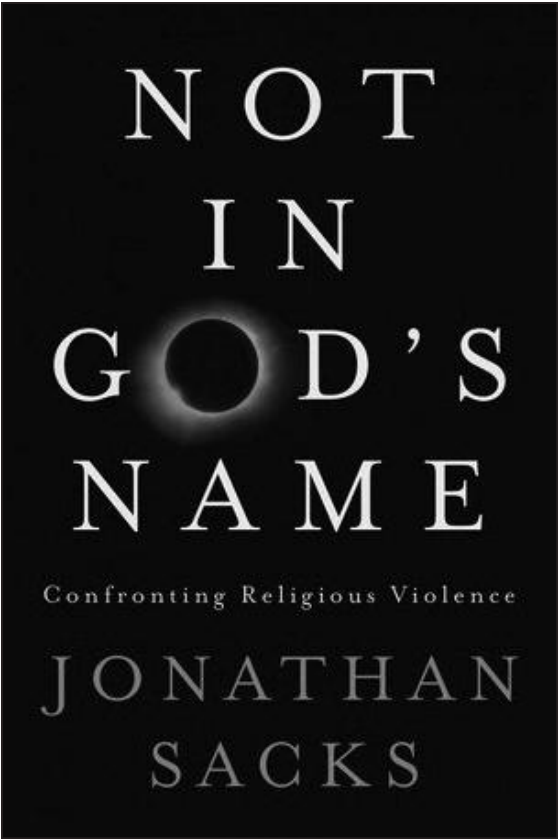
be summed up in a single sentence it is that “Religiously motivated violence must be fought religiously as well as militarily, and with passionate intensity, for this will be one of the defining battles of the twenty-first century.” Islam today is the Abrahamic religion undergoing the most wrenching challenge, but historically all three Abrahamic monotheisms — Judaism, Christianity, Islam — have struggled with violent extremisms committed in their name. It was Christianity’s barbaric 17th-century “wars of religion” that Blaise Pascal had in mind when he wrote: “Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction.” That warning prefaces Part I of Sacks’ book on “Bad Faith” in which he analyzes the religious sources of what he calls “altruistic evil,” i.e. the justification of intrinsically evil actions (torture, murder, slavery) on the grounds of a religious ideal or duty. In the ancient world polytheistic religions were linked to the holders of political power. They were cults sanctifying the rulers. Abrahamic monotheism arose as a sustained protest against idolatry, promising liberation and affirming the inherent worth of each person as children of one God. Yet Abrahamic religions too have been corrupted by alliances with power. Reformation movements have provoked violent reaction and contestation, most virulently when spread by revolutionary advances in communications technologies. It’s no accident that the invention of the printing press preceded the Protestant Reformation and Europe’s worst religious wars. Today the Islamic extremists who condemn western secularization and want to purify Islam (indeed a majority of their victims are Muslims) propagate their struggle through digital social media. Sacks argues that an answer to such eruptions of religious violence must go to the original Abrahamic religious sources themselves: “If we do not do the theological work, we will face a continuation of the terror that has marked our century thus far, for it has no natural end (empha-

resources. When directed against outsiders the identities and loyalties that arise within social groups can acquire dangerous religious overtones. This is particularly the case for dualistic conceptions that divide “us” from “them.” Dualism has dire consequences if it leads to a dehumanization and demonization of the other. As he puts it: “Violence may be possible whenever there is an Us and a Them. But radical violence emerges only when we see the Us as all-good and the them as all-evil, heralding a war between the children of light and the forces of darkness. That is when altruistic evil is born.” Anti-Semitism is the longest standing manifestation of this violence and “is important because it illustrates more clearly than any other phenomenon the psychological and social dynamic of hate.” When it took on racial as well as religious connotations, conversion would not suffice; only extermination could satisfy the haters. Jews had no power in Nazi Germany yet the Nazis presented Germany as the victim of a Jewish conspiracy. In much of the Arab world a rampant “Judeophobia” makes the tiny minorities that remain a scapegoat for various ills. This dualistic scapegoating is most lethal in times of acute social stress. What accounts for the “sibling rivalry” that has produced violent antagonisms among the Abrahamic faiths? Sacks traces it back to the Book of Genesis, noting that in the Bible the first murder, of Abel by Cain, was a fratricide. Divergent readings of sacred Scriptures have led to contending claims to be the true heirs to the covenant God made with Abraham. Jesus and his disciples were all Jews. But for later Christians his coming could be seen as completing and superseding the original with a new covenant. For Muslims Jesus was a prophet in a line leading from Abraham to Muhammad as the messenger of God’s final revelation in the Quran. In Part II, “Siblings,” Sacks delves further into the foundational texts of the Hebrew Bible in a detailed exegesis that reinterprets the central narratives. Take the story of the sons of

Abraham, the first-born Ishmael and his half-brother Isaac. Islam privileges its descent from Ishmael; Judaeo-Christianity from Isaac. Sacks insists that *both* sons should be seen as blessed by God. Similarly with the sons of Isaac: the first-born Esau robbed of his father’s rightful blessing by Jacob’s deception. After Jacob wrestled with the angel there was a reconciliation that imparted God’s blessing to both brothers despite their different destinies. From Jacob’s line comes the story of his son Joseph, hated by his 12 jealous older brothers and sold into slavery in Egypt. Ultimately this story becomes one of atonement and forgiving fraternal reconciliation. To quote Sacks: “The Joseph story brings Genesis to a close by showing that sibling rivalry is not written indelibly into the human script. We can change, repent and grow. . . . The point could not be more significant in the context of the sibling rivalry between Judaism, Christianity and Islam.” Properly understood, these narratives provide “the Bible’s own refutation of the mindset that says that human beings who stand outside our community of faith are somehow less than fully human.” Crucial to a process of reconciliation is “role reversal” — i.e. the ability to put oneself in the place of the other, to experience what it is like to be the other, the outsider, the stranger. In Part III, “The Open Heart,” Sacks begins with the contemporary story of Csanad Szegedi, a leading neo-fascist Hungarian politician who renounced anti-Semitism upon discovering he had Jewish grandparents who survived Auschwitz. The challenge for humanity generally is to overcome the powerful dualisms of “us” against “them” that can be most destructive when cloaked in religious or moralistic language. That means learning to love not just our neighbours but strangers (even our “enemies” in Christianity’s most demanding expression). For Sacks, God’s injunctions form a universal covenant that precedes all others, but without imposing a uniformity erasing different identities. So Genesis “begins with universal archetypes — Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, the Flood, the covenant with Noah and the critique of Babel — and only then turns to the particularity of the Abrahamic covenant,” which gives a role to a “chosen people” — one that demands more of them as examples of God’s love, and frequently calls them to repentance too. That said, the Bible, like the Quran, contains some “hard texts” which can be exploited by religious extremists (and militant atheists) — presented as commands justifying violence. History has proven how, in Shakespeare’s words, “the devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.” That is why fundamentalist literalist readings of troubling passages are so dangerous and why deeper theological reflection is so important.

Equally important is the relinquishing of worldly power. Judaism was first to fall prey to internecine political violence. Indeed, observes Sacks: “What makes the fall of Jerusalem relevant to the politics of the twenty-first century is that it saw the first appearance in history of religiously motivated terror.” That was terror against fellow Jews. The result was self-inflicted tragedy. In the Middle Ages Christendom and an imperial papacy dissolved into terrible religious wars. Now we are witnessing deadly schismatic wars within Islam, such as between Sunnis and Shiites. Power allied to the imposition of religious uniformity is a disaster for religious freedom and tolerance. Extreme religious violence has also arisen from apocalyptic dualisms. As is currently the case with the so-called “Islamic State,” these envisage a final conflict between good and evil ending with the tri-

because Islam was immune from the virus for so long.” We are shocked by Islamist videos showing children being indoctrinated in hate and trained to kill, to become suicide bombers. But do we have an answer? Sacks observes that religious impulses are increasing in much of the world even as a secularized West has been losing faith in “the values that used to be called the Judaeo-Christian heritage (and instead) chosen to worship the idols of the self. . . . Faced with a culture of individualism and hedonism, it is not surprising that young radicals . . . turn elsewhere to express their altruism, even if it involves acts that are brutal and barbaric. Every time a movement like al-Qaeda is defeated, another will arise to take its place. Young people, in search of meaning, identity and community will continue to be recruited to the cause. (. . .) All the military interventions in the world will not stop the violence.” Noting that the old scourge of anti-Semitism runs through the new wave of religious violence, Sacks gives “special praise” to the Jewish-Christian dialogue promoted by popes since John XXIII and especially Pope Francis. “The church, in the West, has begun to overcome its sibling rivalry with Judaism. If it can happen between Christians and Jews, it can happen between them and Islam also.” Sacks concludes with a hopeful challenge that deserves citing at length: *We need to recover the absolute values that make Abrahamic monotheism the humanizing force it has been at its best: the sanctity of life, the dignity of the individual, the twin imperatives of justice and compassion, the moral responsibility of the rich for the poor, the commands to love the neighbour and stranger, the insistence on peaceful modes of conflict resolution and listening to the other side of a case, forgiving the injuries of the past and focusing instead on building a future in which the children of the world, of all colours, faith and races, can live together in grace and peace. These are the ideals on which Jews, Christians and Muslims can converge, widening their embrace to include those of other faiths and none.* Why read a book by a Jewish rabbi? Because if Christmas is to mean more than shopping lists and seasonal rituals, the message he brings about the God of Abraham should resonate in every heart.



Emmanuel: place trust in the Prince of Peace

This editorial by Andrew Britz, OSB, titled Emmanuel, is from the Dec. 18, 2002, issue of the Prairie Messenger. It can be found in his book Rule of Faith: As we worship, so we believe, so we live.

“The Lord will give you a sign. Look, the virgin is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Emmanuel” (Is 7:14).

Down through the ages this prophecy of Isaiah has remained one of the church’s favourites. It was originally proclaimed during wartime and thus has a special poignancy this year, as some leaders of the western world appear eager to go to war.

Ahaz refused to listen to Isaiah. His prophetic word was painful, not because it demanded great ascetical or difficult tasks, but because it drove him to the core of his being. It called him to faith, to trust — in the face of the utter truth about himself.

All of us tend not to look too deeply into ourselves. Only with pain and self-doubt do we ever move beyond the masks we create for ourselves.

Ahaz could not move beyond his mask. The king had paraded himself publicly in Jerusalem as a strong man, as the one the people could trust to confront without fear the advancing armies outside

the city gates. The people did not believe this; but that was not the problem. Life became more dangerous for everyone when Ahaz started to believe he **was** the mask he had so carefully constructed.

The king’s solution was simple: it was not too late to build up his army and screw up his courage. This, however, ran contrary to the advice the prophet gave him. Isaiah had warned: “If you do not stand by me (put your faith in God), you will not stand at all” (Is 7:9).

Ahaz would have listened to the prophet had Isaiah asked him to execute some act of valour before the enemy. But Ahaz knew the prophet too well; he knew part of the sign from God would include placing his trust in the Lord. That he could not do.

Trust is built on inner honesty. Trust is the acknowledgment that we cannot do it alone, that our inner resources are not sufficient to carry the day. It is indeed a death to our pride, asking instead that the Lord begin afresh with us.

Isaiah knew that Ahaz was lying when he said that he did not want to test the Lord. He knew that the king was not ready to trust the Lord.

Isaiah was bitterly disappointed. He had hoped against hope that the king would tear off his mask and learn to trust. While he knew that God could not be present effectively in Jerusalem as long as there was no trust, he continued to hope, to dream of a time when God would be so close to his people that they would call him Emmanuel — God is with us.

From the earliest days of the church, Christians have seen in the virgin birth the fulfilment of Isaiah’s dream. Mary has become the model that Ahaz refused to be. While Ahaz could not trust the Lord enough to open his city gates and allow the Lord to hammer his swords into ploughshares, Mary believed that God would fulfil her. She knew that God would fill her emptiness, could make her virginal womb burst forth into new life.

Isaiah did not believe he was asking the impossible of Ahaz. In fact, the prophet felt the king had nothing to lose. Since Ahaz did

not have a prophet’s far-seeing eyes, Isaiah knew that the king could only see defeat and humiliation before him. Yet even this did not turn his head. It was still easier for Ahaz to believe in his mask and in his sword — even in the face of hopelessness — than to turn and trust the Lord.

Political leaders have the “marvellous” ability to view the world in terms of brute power, and though they weave lie upon lie to give their use of such power a benevolent face, they all too often become the first victims of their lies. (It is not at all impossible that George W. Bush believed his rhetoric of wishing to bring democracy to Iraq rather than of gaining control of one of the world’s largest oil fields.)

Isaiah eventually gave up on Ahaz. Though Ahaz was a descendent of King David, the prophet did not see any good coming from him. Indeed, he went back before David to his father Jesse. According to Isaiah,

it made more sense to believe new life could come from the stump of Jesse than to hope for something from those petty rulers who could not see beyond their sword (see Is 11:1).

Here we see the true meaning of Mary’s virginity. St. Matthew, in tying the virgin birth of Mary’s child with the Emmanuel prophecy of old (see Mt 1:23), is not saying that a virgin birth is something greater or more noble than marriage, or that being born of a virgin is a holier way of coming into the world than is the normal sexual route the rest of us took.

But he is saying that Isaiah’s call to trust in the grave of Jesse, that a new shoot would spring from it, is child’s play alongside belief in the fruitfulness of a virgin, that salvation will always be a new thing calling us to part with the sword of Ahaz that we might know the Prince of Peace “who judges not on appearances or hearsay but with integrity and justice” (Is 11:3).



The Flight into Egypt by Giotto di Bondone (1304 - 06)

Jesus the refugee: ‘nowhere to lay his head’

On the cover:

Iraqi Christian children look at a Nativity scene that was displayed in a tent erected in the grounds of Mazar Mar Eillia Catholic Church, in Ankawa, in this December 2014 photo. The camp has become home to hundreds of Iraqi Christians who were forced to flee their homes as the Islamic State advanced. Some came to Ankawa thinking they would be there only a short time, but as the months go by they are losing hope of ever returning home.

The world, it seems, continues to be plagued by this problem. In a December 1992 editorial titled

“Jesus the refugee,” Andrew Britz, OSB, wrote, “Matthew used all his skill as a Jewish storyteller to relate the meaning of Christ’s birth among us. The cold, calculating violence that the power structures of his time would muster against the hapless Son of Man ‘who had nowhere to lay his head’ (Mt 8:20) is brilliantly told in the story of the flight into Egypt (2:13-18).”

“This story takes on a terrible new meaning in our day. Never in the history of our human family have there been more refugees than there are today. Even more significantly: never has a higher proportion of the human family been homeless and hungry than

today. . . . Individual Christians — and certainly the churches — should have no time to waste romanticizing about a sweet Jesus predesigned to make us comfortable. Jesus, the refugee, should become an important element in our Christmas liturgy and meditation.

“Not only refugees would profit from such Christian action. We too would be the beneficiaries. The fascist god of racism and nationalism that we struggled so hard to destroy in the Second World War is increasingly finding a place in our western hearts. As never before we need to receive the Messiah who ‘had nowhere to lay his head.’ ”

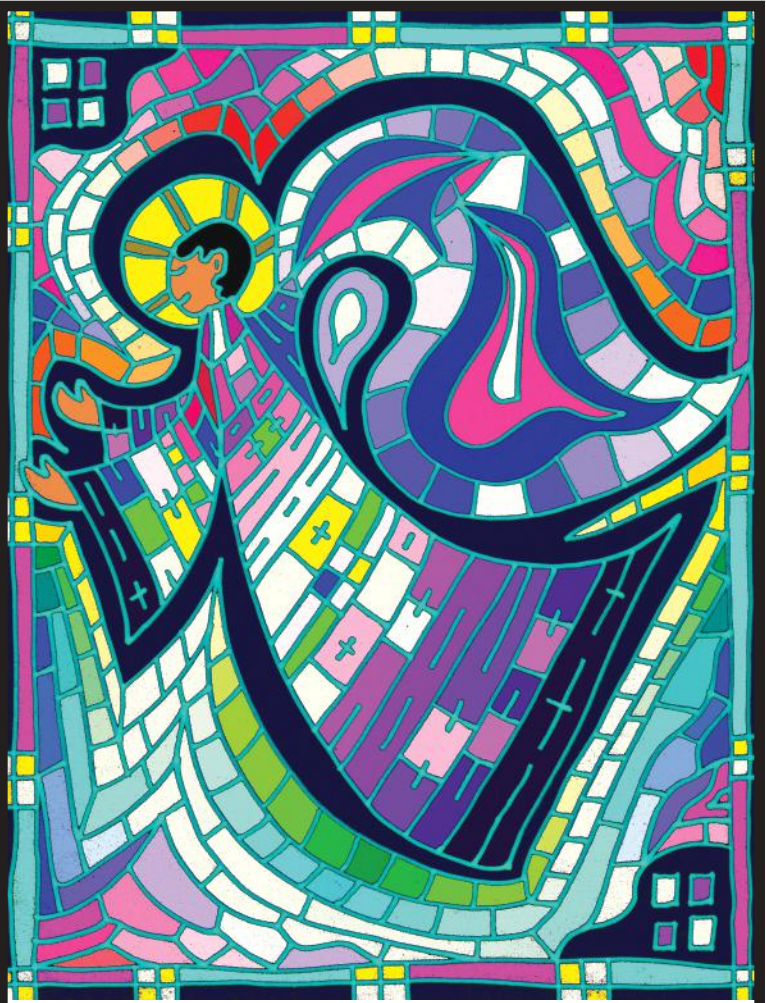
Peace begins in the heart



and reaches around the world...

Christmas Blessings!

The Sisters of Providence
Providence Centre -
Providence Renewal Centre
3005 – 119 Street NW
Edmonton, AB T6J 5R5
www.sistersofprovidence.ca



Stushie Art

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward all!” (Lk 2:13-14)

May you be blessed with peace and joy.
Merry Christmas from the editors and staff at
the Prairie Messenger and St. Peter’s Press.

Climate justice: the church’s challenging ministry

By Joe Gunn

The United Nations’ 21st Conference of the Parties on Climate Change (COP 21) ended earlier this month. The real work for Canadians now begins: reducing our greenhouse gas emissions in substantial ways so that we can meet the targets established through these global negotiations. That job will be tough enough to accomplish, but certainly more difficult if all our neighbours are not “on-board” with the effort. Imagine that you go to all the effort of attempting to live more simply, reducing your unnecessary driving or car-pooling, retrofitting your home, planting trees and using fewer chemicals on your lawn, etc., but at the same time see your neighbour doing exactly the opposite. Would that encourage or deflate your enthusiasm to create change?

Among faith communities, significant leadership in addressing climate change has been evidenced in recent months. Pope Francis released the first-ever encyclical on environmental justice, and the Canadian bishops have now joined in his refrain. However, an unhelpful and strident backlash has arisen from some organizations that question climate action from their particular understanding of their Christian faith.

Prominent among these is the organization known as LifeSite, which describes itself as “a non-profit Internet service dedicated to issues of culture, life and family.” Readers will remember this group for its denunciation of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace’s partners in the Global South,

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

labelling them as pro-abortion organizations. (Even when the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops visited the countries and consulted bishops from where these accusations emanated, giving CCODP their *nihil obstat*, LifeSite did not relent.) And now LifeSite has posted material on their website linking “the culture of death” to climate action.

LifeSite’s Paris correspondent believes that “saving the planet” in climate-speak “is foremost an anti-human enterprise.” This argument is advanced because, she believes, environmentalists have population control as their real agenda. Yet at the same time, she readily admits, at the Paris COP, “the draft agreement does not address population control.” LifeSite has even posted videos on its website produced by the Heartland Institute, a well-funded Chicago-based conservative and libertarian public policy think-tank, which has become the planet’s foremost climate denial organization. Supported by Tea Party groups today, in the 1990s Heartland was renowned for working with the Philip Morris tobacco company to question serious cancer risks of second-hand smoke, and lobbied against government public health regulations. This could hardly be considered “pro-life” activity.

Of course, social conservatives who deny climate change are present in other sectors of society — even if they are becoming an endangered species. Just last week, the New York Times reported that only eight Republicans in Congress, out of 278 in the caucus, had made on-the-record comments accepting the reality of human-made global warming. More frightening yet, most of the contenders for the Republican presidential nomination are solidly in the anti-science camp (<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/where-the-2016-republican-candidates-stand-on-climate-change/>). Fortunately, neither the Vatican nor the Canadian bishops are

buying these arguments against taking climate action seriously. Rather, they are calling upon us to ground renewed environmental action in a new understanding of our faith and its call to conversion.

Pope Francis referred to the Paris COP as “the last, best hope” for internationally agreed upon action on climate change, and challenged leaders to act “now or never.” The Vatican wrote to every bishop in the world to ask them to support the 2,300 climate marches that took place around

the world on the First Sunday in Advent. For his part, the pope signed a climate petition and sent a pair of his own shoes to the *Place de la Republique* to be used in the symbolic demonstration for climate action that day.

Nonetheless, LifeSite criticized the pontiff by saying, “the pope . . . does pick up all the alarmist talk of the ‘warmists’ and seems to have made the fight against climate change into man’s first obligation today.”

For his part, Bishop Doug Crosby, president of the Canadian

bishops, wrote to Canada’s Environment and Climate Change Minister on Nov. 10 asking her “to work toward fair, binding and truly transformational climate agreements, both nationally and internationally.” Bishop Crosby noted that his recommendation was shared by all the Catholic episcopal conferences of the world.

While some of our co-religionists may continue to oppose action toward climate justice, it is clear that the church has now seriously taken up this challenging ministry.



CNS/Paul Haring

CARE FOR CREATION — A butterfly is seen in a light show on the facade and dome of St. Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican Dec. 8. The show was sponsored by a coalition of production companies and charitable foundations with the intent to raise awareness about climate change.

Immaculate Conception: the world matters

By Brett Graham Fawcett

Christ’s work in the world, it has long been recognized, usually takes one of three shapes: kingly, priestly, or prophetic. The papacy is an office that involves each of these elements. Some Catholics bristle against the papacy when it is especially regal, or sacral; but, lately, we’ve seen Catholics react against the current pope for the way he has chosen to be prophetic.

At the time of this writing, the most recent example was a light show projected onto St. Peter’s Basilica on Dec. 8, which stressed the urgency of action on climate change. Surrounded by the vast Roman night, the side of the venerable old church blazed with images of all sorts of exotic people, animals, and locations whose existence is jeopardized by our treatment of the environment.

Why was this so offensive to some Catholics? To judge by some of the angry articles written in response to it, some people simply dislike the fact that, in giving this light show his blessing, Pope Francis is giving such enthusiastic support to the solid scientific consensus of anthropogenic climate change — which seems like rather old news at this point. Others,

however, see a kind of sacrilege in the fact that this light show occurred on the Feast (in some countries, the Solemnity) of the Immaculate Conception, and that, rather than taking time to meditate on and beseech Our Mother, the Vatican chose instead to pursue a sordid political agenda, even using the sacred basilica as a prop in their propaganda. (Some have also objected to the involvement of the World Bank in that event, given their record of supporting causes opposed to the culture of life.)

There is no reason not to wish the event could have been done differently, or with a more explicitly Catholic or Marian focus. That being said, however, we should reflect on what exactly the Immaculate Conception *means*, and what its history is.

Its major defender was Blessed John Duns Scotus, who was also well-known for his belief that creation is on a kind of journey toward God, which seems to anticipate the theory of evolution and much of modern science. Teilhard de Chardin (who is cited in *Laudato Si’*) famously said that this belief of Scotus would be “the theology of the future.” It is not unimportant that this was argued by the Marian doctor; Scotus believed that, for Christ’s redemption to be perfect, someone had to be perfectly saved before the end of time, and that person was Mary. Her Imma-

culate Conception brings the new heavens and new earth into our own cosmos, here and now; it is not wrong to consider our earth and its importance on the feast of her Immaculate Conception.

The Immaculate Conception also means that everything about Mary is *fiat*, receptivity to God, which in turn means that everything about her is *mission*. This is why, as soon as she receives God into her womb, she hurries off and begins her journey to see Elizabeth. She is utterly selfless, utterly about caring for others.

This is the point Pope Francis makes when, at the very end of *Laudato Si’*, with its calls to environmental stewardship and awareness of our interconnectedness, he includes a section on Mary as “Queen of All Creation,” who “cares with maternal affection and pain for this wounded world.” What else can the fact that the Immaculate Heart is Queen of Heaven and Earth mean, except that the Mother of Sorrows is involved with the suffering of creation?

In this light, I submit that, of all the times to be vividly reminded of our need to respond to the environmental crises of this world, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception is one of the most fitting, for the Immaculate Conception reminds us why the world matters: because it matters to God.



CNS/Paul Haring

‘QUEEN OF ALL CREATION’ — Pope Francis presents a rose at the Vatican Dec. 9. At the end of *Laudato Si’*, with its calls to environmental stewardship and awareness of our interconnectedness, Pope Francis includes a section on Mary as “Queen of All Creation,” who “cares with maternal affection and pain for this wounded world,” writes Brett Fawcett.

Brett Fawcett is a master’s student at Newman Theological College in Edmonton.

Secular and sacred traditions important to Christmas

Both Lungs

Brent Kostyniuk



In the movie *Fiddler on the Roof*, the village milkman, Tevye, lives his life according to the dictates of Tradition. However, he often does not know the reason for a particular tradition, only that it must be followed. While Tradition plays an important part in Tevye's life, it is a vital element of Christian theology, especially Eastern theology.

In his book *The Orthodox Church*, Metropolitan Kallistos Ware writes about the significance of tradition for Eastern Christians, notably as it contributes to its changelessness, its loyalty with the past. "This idea of living continuity may be summed up in one word: Tradition. As St. John of Damascus says, 'We do not change the everlasting boundaries which our fathers have set, but we keep the Tradition, just as we received it.' To an Orthodox Christian, Tradition means the Holy Bible; it means the Creed; it means the decrees of the Ecumenical Councils and the writings of the Fathers; it means the Canons, the Service Books, the Holy Icons." Tradition is, in fact, the whole system of doctrine, ecclesiastical government, worship and art which has been articulated over the ages.

In Holy Tradition Metropolitan Ware points out that in the East, formal dogmatic definitions are less common than they are in the West. However, "... it would be false to conclude that because some belief has never been specifically proclaimed as a dogma, it is therefore not a part of Tradition, but merely a matter of private opinion. Certain doctrines, never formally defined, are yet held by the church with an unmistakable inner conviction, an unruffled unanimity, which is just as binding as an explicit formulation. 'Some things we have from written teaching,' said Saint Basil, 'others we have received from the Apostolic Tradition handed down to us in a mystery; and both these things have the same force for piety.'"

Kostyniuk, who lives in Edmonton, has a bachelor of theology from Newman and is a freelance writer. He and his wife Bev have been married for 37 years and have eight grandchildren.

"This inner Tradition 'handed down to us in a mystery' is preserved above all in the church's worship. *Lex orandi lex credendi*: men's faith is expressed in their prayer. Orthodoxy has made few explicit definitions about the eucharist and the other sacraments, about the next world, the Mother of God, the saints, and the faithful departed: Orthodox belief on these points is contained mainly in the prayers and hymns used at Orthodox services."

Although vital to the Christmas story, one key element is brought to us not through scripture, but Holy Tradition: the Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos. According to Tradition, the parents of the Virgin Mary, Sts. Joachim and Anna, prayed that if they were ever to be blessed with a child, they would dedicate it to the service of God. Thus it was that when the Most Holy Virgin reached the age of three, the holy parents decided to fulfil their vow.

Fundamental to our understanding of the Entrance are, as noted above, the liturgical texts for the feast. The vespers not only recount the historic event, they express the ageless joy of all those who believe.

*O faithful, let us leap for joy today,
singing psalms and hymns of praise
in honour of Mary, his mother,
the holy Tabernacle and Ark that
contained the Word
whom nothing can contain.
She is offered to God as a child in
a marvellous way,
and Zechariah the high priest
receives her with great joy,
for she is the dwelling place of
the Most High.
Today is the prelude of the good
pleasure of God,
and the proclamation of salvation
for the human race.
In the Temple of God the Virgin is
clearly revealed,
and beforehand announces Christ
to all.
To her, then, let us cry aloud with
a mighty voice:
Rejoice, fulfilment of the
Creator's plan.*

Interestingly, the historian Josephus Flavius (circa AD 30 - 100) notes there were many liv-

ing quarters around the Temple, in which those who were dedicated to the service of God dwelt. As well, an indication the Feast of the Entrance was celebrated by the very early church comes from Palestinian Christians. Their traditions hold that the holy Empress Helena (mother of Constantine the Great) built a church in honour of the Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple.

While Sacred Tradition is vital to Christmas, this feast we are about to celebrate is ripe with secular traditions we have received from our ancestors. One of my favourite Ukrainian Christmas traditions is one which most certainly originated in pagan times, but remains vital today — the *didukh*. The *didukh* — grandfather — is a sheaf of wheat brought into the house on Christmas Eve. It would have been carefully selected at the end of the harvest and safely stored. In the past, it was meant to honour the gods who had provided a bountiful harvest. Today, its link is with Christ, the Bread of Life and with the holy eucharist, wheat changed into his body. It was, and may still, be believed that as long as the *didukh* was in the house, all the ancestors of the family resided in it. In this way, all generations could be together to celebrate the feast.

Living in a large city, my connection with the land is minimal. However, my desire to keep traditions alive is strong. For that reason, each year I plant a row or two of wheat in our garden, with the specific purpose of having a *didukh*.

After all preparations had been made for *sviatij vechir* — holy supper — on Christmas Eve, the



B. Kostyniuk

TRADITION — The *didukh* is a sheaf of wheat brought into the house on Christmas Eve, writes Brent Kostyniuk. "It would have been carefully selected at the end of the harvest and safely stored. In the past, it was meant to honour the gods who had provided a bountiful harvest. Today, its link is with Christ, the Bread of Life and with the holy eucharist, wheat changed into his body."

head of the household would retrieve the *didukh* and bring it inside, where it would be placed in a spot of honour. As he did, he would recite the following prayer. It is my Christmas wish for you.

O most merciful Lord, and you

*Son of righteousness,
We greet you with Holy Christmas.
Last year you gave us a harvest,
you gave us wealth, you gave us health.
Then help us this year, so that it
will be better.*

Merry Christmas from the Regina Catholic School Division!



*"We bless you, Lord our God most high;
you are all-powerful and you made yourself vulnerable."*

Pope Francis

Regina
Catholic Schools
www.rcsd.ca

*A Joyful Christmas to you.
May all the blessings of the season
shine upon you.*

PRINCE ALBERT
CATHOLIC SCHOOL DIVISION
Learning for life through Catholic Education

Christmas — nothing out of the ordinary



Liturgy and Life

Sylvain Lavoie, OMI

What words best describe Christmas? Humble faith? Immense hope? Great joy? Endless peace? Perhaps all of these? What about two other perhaps shocking words: *ordinariness* and *poverty*? These two words convey, at a very deep level, the meaning of Christmas.

The feast of Christmas invites us — indeed compels us — to recognize Jesus in our poverty and ordinariness.

Jesus was born into a poor family and in a manger because there was no room for him in the inn. The God who is born into our world is born into a world that has no room for him.

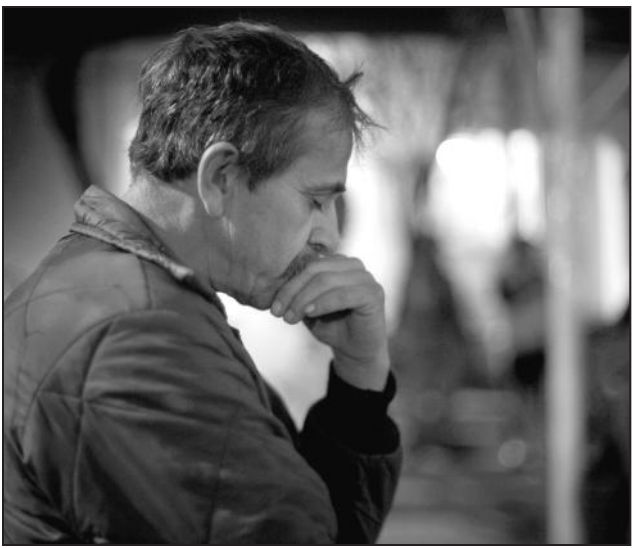
It is still the same today. Our society at this moment is trying to take Christ out of Christmas with “holiday trees” and “happy holidays” instead of “Merry Christmas.” The pace of our own lives can be so busy that we don’t have time for prayer, worship or reconciliation — perhaps even each other at this time of year. Our priorities get lost and we get distracted and confused.

Because our world is selfish, sinful, in love with power, wealth and status, Jesus must come into it uninvited. Because Jesus is meek, gentle, forgiving and pure love, just the opposite of what the world obsesses about, he cannot be at home in this world. Yet as God he must be in it, so his place is with the others for whom there is no room — the poor, the discredited, those who are marginalized.

This is a message our culture doesn’t want to hear, but needs to hear. The poor more easily make a place for God in their lives. Their stables and mangers are more available for God’s birth than our hotels, boardrooms, casinos, bingo palaces and extravagant homes filled with status symbols.

In our lives and in our world, so often, there is no room at the inn, no place to welcome God who wants to be born into it. As it was at the first Christmas, the Christ Child today must be born outside our cities, among the poor. So, to find him ourselves, we must let ourselves be led by the

Sylvain Lavoie, OMI, Archbishop Emeritus of the Archdiocese of Keewatin-The Pas, is chaplain at the Star of the North Retreat House in St. Albert, Alta.



CNS/David Maung

THE INCARNATION — An immigrant from Mexico who is in the United States illegally has been homeless for eight months. “Through the Incarnation, God crawls into ordinary life and invites us to meet him there, in our own poverty and the poverty of those around us,” writes Sylvain Lavoie, OMI.

poor, the children, our own brokenness and poverty, to the mangers of our world today.

Christmas is nothing out of the ordinary. After the birth of Christ, we need not look to the extraordinary, the spectacular or the miraculous to find God. God is found where we live — in our kitchens, at our tables, in our wounds and in each other’s faces.

Nativity of the Lord	Isaiah 9:2-4, 6-7
	Psalms 96
	Titus 2:11-14
December 25, 2015	Luke 2:1-16

This is hard to believe and has always been hard to accept. When Jesus was on earth, virtually no one believed that he was the Messiah, precisely because he was so ordinary, so unlike what they imagined God to be. They had expected a superstar, a great king, someone who would finally get rid of the Roman oppressors and restore Israel to its previous power and glory. Preaching mercy, gentleness, forgiveness, unconditional love and total non-violence, Jesus did not live up to those false expectations.

According to St. John of the Cross, “God has spoken so completely through his own Word that he chooses to add

nothing. He spoke partially through the prophets, but has now said everything in Christ. Anyone seeking some new vision or revelation from him would commit an offence, for instead of focusing his eyes entirely on Christ he would desire something other than Christ, or beyond him. Fix your eyes on Christ alone for in him all is revealed and in him you will find more than you could ever ask for or desire.”

The second reading speaks of “he who will redeem us from our iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own.” One of the best ways for us to meet Jesus is to do just that — let him redeem us — save us from our sins, and heal us, transform us into a new creation.

We do that best by celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation. There we face our poverty, our sin; we name it and share it and receive his transforming forgiveness. To experience the joy of forgiveness, healing and reconciliation is one of the best ways to experience the joy of Christmas before we celebrate it ritually and liturgically as we are doing now.

Father Bob’s mother had Alzheimer’s disease for many years before she died. When he visited her she did not know who he was. He found that the only way he could interact with her was to feed her at meal times. That forced him to slow down, and there he found Christ — feeding his own mother and getting in touch with his own mortality. Through that experience he slowly realized that he needed her poverty, her brokenness, because he was too busy, too efficient and out of touch with a deeper reality of humanity and love.

Love is a thing that happens in ordinary places — in kitchens, at tables, in bedrooms, in workplaces, in families, in the flesh. God abides in us when we also abide there. Through the Incarnation, God crawls into ordinary life and invites us to meet him there, in our own poverty and the poverty of those around us.

The eucharist we celebrate now is another powerful hint at this mystery that Christ is found in the poor and the ordinary. These humble, ordinary gifts of bread and wine will be transformed through the prayer and faith of the presider and the community, into the Body and Blood of Christ. If we receive them with repentant, humble faith, then we are transformed into the Body of Christ, sent to be light to a sometimes very dark world.

So, may our faith and our celebration of Christ’s birth help us to recognize and experience Christ who is born into our own poverty and ordinariness. Christmas is about being poor enough to recognize our need for Jesus, and nothing out of the ordinary.

May God bless us all with his forgiveness and healing, his peace and joy, this Christmas and throughout the New Year.

Recognize a need for sensitivity to community, beyond ourselves

In Exile

Ron Rolheiser, OMI



Some years ago I was challenged by a bishop regarding an article I’d written. We were talking in his office and the tone eventually got a little testy: “How can you write something like that?” he asked. “Because it’s true,” was my blunt reply. He already knew it was true, but now, realizing that, he became more aware of his real agenda: “Yes, I know it’s true, but that doesn’t mean it should be said in that way in a Catholic newspaper like ours. This isn’t a university classroom or the New York Times. It’s a diocesan newspaper and that’s not the best context within which to say something

Rolheiser, theologian, teacher and award-winning author, is president of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas. He can be contacted through his website: www.ronrolheiser.com.

like that. It will confuse a lot of readers.”

I’m not immune to pride and arrogance and so my spontaneous reaction was defensive. Immediately there were certain voices in me saying: “I am only saying what’s true. The truth needs to be spoken. Why are you afraid to hear the truth? Are we really doing people a favour by shielding them from things they’d rather not hear?”

But I’m glad I swallowed my pride, bit my tongue, muttered a half-sincere apology and walked out of his office without saying any of those things out loud because, after my initial feelings had subsided and I’d had a more sober and prayerful reflection on our conversation, I realized he was right. Having the truth is one thing, speaking it in a place and a manner that’s helpful is quite another. It’s not for nothing that

Jesus challenged us to speak our truth in parables because truth, as T.S. Eliot once quipped, cannot always be swallowed whole and the context and tone within which it is spoken generally dictate whether it’s helpful or not to speak it at a given time or to a given person. Simply put, it isn’t always helpful, or charitable, or mature, to throw a truth into someone’s face.

St. Paul says as much in his Epistle to the Romans in words to this effect: *We who are strong must be considerate of those who are sensitive about things like this. We must not just please ourselves* (Romans 15, 1). That can come across as patronizing, as if Paul were telling a certain elite to tone down some of their enlightened views and actions for the sake of those who are less enlightened, but that’s not what’s at stake here. Undergirding this kind of admonition is a fundamental distinction that’s critically important in our teaching, preaching, and pastoral practice, namely, the distinction between *catechesis* and *theology*, the distinction between nurturing and shoring up someone’s faith as opposed to stretching someone’s faith so as to make it more universally compassionate.

Catechesis is meant to teach

doctrine, teach prayers, teach creeds, clarify biblical and church teachings, and give people a solid, orthodox framework within which to understand their Christian faith. Theology, on the other hand, presupposes that those studying it are already catechized, that they already know their creeds and prayers and have a solid, orthodox foundation. *Theology’s* function, among other things, is then to stretch its students in function of giving them the symbolic tools with which to understand their faith in a way that leaves no dark, hidden corners into which they are afraid to venture for fear of shaking their faith. *Catechesis* and *theology* have different functions and must respect each other since both are needed: young seedling plants need to be protected and gently nurtured just as older, mature plants have to be given the wherewithal to live and thrive inside all the environmental challenges in which they find themselves.

Thus the challenge coming to me from the bishop was, in effect, to be more careful with my audience so as to distinguish theology classrooms and academic periodicals from catechetical situations and church newspapers.

It carried too a special chal-

lenge to humility and charity, such as was, for example, shown by the scientist-philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: elderly, retired, and in declining health, he still found himself “silenced” by the Vatican in that he was forbidden to publish his theological thoughts. But, rather than reacting with anger and arrogance, he reacted with charity and humility. Writing to his Jesuit provincial, he acknowledges needs beyond his own: “I fully recognize that Rome may have its own reasons for judging that, in its present form, my concept of Christianity may be premature or incomplete and that at the present moment its wider diffusion may therefore be inopportune. . . . (This letter) is to assure you that, in spite of any apparent evidence to the contrary, I am resolved to remain a child of obedience. Obviously, I cannot abandon my own personal search — that would involve me in an interior catastrophe and in disloyalty to my most cherished vocation; but I have ceased to propagate my ideas and am confining myself to achieving a deeper personal insight into them.”

Recognizing the importance of sensitivity as to where and how we speak the truth, Jesus advises: “Speak your truth in parables.”

Embracing the holy work of Incarnation

Barefoot and Preaching

Leah Perrault



“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory . . .” (Jn 1:14).

With the whisper of an angel, God himself became an embryo,

Perrault is a wife and mom, a grateful employee of the Diocese of Saskatoon and a speaker, writer and consultant at www.leahperrault.com

humanity and divinity swirled and swallowed in the secret of Mary’s body. All the mysteries of heaven and earth were contained in the beginnings of flesh, in blood and dividing cells, a tenuous promise of eternity and mortality.

This life-changing life begins with a pregnancy, as all human life does. Mary gives herself over to the pain and possibility of parenthood. She knows the secret and participates in revealing it to the

world, one person at a time: Joseph, her parents and siblings, Elizabeth and Zechariah. She eats and rests, works and waits, letting it be done in her, longing for Jesus and simultaneously holding him.

Mary and Joseph plan for the long trip to Bethlehem for the census. Mary, late in her pregnancy, climbs on a donkey and Joseph leads them to their destination and into labour. Straw and water, sweat and tears, tiny cries and the coming of milk and shepherds and wise-men — this is the stuff of Incarnation, of God becoming flesh.

And he lives among us. Tucked beneath the clothing of his parents, he flees the terror of Herod’s violence, a refugee to Egypt. The newborn Jesus is blissfully unaware that his birth is anticipated by the kicks of his cousin John, celebrated by angels,

and the beginning of the dying and the rising that will change the world. He eats and sleeps, cries and learns to smile.

He grows and gains favour with God and his people, by waking with funny hair, finding his voice, learning to laugh. Jesus, Prince of Peace, learns to share and use his words. He plays with dishes on the floor, comes in at night with tiny dirty feet. He asks question after question while he watches Joseph work. He asks why the sky is blue and can he have a snack and can’t he have a baby for his birthday?

The Christ Child climbs trees and Mary tells him to be careful. He skins his knees and gets left out of the game and comes home with tears in his eyes. He gets lost in his father’s house and says he is sorry for scaring his parents and grandparents. In the confusion of puberty, he aches to belong and longs to be able to carry the burdens of his friends. He knows the limits and loneliness of his own skin. Our teenaged saviour wonders what God wants for his future.

Jesus learns. He imitates Joseph and wanders in the desert. He prepares food and eats, sits at tables and talks in the early morning and in the evening. He does a day’s work and he sleeps. What hobbies filled his heart with joy? What birdsongs woke him? What storm startled him and what sunrise calmed his fear?

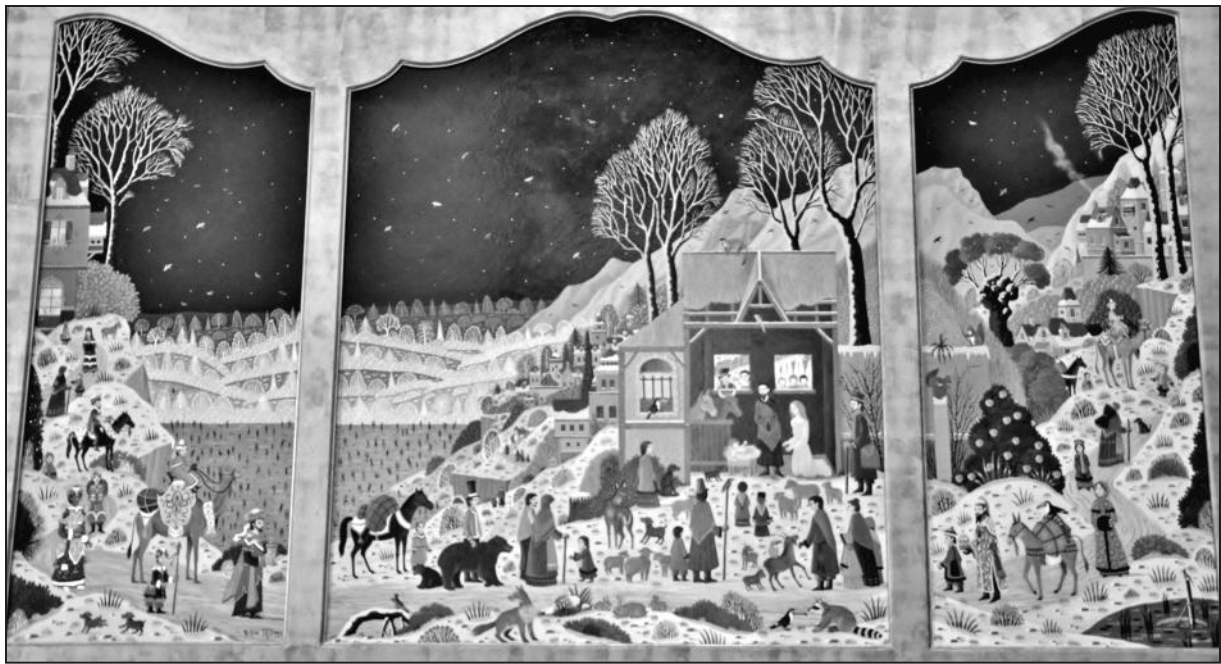
For 30 years he lived among us, like us, day after day after day. Christmas births a lifetime of daily work and play. He grows, his infant hands giving way to fingers full of weed-gifts making way for digits tracing the scrolls in the temple. Those tiny hands trembling in the desert before they hold the mud and trace it over a blind man’s eyes. Barely aged by years or weathered by work, those hands stretching out for nails.

This work — this daily work of rising and eating, growing and

learning, holding hands and hearts. It was Jesus’ work and it is also our work. The work of humanity and God, getting groceries and giving grace. From conception and birth, he lives like us and he shows us how to live.


Who am I, that I am graced with a birth and a life like his? Who am I, that I am graced to grow and to learn, to get up today and love my family, call my friends, serve my neighbours? Who am I, that I should be so blessed by the ordinary things that this today holds? I am. I am his. I am waking in the night to hold babies and dry tears. I am washing dishes and socks. Hundreds of socks. I am holding my tongue and asking for forgiveness. I am unwrapping gifts and moments, walking faithfully into the plan he has for me, letting it be done in me.

Because all too soon, living like Jesus will lead to dying like him. But not yet. For on this day, a child has been born to us, we get to see his glory in these Christmas days. May we marvel at the miracles Jesus brings today and sing Gloria because he comes. Again. Here. Amen.




G. Schmitz

NATIVITY — The 21st-century triptych of the Nativity at the Cathedral of Nantes was painted by contemporary artist Alain Thomas.



May health
and hope be
yours in Christ
this Christmas
Season.

Wishing you a very
Merry Christmas
and a Happy
New Year!




Catholic Health
Association of Saskatchewan

“So the shepherd went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.”

Luke 2:16

Let us celebrate with them in the Spirit of
the Newborn Child, with hope, love, and mercy!



*Wishing you a peaceful and joyous
Christmas season!*

Most Rev. Albert Thévenot, M. Afr.
Bishop of Prince Albert



Co-operative Games!
**Christmas
Special!**
**Buy two games
get one FREE!**
(of equal or lesser value)
**Hurry in . . . this is
our FINAL SALE!**

ANGELSTAD's
821 6th Avenue
Downtown Humboldt
Ph: 306-682-5524
“Learn Leather Craft”
WORKSHOP kit - \$459

Memories of loved ones glow in eternal light

By Paul Paproski

St. Michael’s Retreat and Conference Centre at Lumsden felt different the moment I walked in to assist at a weekend November retreat. The facility, a beautiful structure, looked much like I remembered. It is highlighted by a large circular church, and a lounge with a stone fireplace and large windows overlooking a picturesque view of a valley. There was always a welcoming atmosphere when I visited St. Michael’s. On this occasion there was a sensation of emptiness. The change in ambience was a surprise. And I knew that it came from the absence of the men in brown habits.

The Franciscan Friars of Western Canada, who built the retreat centre in 1963, left in the fall after 52 years of service to the larger community. The friars sold the facility to a private group after a decline in numbers and aging membership made it impossible to continue as owners. There were always friars at St. Michael’s when I was there and I had always felt that I was in their home.

The personality of the Franciscans continues to flow through-

out the building design and art that has been left behind. Even so, I am surprised at the void left by their absence. I hadn’t realized how much the presence of the Franciscans meant. The warm greetings and friendly Franciscan smiles are now memories. Others with me on the retreat, who are familiar with St. Michael’s, felt the same way. The building is beautiful, one person remarked, but it is just a building.

The contrast between a building and home is more apparent during the Christmas season. Families gather to continue their tradition of celebration and togetherness. There is an awareness of emptiness when someone is missing and it is more evident when a person is not there because of death. A home may be beautiful and have a jolly atmosphere at Christmas, but it is not the same when someone is missing. Our homes are homes because of the people who live in them. A home is about families, the presence of our loved ones.

Services of Remembrance are held by some parishes in December to offer comfort to families who find Christmas difficult because of the loss of loved ones. The services incorporate songs, Scripture and commemorative prayers. An important part of the celebration is the writing of the names of those who have gone

before us and placing them beside candles on a Table of Remembrance. During the Service of Remembrance the candles are lit and then carried by individuals or couples, along with the names of loved ones, to a table in front of the church altar.

The light of the candles symbolizes the eternal bond of love between the living and the deceased. The carrying of the candles to the front of the church represents our carrying the memories of loved ones within.

Candles are important symbols for the Advent and Christmas seasons. Their light shines forth as a visible sign of the eternal light among us. The eternal light once left timelessness and entered our time. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The divine became part of our family and joined the human family to the eternal family of angels and saints.


The birth of Christ shines forth in a new light during the Christmas season when the memories of loved ones are recalled.

Memories stir our hearts and move us to wonder about the meaning of the divine being born as a helpless, poor child. We once were helpless children too. Maybe we felt a trace of this powerlessness when we were unable to prevent the loss of loved ones. But they are not gone after all. They are present in a new way. Our loved ones are at home with their new family, the heavenly family. Their memories are eternal. We carry their memories within.




Paproski

REMEMBERING — A candle is carried at a Service of Remembrance in memory of deceased loved ones who will not be with us at Christmas. The light of the candles symbolizes the eternal bond of love between the living and dead. The candles are carried to the front of the church to illustrate that we carry the memories of our loved ones within, and the names of loved ones are placed on a table beside the candles.



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

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



From Bishop Don Bolen and the clergy, religious and faithful of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

Welcoming ‘the least of my brethren’



Figure of Speech

Dr. Gerry Turcotte

“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Mt 25: 40).

Of all the great sculptures I have seen, one of my favourites is the statue often called “homeless Jesus” by Canadian sculptor Timothy Schmaltz. Jesus, asleep on a park bench, has his features covered by a blanket but his feet are marked by crucifixion wounds. This is an apparently controversial statue, rejected by a number of institutions for varying reasons, and even prompting one parishioner to call police thinking it was a real homeless person. Far from an “insulting depiction” of Jesus, as some have claimed, the statue reminds us that Christ can be found in all places and in all people. Pope Francis certainly thought so when he prayed over a miniature of the work.

A photograph of this statue that made me catch my breath

was one where the sleeping Jesus was covered in snow. It reminded me of the very real tragedy of homelessness, and the equally devastating agony of “living rough,” where an outdoor heating vent may be an individual’s only source of heat. I have written often about the impact of our university’s Humanities 101 program, which provides free education, free meals, transportation and even childcare if needed, to Calgary’s most economically disadvantaged citizens. Over the years, a number of our participants have lived in the drop-in centre, and travelled each day to class. I suspect that for them the image of the homeless Jesus would be a powerful one indeed.

The passage in the Bible that is referenced by the statue is from Matthew, where Jesus reminds his disciples that what you do to the “least of my brethren, you do to me.” In a speech on the issue a

few years ago, Bishop Fred Henry noted that homelessness “has been here from the moment that sin entered the world,” and that “through the lens of sacred Scripture” the inviolability and sacredness of the home is clear. As Bishop Henry went on to say, in the biblical text, “The loss of a place to live was, for this reason, one of the greatest misfortunes that could strike a people when war is raging in the countryside or cities.”

It is difficult when reading this not to think of Pope Francis’ own appeal to the world to do more to welcome the tens of thousands of refugees, and equally, the calls of many “good Samaritans” to help our struggling neighbours. To quote Bishop Henry once again, “we must not only be touched by others and their needs, we must respond to them from the very depths of our being. It means taking to the road in a spirit of solidarity with our brothers and sisters who may have no home, and assisting them spiritually and materially in ways that will enable them to ultimately experience the fullness of the kingdom of God.”

If Jesus is homeless, then, it is surely best understood as the result of our own blindness to the plight of others. And there can be no season that so reminds us of the need to be attentive to others as this, our Christmas season.

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

A place of hope for a pilgrim’s faith journey

By Anne Strachan

I drive from British Columbia to Saskatchewan toward a Benedictine monastery on the Canadian prairie. On arrival, I take a deep breath, emerge from the car and push open the wooden door of St. Peter’s Abbey. As I enter my room, unaware that this will be the first of many visits, my heart wonders: “Why am I here?” A moaning wind buffets trees outside the window. In unfamiliar solitude, with no prospect of immediate distraction, I feel lonely and in exile.

What am I seeking? Whom do I seek? At the moment, I’m the only guest. Piles of used bedding in the hall attest to a group of retreat participants recently dispersed. A tour of the abbey grounds with Father Martin, wheat fields permeated with sunlight, is still in the future; the same goes for tea with Father James in his hermitage surrounded by chickadees. Brother Basil is as yet only a voice underneath my window dealing with flood waters in the basement. On this first day, monks seem surreal, like characters in a Brother Cadfael mystery novel.

I cherish the biblical story of the woman who, after enduring years of hemorrhage and exclusion, seeks to be healed by touching the hem of Christ’s clothes. Gradually, as the days unfold, I attend Lauds, Noon Prayer, Vespers, and Vigils. I encounter

This was previously published in The Saint Katherine Review and Spirituality (dominicannpublications.com). Strachan is married with three grown children and lives in Nakusp, B.C. She is a Benedictine Oblate with St. Peter’s Abbey in Muenster, Sask., and a member of the Saskatchewan Writers’ Guild.



P. Paproski

SEEKING GOD — “A holy, transcendent Mystery flourishes in monks, chickadees, and wheat fields (or hoar frost) at an abbey on the prairie,” writes Anne Strachan. “It provides direction, hope, and joy — even within loneliness and exile — for this pilgrim’s faith journey.”

monks wearing black habits. And I’m reminded of that woman. It would be a shock to Abbot Peter if he turned to find me surreptitiously touching the hem of his robe as he bowed before the altar and filed out of Vespers! But in a profound way this image captures an essence of my journey. Metaphorically, I touch the robes of contemporary monks in an attempt to reach the Christ I once believed in and who was as dear and familiar to me as my mother and father.

As a little child, after a day in Catholic school, I tiptoed into church to pray. I prayed to Jesus with happy confidence right into middle age. A presence in all aspects of my life, Jesus was my friend and mentor, whether as a baby in a manger at Christmas, a tortured man on the cross on Good Friday, or risen from the

dead and appearing to Mary Magdalene at Easter.

Somehow, navigating life’s tumultuous journey, I lost my compass. I no longer connected with the Son of God. To spend my entire life trusting Jesus, only to lose him, was excruciating. It was as though all photographs were removed from the album; all signposts on the roadside erased from once-familiar territory. Those were challenging years raising a family in a materialistic, competitive and complex culture. I taught my children catechism and attended church liturgies and potlucks, but as they grew and left home, I began to question my faith.

Now, I wish to recapture a sense of joyful certainty. I long to experience again the passion for Christ I knew as a young girl: the

certain belief in every aspect of the story of his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. And yet: Is this kind of certainty necessary or even desirable?

Much evil is performed in the name of religious certainty. Perhaps, I seek God even as I also seek permission to question. Maybe my doubts and fears will lead me deeper into exploration of faith and hope in a transcendent and loving God as I gather with other disciples in the upper room and beyond. It’s possible that I’ve been shadowing Jesus on that road to Emmaus all through this time of uncertainty. Maybe he’s so transformed I no longer recognize him. And I’ve changed too: I must gaze with new eyes and a broken heart if

I’m ever to find this Jesus I seek.

A certain degree of doubt can be healthy when it causes one to question and search. Now I view the Roman Catholic Church with a discerning and critical eye; it is a deeply wounded and sinful entity. And yet, within all the uncertainty and inevitable human faults and failings, still this pilgrim seeks to recognize Jesus, God’s child on earth, from within this flawed human structure. With the help of grounded, compassionate Benedictine spirituality, I seek to fall in love all over again — and again — with an ever-deepening Mystery.

It turns out that the question “Why am I here?” reveals as many layers as there are cloud formations in a prairie sky. To begin, I’m here to discover the amazing gift of silence, and for a time to be still within that silence. I’m here to touch the hem of Christ’s robe. To be the woman who persists in her demand for Christ’s attention, even as she is rejected and bleeding.

When my own children were small, Easter Sunday dawned with splendid expectation. Amidst Easter bunnies and hidden chocolate eggs, I proclaimed to my family: “Christ is risen!” Caught up in the motion and emotion of the Gospel story, I imagined running alongside Mary Magdalene to the empty tomb, stopping in my tracks to speak to the gardener. Only it was Jesus, raised and transformed. And I recognized him!

A holy, transcendent Mystery flourishes in monks, chickadees, and wheat fields at an abbey on the prairie. This is a place resonant with listening hearts and warm hospitality. It provides direction, hope, and joy — even within loneliness and exile — for this pilgrim’s faith journey.

PRAIRIE MESSENGER PROFESSIONAL DIRECTORY

KAPOOR, SELNES, & KLIMM
Barristers & Solicitors
W. Selnes, B.A., LL.B.;
G. Klimm, B.A., LL.B.;
J. Streeton, B. Comm., LL.B.
Phone (306) 752-5777, P.O. Box 2200
Melfort, Saskatchewan S0E 1A0
Phone (306) 873-4535, P.O. Box 760
Tisdale, Saskatchewan S0E 1T0

WEBER & GASPER
Barristers & Solicitors
Russel Weber (B.A., LL.B.)
Tabbatha M. Gasper (B.A., LL.B.)
517 Main Street, Humboldt, Sask.
Phone: 306-682-5038
Fax: 306-682-5538
E-mail:
weber.gasper@sasktel.net

Assante® WEALTH MANAGEMENT
Assante Financial Management Ltd.
Peter Martens, FICB 301 - 500 Spadina Crescent East
Financial Advisor Saskatoon, SK S7K 4H9
T: (306) 665-3244
Cara Martens, CFP 1-800-465-2100
Financial Advisor E: pmartens@assante.com

VOLUNTEER INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN SERVICE
requires Teachers, Administrators, Medical Professionals and Trades People, aged 21 - 65. If you are interested in serving overseas for two years, we may have an assignment for you! Please call **306-374-2717**, Email: vic1@telusplanet.net or visit our Website at www.volunteerinternational.ca

MCKERCHER LLP BARRISTERS & SOLICITORS
SASKATOON:
(306) 653-2000
L.J.(Dick) Batten, QC
Michel G. Thibault
David M.A. Stack, QC
Curtis J. Onishenko
REGINA:
306.565.6500
David E. Thera, QC
Committed to serving the needs of Religious Organizations for over 80 years.
MCKERCHER LLP mckercher.ca

RAYNER AGENCIES LTD.
www.rayneragencies.ca Est. 1948
General Insurance Broker
Motor Licences & Notary Public
1000 Central Avenue, Saskatoon
Phone: 306-373-0663
Shawn Wasylenko Norbert Wasylenko

MAURICE SOULODRE
Architect Ltd.
Maurice Soulodre, B.A., B.Ed., M.Arch., SAA, MRAIC
1815C Lorne Ave., Saskatoon, SK S7H 1Y5
Tel: (306) 955-0333 Fax: (306) 955-0549
E-mail: soularch@sasktel.net

MOURNING GLORY
FUNERAL AND CREMATION SERVICES
John Schachtel
1201 - 8th St. East
Saskatoon, Sask.
(306) 978-5200

Schuler-Lefebvre Funeral Chapel
“Dedicated to those WE SERVE”
Ph: 306-682-4114 Humboldt, Sask.

MALINOSKI & DANYLUK FUNERAL HOME
HWY 5 EAST HUMBOLDT
Humboldt’s only 100% locally owned and operated.
PH : 306-682-1622

Satisfaction Hearing Systems Ltd.
Hearing Aid Sales, Service & Repair
Ph: 306.979.4543 #16-1945 Mc Kercher Dr.
Cell: 306.881.8602 Saskatoon, SK S7J 4M4

St. Peter’s Press
Commercial Printers Since 1904
Fine Quality Printing
Muenster, Sask. S0K 2Y0
Ph: 306-682-1770
Fax: 306-682-5285
press@stpeterspress.ca
Place your professional ad here
Call 306-682-1772

Make Christmas Brighter for a Child and their Family

Chalice
SPONSOR TODAY!
1-800-776-6855 www.chalice.ca
Consistently rated a top charity in International Aid & Development by MoneySense Magazine pm1215a

'Tis the season for many things, including sadness

Soul Searching

Tom Saretsky



“Deck the Halls with boughs of holly . . . tis the season to be jolly . . .” (Deck the Halls)
“It’s the hap-happiest season of all” (It’s the Most Wonderful Time of the Year)
*“Have yourself a merry little Christmas,
Let your heart be light
From now on,
our troubles will be out of sight. (Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas)*
*“City sidewalks busy side-walks
Dressed in holiday style
In the air there is a feeling of Christmas
Children laughing
People passing
Meeting smile after smile . . .” (Silver Bells)*

There’s a lot to live up to in these Christmas songs. The meaning contained in the lines of these songs suggests (demands?) that at this season, more than any other time of the year, we should be happy and jolly and laughing and smiling; after all, “It’s the most wonderful time of the year!”

Apparently there is no excuse

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

not to be happy at this time of year. Scripture would tell us to be joyful, because the Messiah, as prophesied in the Old Testament, has been born to deliver us from our sins: “But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a saviour, who is Christ the Lord.’ ” God has intervened in human history and now we will take our place among the heavenly host praising God and singing, “Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth, peace, goodwill to all people.”

Theologians might express it differently. Sadhu Sundar Singh says, “Out of love God took on a human form. Through this act of love we can now share in the joy of the angels by seeing and knowing God directly.” The German theologian Karl Rahner would say that Christmas is the one day of the year where God gives us permission to be truly happy.

Religiously, commercially and spiritually speaking we cannot be anything but happy. Right? Then why are so many so sad? What gives us the right to despair? Is it because someone took the last Lego set at Wal-Mart and they won’t get another shipment until after Christmas? Is it because we pressure ourselves to find the per-



G. Schmitz

THAT TIME OF YEAR — While songs and advertisements tell us this is a “most wonderful time of year,” the lights and festivities often mask underlying sadness. “Our world isn’t always joyful and sadness and hardship are not suspended just because it’s Christmas time,” writes Tom Saretsky. “Unfortunately, for many, the inns of happiness will be full this Christmas, and so they’ll have to look for another dwelling place of joy.”

fect gift for our friends or family and get sad when we can’t find it or can’t deliver? Is it, also, that Christmas can never live up to its expectations? Or we can’t live up to our expectations in making this Christmas, or any Christmas, the perfect one? Or is it because you are experiencing a first Christmas without a loved one? Maybe there are some who experienced a job loss or an unexpected illness.

The world says one thing, but how we ultimately feel usually reveals something else. My mom always told me, until her dying day, “Never apologize for how

you feel.” For some, this Christmas will be difficult. For others, every Christmas is difficult. It’s tough to put on a smiling face and pretend that all is well, when it isn’t. There is so much to conspire against this “most wonderful time of the year.” I would even count myself as one who finds this season difficult. Maybe it’s because I’m getting older and my pathological sentimentality of Christmases past include those who are no longer with me: my parents, my father-in-law, deceased aunts and uncles, and friends. I sometimes long for those days, and I do the most reminiscing during December.

This time of year emphasizes sentimentality, nostalgia, tradition and togetherness. Our world isn’t always joyful and sadness and hardship are not suspended just because it’s Christmas time. Unfortunately, for many, the inns of happiness will be full this Christmas, and so they’ll have to

look for another dwelling place of joy.

Maybe the best we can do is to settle for a dark and dusty stable — definitely not much — but that’s all God needs to deliver us from our despairs and our depressions. Maybe we will be delivered and maybe, just maybe, a small sign, a small miracle will appear heralding good news announcing that, “hope shall sing its triumph, and sadness flee away.”

“O come, Divine Messiah, the world in silence waits the day,

When hope shall sing its triumph and sadness flee away.

Dear Saviour haste, come, come to earth,

Dispel the night and show thy face, and bid us hail the dawn of grace.

O come, Divine Messiah, the world in silence waits the day,

When hope shall sing its triumph, and sadness flee away.” (O Come, Divine Messiah)

In the joy of His presence



During this Jubilee Year of Mercy, may the compassion of Christ find a home in our hearts, in our lives, in our Church and in our world.

A blessed Christmas and a New Year filled with joy and peace, hope and charity!



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

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



Wishing you a Blessed Christmas and Happy New Year!  **ST. THOMAS MORE COLLEGE**
UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN
stmcollege.ca

Dynamic, growing parish seeks full-time

Youth Minister

Christ the Redeemer Parish in Swift Current, Sask., is looking to hire a dynamic, faith filled individual with a heart for young people and their families.

The successful candidate will be:

- a faithfully practising Catholic
- willing to engage in ongoing training
- possess excellent interpersonal, organizational and communication skills
- able to work well both independently and as part of a team.

Salary is negotiable, commensurate with experience and education.

For further info contact:

Jackie at Christ the Redeemer Parish (306)773-9524.

Please send resumé and references to:

Youth Minister Committee
c/o Christ the Redeemer Parish
600 Circle Drive
Swift Current, SK S9H 4E1
Email: ctrsc@sasktel.net

Deadline for submissions is **December 31, 2015.**

Hard lifetime lessons learned on a prairie Christmas

By Alma Barkman

Our community was buzzing with the news. Gerald, one of our hometown boys, had met and married a girl I'll call Gloria while he was on extended leave in England during the Second World War. They were both in their early 30s, and their wedding picture showed Gerald still in uniform, his bride wearing a simple afternoon dress and pillbox hat tipped slightly to the side. She carried a small white Bible overlaid with lilies of the valley. She looked pleasant enough, and the community was anticipating her arrival with typical small town curiosity.

Intent upon seeing what she was like, none of us on the platform of the CNR train station thought to look at the scene from Gloria's perspective the day she arrived. The village was not much more than a scattering of frame houses and a general store huddled on the north side of the railway track. Anticipating a shipment of block salt and groceries, the storekeeper had pushed his wheelbarrow across the cinder pathway to the railway station and parked it on the loading platform beside the self-appointed welcoming committee.

Women in print housedresses and gingham aprons stood in little groups bearing gifts of cream and eggs and baked goods. Grizzled farmers in plaid shirts peered

Barkman is a freelance writer who lives in Winnipeg.

down the train track. Impatient to get back to their farms, they anxiously consulted the pocket watches carried in the bib pockets of their blue denim coveralls.

A team of horses, intimidated by the whistle of the approaching train, jerked and strained at their hitching post in front of the general store. As the steam locomotive hissed to a stop, pupils who had slipped away from the nearby school grounds during lunch hour stared wide-eyed as the baggage men unloaded three trunks and two leather suitcases.

And then at the far end of the platform we caught sight of the conductor. Emerging from the end coach, he positioned the little step stool and turned to assist the first passenger.

As Gloria stepped down with her baby in her arms, Gerald wrapped his arms around them both in a self-conscious embrace. As he turned to introduce her, the motley little crowd surged forward to greet her and then hesitated. She was meticulously dressed in a red wool suit and hat, her son in white satin rompers. Most of us had never, in all our lives, seen such fine clothing, and at the last moment, the calloused hands and gnarled fingers that had been stretched out to offer hearty greetings were self-consciously withdrawn.

Gerald tried his best to smooth over the awkwardness of the situation, but Gloria posed a problem never before encountered by these plain farm folk. She was, in their words, "too classy." Her three trunks and two suitcases contained

more beautiful clothes and china than most rural women ever dreamed of owning. She dressed her baby in silks and satins, crooned him to sleep with strange melodies, refused visitors if it was inconvenient and seemed offended by homemade tokens of love.

People concluded that Gerald had married rich.

The autumn ebbed away into winter and undaunted by Gloria's chilly attitude, community women tried to break down the barriers one by one.

And then it was Christmas, and Gerald and Gloria were invited to attend the annual Christmas Eve party at our house. People arrived by horse and cutter, bringing with them their molasses cakes and egg sandwiches, their guitars and fiddles and mouth organs. As I watched Gloria play with young son, her blue velvet dress was a luxurious contrast to the faded denims and mail-order plaids around her.

Did she miss her family across the sea? How did they celebrate Christmas? My youthful imagina-

tion was stoked by Christmas card paintings of elegant English carolers singing near a crackling fire in the hearth. *Sitting here in a drafty farm house on the Canadian prairies, was Gloria lonesome for Christmas in her homeland?*

As if in answer to my thoughts, Gloria announced that she would like to sing a carol, but first she wanted a cup of tea with lemon to clear her throat. *Lemons in December? We hardly ever saw one in July!* There was a titter of laughter at such an unusual request, followed by an awkward silence.

And then, as high and clear as an angel, she began to sing "*O holy night, the stars are brightly shining; it is the night of our dear saviour's birth . . .*"


As naive and culturally deprived as we were, we did not recognize a colouratura soprano when we heard one, and we heard one that night. But when the last note faded, instead of the customary ovation to which she had been accustomed in the concert halls of England, there was only limp applause, and that

was all but drowned by the twang of guitars and fiddles tuning up for Turkey in the Straw.


I think I knew even at that moment that Gloria would never sing in public again. She had dared to make her debut in an adopted land, and to our everlasting shame, we did not recognize her gift.

I think of her every year at Christmas time, a talented woman of English opera thrust into the culturally impoverished Canadian prairies. Mocked, misunderstood, rejected, she could not hide the pain and sorrow reflected by her tears that Christmas Eve so long ago.

Little did I realize the impact her song would have on my life, for whenever I hear O Holy Night, I realize anew the magnificent message proclaimed by the angels that very first Christmas, and to humankind's everlasting shame, the awful ignorance with which the Gift is so often rejected. And yet in God's mercy, "to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God" (Jn 1: 11,12).



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



Saskatchewan Provincial Catholic Women's League


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



Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year!


*General Administration of the
Missionary Oblate Sisters of the
Sacred Heart and Mary Immaculate*

Unit 111-420 DesMeurons St., Winnipeg, MB R2H 2N9





*Today in the town of David
a Savior has been born to you:
he is Christ the Lord.
~ Luke 2:11*

*May the joy and peace of
Christmas
be with you now and throughout the New Year*




Joyeux Noël
Archbishop Daniel Bohan & Priests,
Deacons & Faithful of the
Archdiocese of Regina



SCSBA

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



from the
SASKATCHEWAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

Paula Scott
President

Ken Loehndorf
Executive Director

Suspend judgment on early Christmas decor

Around the Kitchen Table

Maureen Weber



It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas, and it should, because Christmas is almost here. But it has looked like Christmas for a long time, and for some, that rankles. *Creeping Christmas*. The season has backed up all the way to Halloween, and those who thrive on outrage have lots of fuel.

Christmas is too commercial, they say. It's all about spending money on worthless items that no one needs. Gaudy decorations put up too early take away from the meaning of the season. The sense of the solemnity of Christ's birth is lost.

We've heard it all, and read it all, online, on television. Maybe we've even heard it from the pulpit. I even used to scoff when I saw a tree in someone's window in early November. No longer.

Maybe it's because time seems to pass more quickly as I get older, but I've been guilty (if that's the right word for something I feel no guilt about) of beginning Christmas earlier too. I made a playlist on my computer around Remembrance Day: the best of Vince Guaraldi. He is the jazz musician who composed the themes for the Charlie Brown television specials. It so happens that much of his music is from A Charlie Brown Christmas, which celebrates its 50th anniversary

this year. I texted my brother Tom and asked if it was cheating to listen to Vince Guaraldi if it includes a few Christmas tunes. He said he'd already been listening to hard core Christmas music à la Virgil Fox.

The music of Christmas warms my soul, and is a direct connection to my mom and dad. It is the sound of Dad finding the Charlie Brown Christmas soundtrack album one year, and how excited we were to listen to it without having to depend on catching it the one time it aired on TV, in the era before VHS recordings. Or the soft dulcimer of Winterfall, a tape my mom and I bought on our last Christmas shopping stop before driving the dark highway home one December evening many years ago. We listened to it as the Christmas-light farmhouses could be seen in the distance, in the cocoon of a warm car and our gifts in the back seat. Listening to Christmas music as early as I do feels like welcoming Mom and Dad home in a tangible way.

My daughter Leigh in Ottawa has gotten into the Christmas spirit a little early this year. She and her husband moved to a new home in July and she was excited about having a Christmas tree for the first time. They bought a tree on a mid-November weekend.

Leigh's husband does not work on Mondays and Leigh arrived home from work on Nov. 16 to find that Nohé had set up the tree all on his own. The joyful caption on her Snapchat of the tree was, "Never too early."

The following weekend we had a family brunch at my son Gerard and his fiancée Sarah's home, to find that they too were enjoying the soft glow of their Christmas tree and lighted decorations.

Catholic tradition dictates that the tree is to be decorated on Christmas Eve and taken down Jan. 7, the day after Epiphany — a mere two weeks. I know of people who honour that tradition and look askance at the early birds. But condescending attitudes do not foster goodwill toward all.

It's true that our society tends toward impatience. Because of the influence of the Internet and social media we have been conditioned to expect instant gratification — we don't like to wait, even in the season of Advent where it is hoped that we can practice patience and self-control. But the season also coincides with the darkest time of the year, and darkness is unsettling. We turn to something that calms, and maybe even imparts a sense of hope: the



M. Weber

LIGHTING THE WAY — Elaborate strings of Christmas lights can be seen throughout the neighbourhood, but in the Weber yard a little moose lights the way. "Comparison is the thief of joy," wrote Theodore Roosevelt, and we do take joy in our humble display.


tree, and Christmas lights.

The feast of Christmas is observed by religious and non-religious, with differing traditions across the entire spectrum of backgrounds and beliefs. I don't believe a November Christmas tree corrupts any more than a Christmas Eve tree is virtuous. It's the heart behind it that counts and most of those hearts are just looking for a little light. At this time of year I like to quote from my favourite Christmas book, John Shea's *Starlight*: "Among spiritual seekers Christmas may have a mixed reputation, but it also has unlimited potential. Can a feast that strings lights over the entire world not have the power to illuminate the

dark spaces of our souls?"

We put new siding on our house this summer and Russ had no intention of stapling cords of lights to it (we could get clips but that would be too efficient). Instead, we bought a lighted moose. You might ask what a moose has to do with Christmas. All I can say is that a moose is a hulking, homely, awkward-looking solitary creature and if he had attended Christ's birth he would have been as welcome as the donkey and the lambs. Because that's the spirit of Christmas — all are welcome at the stable, and sometimes the stable is lit up not only by stars, but by the lowly mooses of this world.

Exceptional People.
Extraordinary Care.




Dr. Nael Shoman
Otolaryngologist,
Head and Neck Surgeon


Meningitis had left me deaf and the damage was permanent. Dr. Shoman and his team gave me a way to hear again. Miracles do happen!

In surgery, every minute matters. Support operating room advancements at St. Paul's Hospital. Improved Efficiency. Reduced Wait Times. Advanced care.

GIVE GENEROUSLY

Visit sphfoundation.org or contact Lecina Hicke, Manager of Major Giving at (306) 655-5832






Peace on Earth is Possible

“Glory to God in the highest, and peace to His people on Earth.”

Luke 2:14

Wishing you and your loved ones a peaceful Christmas.



CANADIAN CATHOLIC ORGANIZATION FOR
Development and Peace

devp.org • 1 888 234-8533

A Gospel of mercy

Pope Francis has inaugurated the Year of Mercy. Liturgically, this year the Gospel of Luke is read on Sundays.

As a matter of curiosity, I googled to see how often the Gospel writers use the word mercy; Matthew, 10 times; Mark, three times; and Luke, 10 times.

Surprisingly the word mercy does not appear in John's Gospel. But the word "grace" appears three times in Ch. 1. John uses a number of similar expressions to describe God's relationship with us.

Going back to Luke, the first five uses of the word "mercy" occur in his first chapter where he describes the circumstances of the birth of Jesus. They first two occur in Mary's Magnificat, a summary of God's goodness and fidelity to his covenant.

"The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His *mercy* is for those who fear him from generation to generation" (1:49-50).

"He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his *mercy*, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his

descendants for ever" (1:54-55)

The next three reference Elizabeth and Zechariah, whom Mary visited, and whose son John prepared the people for Jesus. "Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great *mercy* to her (she had been barren), and they rejoiced with her" (1:57-58).

When Elizabeth's husband, Zechariah, had his tongue loosened at the naming of his son John, Zechariah exclaimed: "Thus God has shown the *mercy* promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant . . ." (1:72).

Then he prophesied that John would prepare the way for Jesus, who will be light in the darkness. "By the tender *mercy* of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us . . ." (1:78).

It is not surprising that Jesus uses the word mercy in his public ministry. What is surprising is that he doesn't use it more.

The first instance is the parable of the Good Samaritan. To Jesus' query about who was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers,

the lawyer responded: "The one who showed him *mercy*" (10:37).

The next instance is in the mouth of the rich man who never noticed the lot of his unfortunate neighbour, Lazarus. After both died, the rich man saw the good fortune of his neighbour in the distance and begged: "Father Abraham, have *mercy* on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames" (16:24). Alas, this was not possible because of the great chasm separating them.

In Luke's next chapter, Jesus meets 10 lepers who recognize Jesus as a compassionate healer and plea, "Jesus, Master, have *mercy* on us" (17:13). Their request was granted and they received a new life.

The final two times Luke quotes someone asking for mercy involves a blind man near Jericho. In his desperation, he cries out, twice: "Jesus, Son of David, have *mercy* on me" (18:38-39). Jesus granted his request.

Luke's Gospel can provide a useful springboard to reflect on God's goodness during this Year of Mercy. — PWN

Christmas message from president of the Canadian bishops

By Bishop Douglas Crosby, OMI, Hamilton

Dear friends,

Goodness abounds!

This Christmas, as a counterpoint to the destructive forces of misery and terror that we have

Crosby is bishop of Hamilton and president of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.

witnessed these past months, we must not forget that *goodness abounds!* More than not forgetting, let us be ready to point it out when we see it.

A few weeks ago, I was invited to join a small group of people who help at the Out of the Cold breakfast program in Hamilton. These very good folk agreed in the autumn to get up early every Thursday morning from November through March to make their way to a small kitchen

outlet to prepare a hot breakfast for over 120 men and women.

The volunteers are part of about 400 remarkable and generous people who make the program work. They arrived in the quiet early morning hours and were spirited as they took up their duties, each one pitching in to assure that everything was ready for the arrival of the guests.

Steve showed me how to whip up pancake batter and how to

cook the pancakes. Not too difficult — we worked together. Two hundred pancakes later, I was asked to help Karen and Frank serve the breakfast: pancakes, sausages, cereal, fruit, juice and the prerequisite coffee or tea. Morning greetings were friendly and sincere; the guests were known and called by name.

As the serving line thinned out, I moved again, now to help with the washing of dishes. It gave me

a chance to chat with Rob, who had done everything, including picking me up, to make the experience pleasant for me. The time passed quickly and, even before I left, I knew that I had participated in something good, something beautiful, something sacred!

The same thing happens every day in many communities in our country and around the world. Terrorists may get front page media coverage, but quiet unassuming goodness such as I experienced that morning wins hearts and souls! It won mine, and I know it won the guests. Goodness abounds!

This Christmas we have begun the Year of Mercy called by Pope Francis. Feeding the hungry is one of the seven traditional corporal works of mercy. Many good people feed the hungry every day — often against great odds. When I think of the single unemployed parent worrying about how the three children will be fed that day, I know that my problems are small in comparison.

Recently, I was reminded that

Can the church apply penalties to the faithful?



Canon Law For Today

Rev. Frank Morrissey

Like any society, the church has to be able to avail itself of measures to punish those of its members who do not observe the common rules of the group, yet still wish to remain members.

In canon law, such measures are known as "penalties" and they can be applied only in very particular circumstances. A penalty presupposes that there has been a sin committed by the person involved.

Thus it follows that, before a penalty can be imposed, it must be shown clearly that the person who committed the "*delict*" (that is, the canonical crime) was responsible for the action. This presupposes grave matter, full knowledge, and full consent. A person who is not responsible for decisions cannot be punished for committing the crime (canon 1321).

On the other hand, canon 1321 presumes that if someone has done something seriously wrong,

Morrissey is a professor emeritus of canon law at Saint Paul University, Ottawa, and has been very active over the years in the field of canon law, especially as it applies to dioceses and religious institutes. This is his 39th article in a series.

that person knew and understood what was occurring. However, difficulties arise sometimes when it is not clear whether or not a person was indeed free to carry out the act.

For instance, at times, an addiction can be so strong in a person that the sense of freedom is diminished, but this calls for careful consideration before any determination is made. Likewise, the psychological state of the person can be seriously diminished (by, for instance, the constant use of various drugs).

Penalties in the church are considered as a last resort. They are to be imposed only when necessary. This is why canon 1341 tells us that before a bishop imposes a penalty on a person, there must have been prior steps taken.

The first of these is known as "fraternal correction," based on the Gospel precept to go and speak to the person with whom someone has a complaint (Mt 5:23-25). A second form is known as "reproof," which can be a formal warning, a strong statement of displeasure with the activity. The third form is more general, and is simply called "methods of pastoral care." These latter could include inviting a person to obtain professional help to

address the issue, to recommend a time of prayer and recollection, and so forth.

It is only when these methods have failed to bring the person to repentance that further steps are to be taken to impose a penalty.

There are various types of penalties. The most serious ones are known as "censures," the most common of which is excommunication. Excommunicated persons cannot take part in the celebration of the eucharist or in any other ceremonies of public worship, nor can they hold any office in the church (see canon 1331).

There are different types of excommunication: one is incurred automatically, another is imposed as the result of a penal process, and the third is a public declaration of the state of the person. Many of the automatic excommunications apply to clerics, such as in the case of breaking the seal of confession, or attempting to celebrate the eucharist when a person is not a validly ordained priest.

There is also an automatic excommunication for abortion, but we

will address this issue separately in another column.

An imposed penalty would follow upon a church trial. Fortunately, these have been rather rare in Canada except for the recent cases of those priests who, by imposed penalty, have been dismissed from the clerical state for the sexual abuse of minors. Catholics who leave the church incur an automatic excommunication, because they no longer wish

— DIFFERENT, page 23

— GOD, page 23



CNS/L'Osservatore Romano

POPE BENEDICT WALKS THROUGH HOLY DOOR — Pope Francis, left, watches as retired Pope Benedict XVI walks through the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Dec. 8. Pope Francis opened the Holy Door to inaugurate the Jubilee Year of Mercy.

Women feel left out in today’s church, reader says

The Editor: Joan Chittister wrote an excellent article in the Nov. 18 *Prairie Messenger*. I appreciate and applaud her courage in stating what is so obvious to many women in the church. Things need to change so women have a place in our male-dominated church. The ironic

thing is that when you look around the congregation the majority are women. We have seen that many of the younger women are no longer part of our parishes. There is nothing there that attracts or encourages them. It is the same older women who

carry on the activities in the parish. Now in some smaller parishes more and more of the middle-aged women are no longer present. Is it any wonder that they look elsewhere for spiritual nourishment? — **Leona Donnan, Tisdale, Sask.**

Different types of excommunication

Continued from page 22

to live in communion with the church. If, however, they eventually wish to return, then arrangements are made, usually through the diocesan bishop’s office, to have the excommunication lifted. Another type of punishment is known as an “expiatory penalty,” where a person is asked to make reparation for a crime committed. Such a penalty could include deprivation of rights of residence in a church-owned property, or an order to remain in residence in a certain place; there could also be a loss of office, demotion, and so forth. For instance, some priests receive a sentence to reside in a

particular place or house of penance; this can happen when they are too elderly to be dismissed from the clerical state and have no one to care for them. They are then to live a life of “prayer and penance” in reparation for the offences committed. The third type of penalty is known as a “penal remedy”; it also includes penances that are imposed as a result of an action which is contrary to church law. Among the penances foreseen by the law, we find reference to the performance of some work of religion or piety or charity. If an offence was not public, there cannot be a public penance imposed on the person. This is to protect

that person’s reputation. We notice a certain similarity here with the penance imposed on a penitent in the sacrament of reconciliation. If a censure (such as excommunication) has been imposed on a person, it must be lifted if this person truly repents. Indeed, the entire purpose of penalties is to lead the sinner to repentance, to repair scandal, and to satisfy the demands of justice. Hopefully the imposition of such remedies will continue to be rare, but it is necessary to have the law in place in case certain situations arise which call for prompt action on the part of church authorities.



Moments

The night looks sad and bitter
And a tiny lamp defines
Its sullen and cheerless air.
Inside its meagre lodging,
Where the animals are fed,
A young carpenter, worried,
Burdened, but not bewildered,
Ponders with his pregnant wife.
In expectation of birth
He cleans a dirty manger
And turns it into a crib.


By Conrado B. Beloso

God created world ‘good’

Continued from page 22

before original sin, there was original good. The biblical story of creation reminds us that God considered the created world to be “good.” And the human was “very good”! Original good came before original sin — and in Jesus Christ, the first born, that goodness is restored. Christmas is a time to remember that in spite of the horrors of evil, good abounds. This

Christmas, let us look for the goodness of others, and allow the good in us to shine — so that God’s compassionate mercy might be revealed through simple, everyday kindness. And when we see the good deeds of the other, acknowledge them and affirm them. A simple “thank you” is easy enough, and is actually quite effective. Thank YOU . . . and Merry Christmas to you, your families and your loved ones!



May your hearts
be touched by
LOVE

*Wishing you
a Blessed Christmas*

Sisters of the Child Jesus

May Peace and Joy
fill your hearts
this Christmas!




MERRY CHRISTMAS

from the
Saskatchewan Knights of Columbus


Looking for a meaningful gift?

Choose a memorable
Pilgrim Journey
during the
Jubilee
Holy Year 2016



Byzantine Icons to Rome’s Holy Doors Istanbul/Venice to Rome
*Crystal Serenity Sept. 14 - 25 +5 Days Rome/Assisi.
Santiago de Compostela to Fatima/Lisbon & Portugal’s Douro
River Cruise, Oct. 30 - Nov. 10, +12-14 day optional extensions
before or after in Spain & Portugal.
Inspiring “Care of Creation” Alaska *Crystal Serenity Aug. 6 - 16
+ Denali National Park option.
*Booking discounts before Dec. 30, 2015.

And by Popular Demand in 2017
Holy Land Israel, Jordan to Istanbul Eastertime April 2017. Limited to small party.
Contact immediately: Fr. Ralph Kleiter, Ministry to Tourism,
Ph: 306-244-3747 ✦ Kleiter@shaw.ca ✦ www.pilgrimjourneys.ca



Ministry to tourism
- the church serving travelers today.

Highlights of Pope Francis’ ministry in 2015

By Cindy Wooden

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — At the Vatican and on five continents in 2015, Pope Francis continued to encourage and demonstrate a style of evangelization that emphasizes walking with people, listening to them and showing them God’s mercy.

From the heart of the universal church to the heart of Africa, the pope showed how Christians with a joyful, living faith take calculated risks, engage in discernment and even debate, and resist the natural temptation to stay safe and cozy at home, letting everything move along like it always has.

On the 1,000th day of his pontificate, which began March 13, 2013, Pope Francis opened the Holy Door in St. Peter’s Basilica and inaugurated the Year of Mercy to help Catholics “rediscover the infinite mercy of the Father, who welcomes everyone and goes out personally to encounter each of them,” he said

at mass Dec. 8.

With his gestures, homilies and speeches, the first 33 months of his pontificate led toward that door in a way very much like the early years of St. John Paul II’s energetic papacy prepared him to lead the church into the new millennium, calling Catholics to throw open the doors of their hearts to Christ.

Pope Francis’ call, building on St. John Paul’s, is for those who have experienced Christ’s love to throw open the doors of their churches and their hearts to others, welcoming them in with gestures of tenderness.

He showed a willingness to take risks to spread the message when he decided to anticipate the Holy Year far from the Vatican. Ten days before the jubilee began at St. Peter’s, he opened the Holy Door at the cathedral in violence-torn Bangui, Central African Republic, Nov. 29. Despite security concerns, the Vatican newspaper reported, he told the pilot

flying him to Africa that if a landing in Bangui was not possible, “give me a parachute.”

Mercy, the family and the environment topped the list of topics repeatedly and insistently discussed by Pope Francis and Catholic leaders across the globe in 2015.

None of the topics was treated just on the level of theory. Discussing concrete situations, though, set off a seemingly endless series of debates, including: Are there situations where justice and truth prevent some expressions of mercy and forgiveness? How far can the church go in acknowledging and welcoming families who do not fully live up to the church’s ideal? Is climate change as real and as dangerous as most scientists say?

Pope Francis kept saying he welcomed the discussion and debate, that it was important and a sign that the church is alive. However, there also were times, particularly at the synod of bishops on the family in October, when he indicated that some of the rhetoric had crossed the line. He cautioned synod members against reading their differences of opinion in a “hermeneutic of conspiracy” and against using church teaching as “stones to hurl at others.”

The pope and synod affirmed repeatedly that God’s ideal for the family is based on the marriage of one man and one woman, united for life and open to having children. Without acting as if every form of modern family life was equally valid, but also without “demonizing others,” the pope said at the end of the gathering, the synod wanted “to embrace fully and courageously the goodness and mercy of God, who surpasses our human calculations and wants nothing other than that ‘all would be saved.’ ”

Pope Francis, who celebrates his 79th birthday Dec. 17, said from the beginning of his pontificate that he would not be a globe-trotter and did not particularly like to travel.

Other than enjoying a restful

August, though, he added more than 50,000 miles to his frequent-flyer account. He visited Sri Lanka and the Philippines in January; Bosnia-Herzegovina in June; Ecuador, Bolivia and Paraguay in July; Cuba and the United States in September; and Kenya, Uganda and the Central African Republic in late November.

Each trip featured visits to prisons, hospitals and soup kitchens or other places where Christian charity and mercy take their most concrete forms. He spoke in the halls of power, including at the United Nations and at the U.S. Congress, where he was the first pope to address a joint meeting of the Senate and House of Representatives. Whether soaked repeatedly by rain like he was in the Philippines or baked by the sun like in Cuba, he called on governments to put the needs and rights of their people first, and he called on Catholics to bend down with love and care to help society’s most needy and defenceless members.

In the document department, the highlight of the year was the release in June of his much-anticipated encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si’*.

Although forcefully insisting on a need to mitigate climate change and clean up polluted land, air and water, Pope Francis’ encyclical took a broader view of ecology and called people to treat all of creation — including poor

people — with respect and concern because a lack of respect for creation is a lack of respect for God who created all that exists.

“The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth,” the pope wrote in the document.

Pope Francis also drew attention to internal church matters, though he always said the priority was on a lean, limber and listening church busy ministering to the world rather than preoccupied with shoring up its own structures. With his international Council of Cardinals, work continued toward reorganizing the Roman Curia and revamping spending and budgeting procedures to ensure responsibility and transparency.

And if mercy must be at the heart of the church’s message, “synodality” — walking together — must mark its internal relationships, he said. The themes of synodality and collegiality have been present since the beginning of Pope Francis’ pontificate and featured in his exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, published in November 2013.

“The journey of synodality is the journey that God wants from his church in the third millennium,” the pope said Oct. 17. “A synodal church is a listening church, aware that listening is more than hearing. It is a reciprocal listening in which each one has something to learn.”



CNS/David Ryder, Reuters

PEOPLE SUPPORT ACCEPTANCE OF REFUGEES — People gathered Nov. 20 outside the Washington State capitol in Olympia to urge the United States’ acceptance of Syrian refugees. A coalition of religious leaders joined three U.S. senators on Capitol Hill Dec. 8 to say “enough is enough” to those who want to bar Muslim refugees from Syria and other Middle East trouble spots from the U.S.

Church needs to reflect God’s mercy

By Junno Arocho Esteves

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The Catholic Church needs the extraordinary Holy Year to become an effective witness of God’s divine mercy, Pope Francis said.

“The jubilee is a favourable time for all of us, so that in contemplating divine mercy, which surpasses every human limitation and shines in the darkness of sin, we may become more convinced and effective witnesses,” the pope said Dec. 9 during his weekly general audience.

One day after inaugurating the Year of Mercy, the pope dedicated his audience talk to the significance he hopes the year will have for the church saying that it is a time to experience the “sweet and gentle touch” of God’s forgiveness and his presence in difficult times.

“In short, this jubilee is a privileged moment,” he said, “so that the church may learn to choose

only that which pleases God most”: forgiveness and mercy.

The Bible says that God saw the world, the planets and the animals he created and called them “good,” but when he looked at the man and woman he fashioned, he pronounced them “very good.”

The 4th-century doctor of the church “St. Ambrose would ask himself: ‘But why does it say very good? Why does it say that God is so happy after the creation of man and woman,’ ” the pope said. “In the end, it was because he had someone to forgive. This is beautiful! To forgive is God’s joy; the being of God is mercy. For this reason, in this year, we should open our hearts so that this love, this joy of God may fill us with this mercy.”

The work of reforming the church’s institutions and structures, he noted, also offers a living experience of God’s mercy that allows it to shine forth in the world. Without mercy, the pope said, any

reform would be in vain because “we would become slaves of our institutions and our structures. No matter how renewed they may be, we would always be slaves.”

Only mercy can truly contribute to a “more human world,” the pope said, particularly at a time where forgiveness is “a rare guest in the areas of human life.” While some may believe that the church has more important objectives, he said, rediscovering divine mercy and forgiveness is essential to avoid falling into self-love, which can often be “disguised in Christian life as hypocrisy and worldliness.”

Pope Francis stressed the importance of recognizing one’s sins during the Holy Year in order to “strengthen within us the certainty of divine mercy.”

“‘Lord, I am a sinner. Come with your mercy.’ This is beautiful prayer and it’s very easy to say every day. ‘Lord I am a sinner. Come with your mercy,’ ” he said.



CNS/Karen Callaway

COWBOY JOINS GUADALUPE CELEBRATIONS — A man prays next to an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe as over 250 horses carrying members of various cowboy clubs from the Chicago area conclude a Dec. 6 pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Des Plaines, Ill., as part of a pre-celebration for her feast day, Dec 12.

Whoever believes in the good in people, draws forth the good in people.

— Jean Paul