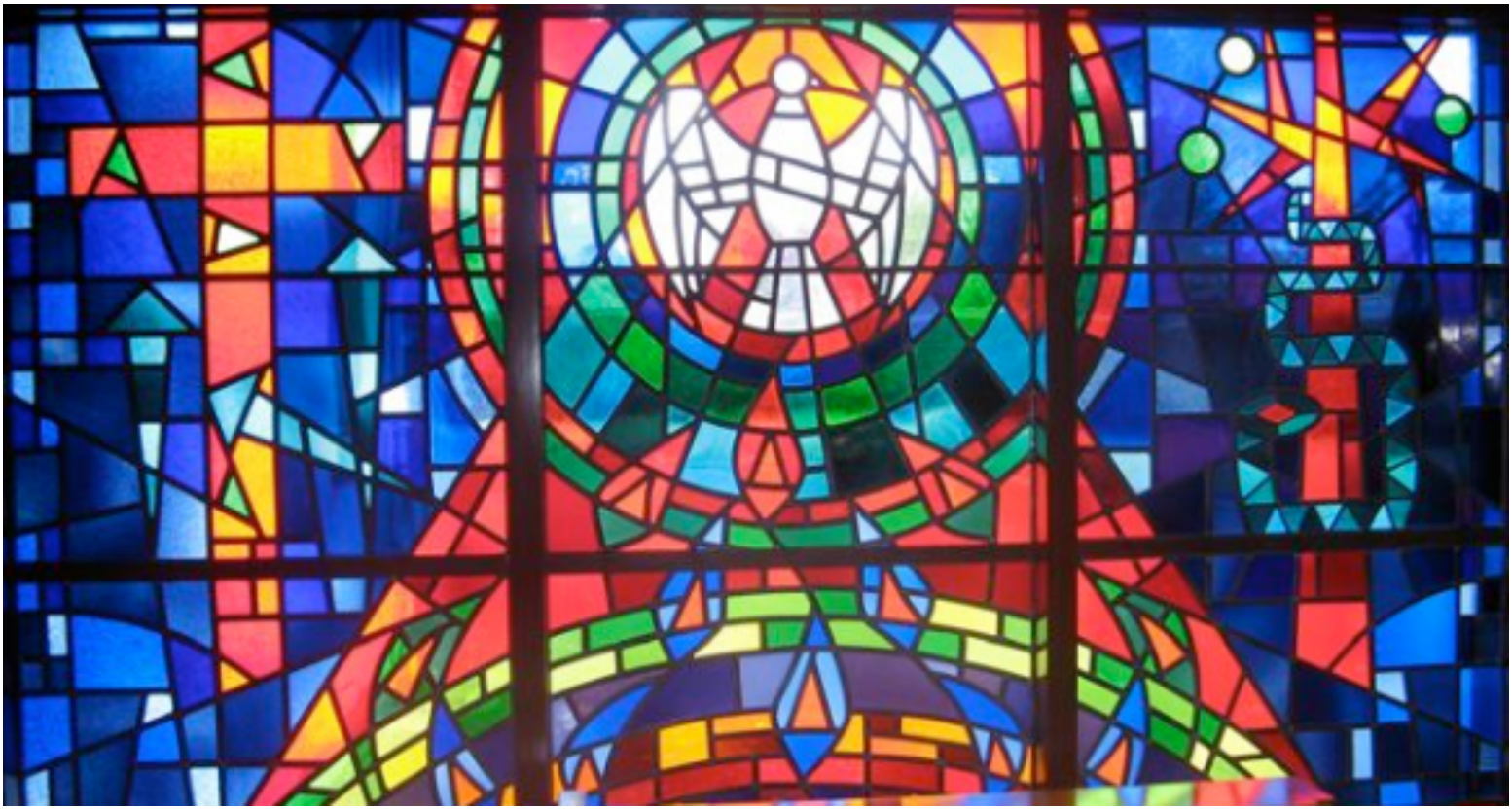
The Journal

April - June 2007

Pentecost



Pentecost is an Israelite/Jewish agricultural celebration of the first fruits of the first grain harvest. With Passover and Tabernacles, it is one of the 3 pilgrimage festivals. It was at one time called Ingathering and it was a moveable feast. When Passover and Mazzoth (feast of unleavened bread) were combined and became fixed, it too became fixed in relation to Passover and it has remained so. It was sometimes called the Feast of Weeks (Tobit 2:1).

Pentecost celebrates God's giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai: "Then from the midst of the fire that streamed from heaven there sounded to their utter amazement a voice, speech in the language familiar to the audience, so clear and distinct." (Philo Judaeus on the Decalogue)

The author of The Acts of the Apostles (Acts) uses Pentecost to show that God is faithful to the promises made to the Jews. The birth of the universal church in Jerusalem is the first fruit of the spirit of God in Jesus' disciples; the confusion of the Tower Babel is reversed in the gift of tongues; the unity of humanity is restored; Peter is the first proclaimer of the christian message after God's spirit has been given; apostolic activity follows a period of inactivity; the gospel is brought to the nations; Peter, Paul, and others are able to do miracles and to suffer as Jesus did.

The wind sound fills the house recalling the noise of God on Mt. Sinai. Fire is the sign of God's presence: "The voice of the Lord flashes forth in flames of fire." (Ps. 29:7) The remnant of Israel is restored when thousands of pious Jews, Jerusalem dwellers from all over the world, receive God's message. The point of Acts is not the pyrotechnics but the response of the disciples and the people to God's message.

The author, thoroughly rewriting the stories that had been handed on, stresses God's spirit in the way the community lived, their witness to God in Jesus, their suffering at the hands of the Jewish leaders, and the success of the apostolic mission in preaching "the great deeds of God".

This summary by Chris Diamond is based on Luke Timothy Johnson's The Acts of the Apostles in the Sacra Pagina series Volume 5.

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April - June 2007
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Editorial Team
Chris Diamond François Brassard
Arthur Menu Phil Little
Jim Noonan (NCR Regional Editor)
Emil Kutarna (SK Regional Editor)

The Journal welcomes submissions from small faith communities and individuals that share its vision of the Christian Church as one in which all are equal, decisions are made by consensus, healthy relationships are nurtured, justice is done, and the Good News of Jesus Christ is proclaimed.

All submissions to the Journal must be received by February 15, May 15, August 15, and November 15.

Address all submissions and correspondence to the **Principal Editor:**
Chris Diamond
4390 Kingscote Rd.
Cowichan Bay, BC V0R 1N2
Phone: (250) 743-5088
Email: diamondcnf@shaw.ca

Desktop Publisher:
Michael Irving
Email: ballinderry@shaw.ca

Assembling & Mailing:
Jim Doyle & crew

PUBLISHER
Xristos Community Society
35-10070 Fifth Street, Sidney, BC V8L 2X9
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See the back page for further details.

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Priesthood is an office in the Church Universal for the gathering of believers in the act of thanksgiving (eucharist) to God. In this eucharistic action, the faithful offer themselves to God with all their gifts, in imitation of Jesus, to heal the divisions, alienations, and discords that human frailty has brought about between ourselves, our neighbours, and God. We acknowledge God's pardon for our weaknesses and for "having missed the mark" (sin) and we ask forgiveness from each other. A christian priest is not a cleric nor a hierarch but a servant in the Universal Church.

FOCUS TOPIC

for the July - September 2007 Issue

Blessed are the animals. Where are they in God's kingdom? Is the ethical treatment of animals a religious obligation?

Note: Articles for this issue are due by August 15.

Reader's may send in items of interest to the Corpus Canada Forum at www.corpuscanada.org

Eucharistic Theology

by Marie Bouclin, Sudbury, ON

Dr. Odette Mainville is professor of New Testament Exegesis at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at 'Université de Montreal. She has written several works to make biblical studies more easily accessible to the general public. Having attended two of her lectures on the Eucharist, I have translated excerpts into English and added comments to reflect my own understanding of the Eucharist. The quotations are from Part I of *The Eucharist as Memorial of the Last Supper* (L'eucharistie, mémorial du dernier repas de Jésus) by Odette Mainville, Dossiers Culture et Foi, www.culture-et-foi.com/dossiers, November 2005.

"I like to speak of the 'memorial' of Jesus' last meal. I always speak of the Last Supper in terms of memorial. But in order to remember someone, we have to know that person. The problem is that we've celebrated Mass for centuries without knowing very much about the person behind the event. (It's amazing how we can go through the rite and mention him so seldom. If we want to renew, rejuvenate or regenerate the Eucharist, we should begin by evangelizing. We should first get to know this person Jesus.)"

This "getting to know Jesus" has been part of my personal theological quest for several years. I have become quite fascinated with the "historical Jesus" and have found several readings helpful. It began in earnest with Albert Nolan, o.p., *Jesus Before Christianity*, Orbis Books, 1976 which I still recommend as a classic. I then progressed to a more scholarly book, John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew, Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Doubleday, New York, 1991. This helped me distinguish between fact, myth, prototype and midrash in Scripture, but more importantly between historical truth and theological teaching. I was profoundly grateful for Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary Faith*, Harper Collins, San Francisco, 1995 - the title speaks for itself. Then my theological reflection became clearly "Christological." Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology*, Crossroad, 1999 gave me a wonderful, modern take on Jesus and from a feminist perspective. All the while, I was trying to give some kind of grounding to my being a faithful disciple of Jesus and connect that understanding to the celebration of Eucharist as "fount and summit of the Christian faith." Odette Mainville provided some answers to questions of her own.

"Why did Jesus celebrate this meal, in this particular fashion, with his disciples? Was he inventing a new ritual? And if he did not invent anything new, was his intent to confer new meaning to an existing ritual? Since this ritual has survived two thousand years of history (in a variety of forms), something important must have happened for the event to have so impressed his disciples that it has come down to us today. To better understand the origins of this memorial, we must remember that there was a 'before;' then there was the ritual (on which we'll focus later); then there was an 'after,' something that consigned the event to history.

"We distort the ritual of the Last Supper if we do not associate it with the person of Jesus, his mission and ideals, in a word, his very life. When Jesus went up to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, he had no intention of instituting a new ritual. He simply wanted to celebrate Passover with his disciples. Jesus was no fool, he knew what lay ahead because all through his ministry he challenged Jewish Tradition, the Law, and the religious authorities of his day. Jerusalem, site of the Temple, is his last stop. If Jesus had any hope of putting his message across, he had to go the distance, to reach the very heart of the Jewish community."

The idea that Jesus chooses to go to Jerusalem knowing that it was at great personal risk is not the same thing as saying that Jesus, being God, knew from all eternity exactly what he would be subjected to in order to save humanity from his Father's wrath. This high christology is another notion that needs serious consideration - beyond the scope of this paper - but it will impact on any discussion of the memorial as "sacrifice." Mainville hints at this: it is the mission of Jesus proclaiming God's vision for humanity- that disturbed both the Romans and the religious authorities of his time, leading to his execution. It was not the demands of a blood-thirsty god who would settle for nothing less than a human sacrifice.

"Jesus challenged people because he had a different conception of God. To be faithful to that vision, to carry out his mission, he had to confront those whom he believed had misrepresented God."

Bringing about the Vision of God for Humanity

"How does Jesus challenge people? He literally puts into practice what he finds in Genesis: God created man and woman equal, according to God's own image and likeness. Having this profoundly etched in one's mind changes one's vision of humanity. Promoting human dignity is a constant concern for Jesus. His vision of God informs his commitment to the human race. This explains how he treats marginalised persons, society's rejects, and women. Too quickly it was forgotten that there were women among Jesus' disciples; that was a radical novelty in an age where women had to be veiled before they could step out of their house. Jesus ate with sinners, contrary to current religious precepts. He entered into relationships with all kinds of outcasts.

"All these behaviours finally led the authorities to conclude that this man could not be from God. Everything he does flies in the face of their laws and traditions. And yet it is in the way he treats people that Jesus seeks to reveal the real face of God. His disciples are representative of everything he is doing wrong. There is a zealot (a revolutionary), a publican (a Jew working for the Roman occupiers), and illiterate, ordinary people with no education, no status, no power.

"Jesus also questions a number of rituals, laws and institutions that even then had lost their purpose and meaning. He wanted to give the Sabbath its rightful place, namely that it exists for people and not people for the Sabbath. He wanted to do away with dietary laws that created barriers between people. He set many misconceptions straight."

This is not to say that ritual cannot have purpose or meaning. The

danger for us, two thousand years later, is that our rituals become calcified - unchanging and unable to change - or meaningless. Some rituals may well need explaining, but for symbols and rituals to be effective, they need to refer to something in our own life context that has meaning. As we shall see, bread is still a symbol of nourishment. Sharing of food is still a symbol of conviviality - a sharing of our space, our lives, our values. Wine is still a celebratory drink. We still raise a glass to "toast" - show our admiration, recognize merit, extend good wishes - when we gather to celebrate. The important element here is that Jesus extends his table fellowship to everyone. Paul will take up that notion in Gal 3:28 (In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female). Moreover, continues Mainville:

"Worse is his attitude with marginalised persons and strangers. He goes so far as to set a Samaritan up as an example in his teaching, knowing Samaritans were damned, hated and despised by Jews. That's his way of preaching that 'orthodoxy' is about doing what's right.

"In the mind of Jesus, God considers life and everything life-giving a priority. If circumstances are demeaning, destructive of life, people should try to change them. Jesus always endeavours to carry out God's plan for humanity. That is the motivating force behind his mission - by loving, being open to all, defending the weak, healing the sick, and so on. That was his way of putting into practice the anthropological vision of Genesis: all persons are equal, therefore have the same rights. He understood full well the teaching of the prophets - Isaiah, Micah, Oseah - that God rejects any form of worship that does not include justice and love of one's neighbour. Thus, in Matt. 25, the righteous are those who take care of their neighbour, are just and charitable."

When we consider this aspect of Jesus' teaching and practice, particularly his table conviviality, we realize how contrary it is to his spirit to exclude people. In a word, orthopraxy takes precedence (but does not preclude) orthodoxy. To borrow from Micah (6:8), Jesus' right praxis is rather simple: act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with God.

"That raises a number of issues around ritual practices. It's not about ruling them out, but rather about giving them meaning by predicating them on living according to God's expectations."

Jesus sets an example of calling our religious authorities to accountability:

"Jesus also challenged the Temple, because it was riddled with scandal. The Temple was not only a place of prayer and sacrifices. It was the seat of government, the central bank, a business financial institution, and court house. And shortly before Passover, Jesus 'cleans house' in the Temple - a symbolic gesture, to whatever extent it really happened."

And we know that contemporary prophets are not much better received by church authorities. Like Jesus, prophets are persecuted, on the pretext that their "sacrifice" is pleasing to God. Sacrifice, meaning the killing of the victim to please God, goes contrary to the frequent admonition that God does no want sacrifices but a kind heart. This is what makes an understanding of the Sacrifice of the Cross, as depicted, for instance in Mel Gibson's "Passion of the Christ" so abhorrent: the idea that the more atrocious the torture and pain, the more pleasing to God. This condition of our "salvation" understood as "admission to heaven" does not fit with Jesus' teaching either. He talks about building the kingdom/reign of God by eliminating injustice, oppression, and all the accompanying inhumanities humans inflict on one another.

At the risk of his life

"Jesus cannot continue to teach this way and not be executed, because he is in conflict with authorities who are in the habit of governing by repression and coercion, keeping people in their place. Jesus challenges the Law. There is no dichotomy between civil law and religious law at the time; the Law is everywhere, it is what drives the life of the people. Jesus tells people to hold their heads high, to use their good judgment. There is nothing more dangerous than a people that decides to be free and to take charge of its destiny."

Which would explain the fear both religious and political leaders have of liberation theology, feminist theology, and so on. Jesus preaches a gospel of empowerment for all human beings, which means less power for those who believe they are called by God to dominate over others. No wonder repressive regimes do not allow the Magnificat to be prayed publicly. And interestingly enough, while the Liturgy of the Hours calls for daily recital of the Magnificat, it is never read in full in any Sunday liturgy (that I can think of).

"So, Jesus arrives in Jerusalem for the Passover meal with his friends. I can easily imagine that things are tense and emotional that evening. Remember, Peter took him aside when they were in Galilee and begged him not to go to Jerusalem. That's because Jesus has already made a name for himself. The disciples know perfectly well that they would be arrested and probably executed. Jerusalem was a very busy place at Passover. Pilgrims came from all over the Roman empire and the emperor's governor was there. The military were everywhere. The slightest spark could ignite the tinder box. Jesus was watched so when he joined his friends, he knew he wouldn't get very far.

"He was convinced the face of God is the one he has presented, but his life seems a failure, he is doomed to die. So what does he do? Now, we often discuss the idea of Jesus' messianic awareness (did Jesus know?..) I think that if Jesus had any profound awareness of "reality," it was at the end of his life when everything was falling apart around him, even while he is convinced he has fought the good fight. Because Jesus makes an ultimate act of faith by trying to pass the torch to his group: folks he dragged along with him for - maybe- a year and a half, trying to teach these mostly illiterate folk, likely eleven out of twelve, hapless, penniless, and powerless Galileans (a handicap in itself) like himself.

"The faith and confidence he places in God by asking his disciples to continue moving forward are pretty extraordinary. And that takes place at his last meal with them."

The Last Supper

"Jesus prepares to celebrate the paschal meal with his friends, repeating the time-honoured ritual still practised among the Jews of the time, recalling their deliverance from Egypt. What makes the meal different that night is that Jesus knows he's going to die and he wants to ensure that his disciples will carry on his work.

"What is his intent? That is the ultimate question. Did he want his

disciples to worship him? That's impossible. What is most important to him, as he is about to die? It's that his disciples commit to continuing his work. He would not have pronounced the words we'll look at momentarily if he had not known his end was near. So, he wants his disciples to make a commitment.

"The words Jesus pronounces are rooted in the most beautiful Semitic imagery of the time, one of its noblest expressions. He speaks of body and blood."

The Body

"We have reduced the notion of body to that of human flesh, that flesh destined to decomposition. In the Semitic world, this body-soul dichotomy does not exist. The body is a human being in relationship. It is a personal entity as distinct from another. That person is an autonomous entity, necessarily in relationship, with physical reference points but also specific character traits such as a unified personality constituted of intelligence, talents, strengths and flaws, everything a person is. It is to this integral person, in the Semitic mind set that God has given the breath of life. The Semitic world believes that when God takes back God's breath, a person dies.

"The body constructs itself throughout its existence. A baby's body, for instance, or an adolescent's, is transformed. So does the body of a person in the prime of life, but also at sixty, eighty or ninety. The body understood as a totality develops according to choices made, reflection, relationships, joys, sorrows, trials, struggles, the stands a person takes, his or her successes and failures. At whatever age, our body is the sum of our experiences and of all things that shaped us. At the end of life, the body is its initial potential enriched by the sum of its experiences."

This is My Body

"And so, when Jesus took the bread (is there any more beautiful symbol?), and said to his disciples: 'This is my body,' I believe he is referring to a symbol. According to Protestant theologian Gordon Fee, 'To imagine that a change took place or was destined to take place in the bread itself when he offers it, is to go far beyond both the intention of Jesus and the framework in which the disciples were operating.' Another theologian writes, 'The bread is not physically changed into the body of Christ but remains what it has always been, that is bread.' We remain on a symbolic level here.

"And when Jesus says, 'Here, this bread is my body', he presents all that he is. 'This is me, here I am, this is what I've become over the course of my life and through my commitments.' I want to stress these commitments and I want to stress what Jesus said. He said, 'Are you prepared to share this bread? If you are, you are accepting to prolong my person, prolong what has made me who I am, my choices, my preferred options, my mission. You take upon yourselves to carry on what I've started.' And that of course implies a perpetual starting over. I think that's what Jesus wanted to tell his disciples, and not, 'Here, please worship me.' Rather, he is saying that if they shared the bread, they would share his destiny. They subscribe to what he has stood for until this moment, to the face of God he has manifested, to the type of human relationships that he wanted to establish among them. I suspect the disciples at that point did not grasp one tenth of what they'd understand afterwards."

Nor do we if going to Mass on a given Sunday just means going through the motions. Bowing our heads, on our knees, at the moment of consecration are acts of adoration. Standing in a gesture of faith in Christ as God's presence among us, standing as one people committed to living the Gospel message is also highly symbolic. It says we commit to live as he did. That is far more demanding. "Embodying" Christ is more difficult than paying homage to the divinity of Jesus.

The Blood and The Wine

"Then Jesus takes the cup and blesses it. The family patriarch usually did this because he presided at the paschal meal. He still does this today in many families.

"For the people of the Bible, blood is life. They believed that the life of every human being resided in the blood. It is literally written in Leviticus and in Exodus. They are so convinced of this that they end up declaring very simply (Lev 17:11 and 17:14) that the blood of every creature is its life. Life flows as blood flows. So that blood is the carrier of life and since all life comes from God, all life is sacred. No wonder then that the consumption of blood is forbidden - it is sacred.

"If blood is life, to pick up the cup and say, 'This is my blood,' has nothing cannibalistic about it. It simply means, 'This is my life. Do you want to commune to my life?'

"There is another nuance to become aware of in the relationship between body and blood. The body of Jesus is what he has become through all his struggles: his life is what he is, what he will continue to be. And we're familiar with the symbolic sharing of the cup. Drinking at the same cup means sharing the same cause. 'Do you want to nourish yourself with my body, do you want to share my cause? Then, drink at the same cup.' Let's try to move away from the idea of a bloody sacrifice to see in the cup a source of life."

I still find the "blood of Christ" business difficult. I prefer stressing that Jesus raised a cup of wine... and I find some sympathy here.

"'This is my blood, let my life feed you.' Jesus does not invite people to eat his flesh and drink his blood, but to share the kind of life he led, and continue his mission. But the disciples were so frightened that at the first sign of danger, they ran. That's why I don't think the disciples completely understood at that point what Jesus was asking them to do."

Afterwards

"Jesus did say however, 'Do this in memory of me. Repeat what was done here.'

"I don't think they would have, had there not been a resurrection. Because at the first sign of danger, the disciples all disappear one after the other and leave Jesus to face the worst possible fate. That's understandable. At the time when a seditious person was arrested, he was executed and along with him all those who were likely to pick up where he left off. The disciples know that if they stick around, their lives are in danger."

Maybe this is why it's much easier to fall in humble adoration than it is to stand with Jesus for all he stands for. We know even "Jerusalem kills its prophets." But we also know that all disciples falter at one time or another. Which is why we need to come back, time and again, to be nourished and fortified lest we become discouraged.

"But then, there's the resurrection. Jesus' death makes no sense without the resurrection. They cannot be separated. It is not his death that saves, it is the paschal mystery that enables us to find a path of salvation through death and resurrection."

Which is why we call Eucharist the "Sacred Mysteries" - that reality so profound that we never fully comprehend it. This man Jesus was prepared to give up his life to proclaim God's message of salvation: that we are called to be whole in our human dignity, that salvation lies in our being truly and fully alive.

God is recognizable in Jesus

"The resurrection is the starting point of an extraordinary reflection undertaken by those who followed Jesus. He died; they fled to Galilee, running for their lives. It would have ended there and nobody would have heard about Jesus after a few decades had God not acted on his behalf, bringing him back to life and enabling him to manifest himself to those who walked with him.

"It is the resurrection that is the impetus, the starting point of extraordinary questions. Why did God raise Jesus? The disciples gather to reflect on the meaning of the resurrection and end up decoding it. God proved Jesus right. God recognized himself (sic) in everything Jesus did, in all his options, in everything he promoted, in the types of relationships he had. There is nothing shocking in his associations with women, strangers, pagans or sinners. And if God proved Jesus right, there is no other way to God than to follow Jesus and live out his options."

In other words, we are all called to be incarnations of God by living a Christ-centred, Christ-driven, Christ-modelling life. This is what is at the heart of our eucharistic celebrations, the "fount and summit" of our Christian faith.

"The disciples' commitment is part of keeping alive what Jesus tried to give them. What were they to do? To keep on obeying the Jewish authorities even if it did not correspond to doing God's will, since God, in raising Jesus, says, 'I see myself in him, here's how you should act.'?"

Remembering is About Doing

"When the disciples met, they reminded one another of the significance of remembering Jesus. They understood there would be no better opportunity to rekindle the flame Jesus came to ignite. What better way to remember Jesus than to recall that last evening when he shared the bread and said, 'This is me, my person.' When he took the cup of wine and said, 'This is my blood, this is my life.'"

Two Reactions To The RCWP Toronto Ordinations

Irshad Manji, author of "The Trouble With Islam Today" writes:

Salaam Alaykum (Peace be upon You) It has been wonderful to share with my audiences the changes being pursued by all of you inside your respective faith traditions. You give a great deal of strength to reform-minded Muslims. With every pro-active campaign like the RCWP, and with every gesture of support like the kind that West Hill offers the RCWP, reform-minded Muslims are reminded that we are not alone. We, the reform-minded Muslims of Project Ijtihad, believe that faith is a journey. If it becomes a destination, it becomes dogma. We are grateful to be included in your journey to justice – a journey taken in the best spirit of Jesus Christ, who is among Islam's noble prophets.

With this prayer for Divine Guidance to the new priests and deacons, we pay tribute to your courage.

"Dear Creator whom we encounter in every trial and triumph, it is you who has given us the power of conscience, the blessing of intellect and the command to seek truth. These gifts are the makings of ijtihad, Islam's tradition of critical thinking. It is a tradition to be shared by all faiths, for the inspired combination of a questing mind, hungry spirit, and personal agency belongs to all humanity. Yet some of us have more opportunity – and thus more responsibility - to exercise ijtihad. We in North America and Europe enjoy the freedoms to discuss, debate and reform so much that has been set before us. Remind us never to squander our potential through the petty tribalism that has calcified every belief in your expansive name. May we remain open to your revelations, in whatever the language they arrive. May we grow ever more receptive to challenging ourselves as well as those who appoint themselves our authorities. Above all, may we seek you in the way of Rabiya, the woman often called Islam's first female saint. She advised us to love you not for fear of hell nor desire for heaven, but for the sake of your beauty alone. God "gives wisdom to whom He will; and he that receives the gift of wisdom is rich indeed." And "She who receives your gift is even richer, for she sends a revolutionary message that your embrace is large. We have faith that it is. Let us demonstrate our faith today and forever. Ameen. (Arabic for Amen)"

Gretta Vosper, pastor of West Hill United Church writes:

Hello to you all, I do hope you have all had some time, now, to sit and reflect on the beauty of yesterday's ordination service. Linda, Irshad, Peggy, and I were so blessed by the opportunity to be with you and to participate as we did. Those from West Hill who were in attendance were deeply moved by what happened and recommitted by it to the importance of the difficult and challenging work in which we, as a community, are engaged. It isn't always clear how our work is so integral to the journey that a life of faith must be; yesterday provided beautiful moments of clarity and I thank you for them.

Please keep in touch. Irshad, Joanna, and I are all interested in bringing to birth something that honours the rising of the spirit we are all seeing, and hope that we will find ways to connect with you in that undertaking in the near future. With love to you all.

RCWP Ordinations In Toronto

by François Brassard, Ladysmith, BC

On Sunday, May 27th at West Hill United Church in Toronto, five women and one man were ordained as Roman Catholic priests and deacons by bishop Patricia Fresen of Germany.

Patricia Fresen, originally from South Africa where she was a nun for 45 years, is presently the international Program Coordinator of the Roman Catholic Womenpriests movement based in Germany. She was ordained a bishop in 2005 by an active Roman Catholic bishop in good standing.

This was the first ordination ceremony of the RCWP movement to take place on land in a church. All other public ceremonies have taken place on boats, usually in international waters, to avoid jurisdictional conflict with diocesan bishops. Also, for the first time in North America, a man will be ordained in a public ceremony in the RCWP movement.

This movement is making history in the Roman Catholic Church. It was born in 2002 and already there are 14 women priests in the U.S. and one in Canada, Michele Birch Conery of Parksville, BC. Also, there are over 150 candidates in training worldwide. At the Toronto ceremony, Marie Bouclin, from Sudbury, Ontario, and two other women from the U.S. were ordained to the priesthood. Three others were ordained as deacons at the same ceremony, one from the U.S. and two from Canada, Monica Kilburn-Smith of Calgary and Jim Lauder of Victoria, BC.

The movement is also maturing. The first ordinations that took place on the Danube in 2002 were designed to protest an unjust, discriminatory law of the Roman Catholic Church, namely, that women were denied access to ordained ministry. Now the movement wants to model another way of being Christian in the Roman Catholic tradition, a way that is more in keeping with what they understand Jesus to have originally taught and lived. Their ministry is dedicated to nurturing the world the Jesus way, that is, responding to the needs of people and planet with caring love and attention. To those who seek them out for service, they offer inspiration, hope and empowerment, just as Jesus did. It is ministry without borders. It is inclusive.

Several groups who support this vision participated in the ordination ceremony. These included representatives of the Canadian Network for Women's Equality (CNWE), Corpus Canada, Ministry Without Borders (MWB), and the Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity (CCPC).

In a separate article, The Journal is publishing a paper on the Eucharist that Marie Bouclin wrote in preparation for her ordination. The editorial board of The Journal calls upon the Holy Spirit to bless the ministry of Marie.

Honesty

by Chris Diamond, Cobble Hill, BC

"No lie can be lawful or innocent. No motive, however good, can excuse a lie-for a lie is always sinful and bad in itself." Thus said the catechism that catholic children learned by heart in the early 1900s.

Later perhaps you learned that you could avoid telling a lie. You didn't have to tell the whole truth; you could use the mental reservation; you could allow listeners to deceive themselves. Like the child who answered the ring of the door bell and told the caller "My mommy says she's not home." The child hadn't told a lie but had gotten away with less than telling the whole truth: Mommy was not "at home" to that particular caller.

There is no mistaking the meaning of being honest. It's a tall order. It doesn't admit of the mental reservation. Well, except that if you said what you really thought and told the whole truth, you might hurt someone's feelings. Then it might be alright to water the facts down a bit or tell a little "white lie" to get out of an awkward situation. It happens all the time.

In practical terms, if you lead a simple life, it is easier to be honest than if your life situation is more complex and you are in a position of determining the direction of events that can shape other people's lives. Then being honest (true and sincere) is much harder. Knowing this makes it easier to understand the difficulties and the dilemmas of people in positions of authority always having to do the right thing and striving to do what is good for everyone. Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor, remarked that "It isn't always a matter of deciding between what is right and wrong or of what is legal, but of doing what is good."

There's too much casuistry, too much fiddling with what is legal or morally right or wrong. You can do a lot of damage that way. A couple of the old patriarchs in the Bible told lies. Pious interpreters have tried to excuse them on the grounds that Sarah was a relative of Abraham and he could "honestly" say that she was his "sister" and leave out the fact that she was his wife. But it was a lie; he

meant to deceive to save his skin; he caused a lot of trouble.

According to the Dead Sea Scrolls, the truth of God was God's fidelity, God's trustworthiness. In biblical terms, being honest is synonymous with being good, holy, and doing what is right. These are attributes of God; God is trustworthy and we can have confidence in God's word and promises. Anyone who practices the attributes of God is said to be pleasing to God and is just, upright, and virtuous. So in Mt 1:19, Joseph is called "a just man". 2Peter 2:7 says the same thing about Lot. For Paul, to be true and sincere is the christian way of life. He urges the Corinthians: "Clear out the old leaven and become a fresh batch of dough." 1Cor 5:7-8

The Bible has its own conventions. The prophetic saying "Thus says the Lord" does not mean that the prophet heard the word in his ear or that a bystander would have heard a voice. But it does speak out the truth of God's Way against injustice, wickedness, and malice.

The opposite of truth is not lies but malice and wickedness which is the leaven of the old way. To be honest is to act in a God-like way, to be true and real, and not to live life only for the sake of appearances or worse. There's far too much of the latter evident in many public figures today, and most of us suffer the results. Political leaders do not tell their constituents everything they should, nor do they confront those whose only aim is to maximize profit. Almost every aspect of our lives is affected by the malice of gouging and dishonesty. It's time that political leaders realized that health and education and the environment are more important things than big profit, the bottom line. Religious leaders sadly are not much better. There's far too much talk of excommunication and sexual morality to the neglect of the greater morality of doing what is good. It's time that religious leaders realized that there's more immorality connected to business than to sexual conduct which is as ordinary as eating. I don't think the world will be "saved" by so-called "same sex marriage" nor by abortion clinics, but neither do I think that it will be saved by war and exploitation which do more harm than anything I know. Honesty practiced by political and religious leaders would be more acceptable to the public than what is evident at the present time. Some political and religious institutions have beautifully expressed doctrines and vision statements but their practice doesn't always live up to them.

Being honest renders one trustworthy. It is first among the virtues. Being honest- striving to do what is good for others- calls for discernment and patience: It's not the "This hurts me more than it hurts you, but it's good for you." attitude. The genuine well-being of others, especially the weak and helpless, calls for more thought and stamina than that. Discernment comes only with an open mind and dialogue with others; patience comes from God only knows where; honesty comes from integrity. Honesty is honed on truth and sincerity.

When I am asked why I am a christian and a Roman Catholic, I answer honestly that it has nothing to do with salvation and forgiveness of sins. God has taken care of that already. I am what I am because I was brought up an Irish catholic and that is how I find my way to God. I am at home there. I try to live, proclaim, and celebrate the Gospel and do good whenever and wherever I can. Others find God in their own way and I respect them. That is God's way for them.

God's loving action is manifest in diverse ways. Wherever there is good, God is there and the world is a better place. It is saved by institutions and people being honest and doing what is right. I think it was the late pope who said "If you want peace, work for justice." I'd like to see an honest church; it would be a good start; but I don't think I will. I'll just have to be as honest as I can.

Theological Soapbox: In The Shadow Of Wittgenstein

by Arthur Menu, Sidney, BC

The mathematicians of ancient Greece laid the foundations of geometry by conceiving of geometrical objects, such as points, lines and triangles, as having an existence apart from the material objects that embody them. In the real world there is no such thing as a perfectly straight line or a perfect triangle. But perfect lines and triangles can exist at least in the minds of mathematicians, even if they have to use diagrams to help them think about these objects.

This advance in mathematics inspired the philosopher Plato to theorize that for every material object of a particular kind, there is a perfect object outside the material realm, such that the material object is the kind of thing it is because it embodies the perfect object, just as a material triangle embodies the perfect geometrical triangle. He called these perfect objects "Forms" (sometimes translated as "Ideas").

Hence, there is, for example, a Form of courage, a Form of justice, and other moral virtues, as well more mundane things such as Forms of dogs, and cats and chairs. So if we call the Form of chair, Chairness, the chair you are sitting on is a chair precisely because it embodies or "participates" in Chairness. And Chairness exists in its own realm, whether or not there actually are any material chairs in the world.

Plato's student Aristotle, while not holding that Forms exist independently of the material objects that embody them, held that Forms exist as embodied realities. The Form of a chair, or Chairness, exists in every material chair. A chair would not be a chair if it did not have the Form of a chair. Another name for the Form, that defines what kind of thing a material object is, is "essence". A material object has both an essence that defines what it is, and existence in the real world. Essence cannot exist apart from its embodiment in an existing material object, and a material object cannot exist unless it has an essence.

In modern philosophy belief in the material existence of essences was replaced by belief in concepts or ideas of the human mind that served the same purpose as Plato's Forms or Aristotle's essences in defining perfectly what it meant for a

material object to be the kind of thing it is. This way of understanding reality dominated western philosophy until the twentieth century when the Anglo-Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein denied not only the existence of essences but also the existence of concepts or ideas that perfectly define what something is.

Take, for example, the chair. No doubt there are a range of chairs that can serve as paradigms of what a chair is. The chairs around most kitchen tables could serve as paradigms for being a chair. Everyone will agree that these are, without a doubt, chairs. But does a stool count as a chair, does a bench, does a tire on a rope serving as a child's swing count as a chair? When does an electric wheelchair cease to be a chair and become a scooter? Is a toy chair a chair? Is the executioner's electric chair a chair? Is a toilet seat a chair? Is an old person's walker a chair if it is equipped with a seat? Is a shaped bench in a bathtub a chair? Is a baby's car seat a chair?

There is no perfect definition of a chair that provides answers to all these questions. Like all definitions, except the definitions of mathematical objects, the definition of "chair" is incomplete. We may encounter a new object that is chairlike in some respects and not in others, and at that point we will have to decide whether the definition of "chair" will be further specified to include or exclude this new object.

Not anything can be included in a definition. For something to be included in a definition, it has to bear a degree of resemblance or similarity to objects that everyone agrees fall under the definition. One could not, for example, include a cloud in the definition of "chair". But once the condition of resemblance has been met, whether an object will be considered to fall within the definition, will often be left up to the free, and sometimes arbitrary, decisions of people.

Definitions grow and change for all kinds of reasons. Some words have positive connotations. If I have a political cause that I wish to garner support for, I will do all I can to associate my cause with words with positive connotations. For example, if I wish to gain acceptance for homosexual unions, I will seek to have the definition of marriage include homosexual unions because for most people the term "marriage" has more positive connotations than the term "homosexual union" by itself.

Those whose objection to having homosexual unions included in the definition of marriage, which is based on the existence of a complete definition of marriage, a definition that excludes homosexual unions, are taking a position that is becoming less and less philosophically tenable. The only argument against this expansion of the definition of marriage that has any chance of succeeding is one that recognizes that how marriage will be henceforth defined is purely and simply a political decision, and goes on to offer legitimate political reasons for rejecting the proposed expansion.

What implications does all this have for our understanding of God? The traditional theological formula is that God is three Persons having one and the same divine Nature (i.e., Aristotelian essence). If we discard the Aristotelian notion of essence, how do we understand the Trinity?

First let us be clear that the philosophical concepts of person and essence apply to God only by way of analogy, or as metaphors, if you prefer. God cannot be defined by any concept of human thought or definition of language. So even if the philosophical concepts of person and essence be discredited or fall out of use, their analogous or metaphorical use to describe God need not be discarded. To use an analogy, describing someone metaphorically as a Medusa in no way loses its communicative power because we do not believe any creature like Medusa ever existed.

What this means is that refining the definitions of concepts that apply analogously or metaphorically to God does not bring us closer to God. Such concepts get us started on our journey to God, and for that they are indispensable. But once we have journeyed for awhile, we must begin to engage with God in a new way, the way of conversation. We become participants in the conversation that human beings have been having with God for thousands of years. The Bible is a record of this conversation, and the conversation continues for each of us whenever we hear God speaking to us, whether it be through a creature or through inner illumination.

In the final stage of the journey, the conversation with God subsides as we enter more deeply into communion with God. The one we have been speaking with, is who we have become.

Sophia: Morning Pages

by Dianne Peck, Halifax, NS

It didn't take me very long to decide on the answer to the question , "What nurtures your spirituality?". The answer is, Morning Pages. I discovered the practice of Morning Pages in a book called The Artist's Way by Julia Cameron. That was about five years ago. Since that time they have evolved into what I call a writing meditation.

But first, here are a few thoughts on meditation from my book, "At Our Age: How to Make 50-90 Your Dynamite Years". They are from chapter three, "The "S" Word (Stress)".

The goal of meditation is always to connect us to our Center, to the quiet Center in each of us, which is always there. Sometimes our Center is like the eye of the storm, surrounded by wild winds and turbulence. Then meditation is the boat that carries us over the choppy waters, through the hurricane, and into the stillness.

We have a still Center and it is in that place that all the solutions to all our problems lie.

At our Center is all our natural resourcefulness; eons of untapped potential is there. For every problem you have, your deep Center has an answer. The world's major corporations know that meditation is a highly effective tool for accessing that deep Center and those answers. That is why they sponsor, on a regular basis,

"*Retreat*" *weekends for their employees*. (In fact, a prediction for the corporate world for 2007 is that we can look for more Corporate retreats focusing on wellness workshops, spiritual retreats, and "find your inner artist" getaways).

There are many ways to travel from outside ourselves where stress is battering us to inside ourselves where the stillness is. And anything you do which gets you there is meditation.

Whatever you do to give yourself even a few moments of respite, of feeling good, of connecting to your true Self, is a meditation practice.

I want to tell you about my current meditation practice. It is my greatest find. It is simply a matter of going aside every day and writing a few pages.

What do I write about? Nothing and everything. That is the point. It is a kind of stream of consciousness writing. You just pick up the pen and start.

It might look like this, "Don't know how I'm going to fit everything in today. Feeling overwhelmed and haven't even started yet. So. What about this feeling of being overwhelmed. Not a stranger these days... feel it most in the evening..."

You just write. Anything. After a page or so there you are sailing along, and after a half hour or so you have filled about three pages.

That's the first thing you notice.

What you also begin to notice is that you no longer feel overwhelmed. You feel put together and ready. You feel stilled and refreshed. Very gently your writing has taken you into your Center where your needs, even needs you weren't aware you had, were resolved without effort.

The only effort you exert is to write. Just pick up a pen and start writing; write anything that comes into your mind.

What happens is this. Your pages take you into your deep soul, who puts her arms around you and holds you more tenderly than you have ever been held; who floods your "overwhelm" with extreme love.

Morning pages do not rake you over the coals of blame, do not drop you into the throbbing places or into the unbearable memories. They do not access your hurts and stand you naked in front of them to relive them.

Morning pages access your Soul, where invisible arms hold you and unconditional love floods you.

The Universe always chooses the easy way. You can believe this. You can trust in this promise.

We meditate because "guidance comes in advance of need". Do not be unsettled by the word "meditation". It is simply a tool to take you to where all the guidance you desire for your life is waiting for you, even before you need it.

The ideal time for a writing meditation is on awakening. It is utter luxury to be able to get a cuppa of my favorite morning beverage and prop up in bed with my pen and paper. As much as possible I avoid waking up my left brain until my right brain has had its chance in the spotlight.

Two years ago I was introduced to a right-brain writing practice called non-dominant handwriting. It is simply the act of writing with your non-dominant hand. The ND hand is connected to our right brain and lets us access directly our heart and our intuition. This practice has greatly strengthened my intuitive skills, and given me a loving compassion toward myself. A leading work on non-dominant handwriting is "The Power of Your Other Hand" by Lucia Capacchione.

So my writing meditation looks like this: I start stream of consciousness writing with my dominant hand. I follow that until I feel a shift in my emotions and spirit. I then ask for guidance, leads, answers, order, alignment, advice etc.

Whom I ask this of varies. It can be my own soul, the Divine, my heart, my angels and guides, even the heart and spirit of loved ones who have died.

And then I begin writing again, this time with my "other" hand. I never fail to receive a soul encounter. When I reread these lines at night or the next day, they nourish and uplift, often even more than at the time of writing.

One of my Christmas gifts was a certificate for a healing session with a black/native healer whose name is Selina. Her business is called Grandmother's Medicine Lodge and her guides are her native Ancient Ones.

The almost three hour session was a profound experience. One of the instructions I received was to become more inwardly grounded, and to do that by spending more time with my own soul. In other words, more meditation. This was not a surprise message.

For the last number of weeks I had been getting the same message, through my own intuition and from a variety of exterior sources, that one of the secrets to happiness for 2007 will be for us to increase our opportunities for stillness. Stress, illness, and yes, war, are counterbalanced by the act of getting in touch with our still Center.

Not only those in the corporate world are recognizing the need for a "going aside" practice. The message that is spreading across the globe is that world peace is more than possible and will be attained when the number of those who have personal peace reaches the tipping point.

There are many ways to practice meditation, and over the last forty years (yep, at least) I have used several different methods.

At present, the practice of a writing meditation continues to fill all my needs in phenomenal ways. It is especially responsive to the "Butterfly Effect".

The Butterfly Effect is the idea in meteorology that the slightest movement in the atmosphere in one part of the globe, can cause a major movement in another part of the globe. "The flap of a butterfly's wings in Brazil can cause a tornado in New York", as they say. The phrase refers to the idea that a butterfly's wings might create tiny changes in the atmosphere that ultimately could cause a tornado to appear (or, for that matter, prevent a tornado from appearing).

I find this possibility easy to believe because it is based in Quantum Physics which keeps exploding with information about the nature of all matter, us and our minds included. Everything originates from a common matrix of energy particles. In fact, we not only originate from it, we are it and are always immersed in it. It is something like being in a pool. The smallest movement in this spot causes ripples throughout. What is happening over here affects what is happening way over there.

What I love about this idea is that we are talking about action that is as gentle as the flap of a butterfly's wings. Is there any

movement more gentle than that?

One of my coaching clients, who keeps getting swamped at her desk by un-filed papers, has made the resolve that before she leaves her desk for the day, she will file one paper. One. How is that for a gentle resolve. And therefore a do-able one. And one that is much more likely to last. And the end result will not be a tornado of disaster, but a tornado, paper by paper, of success.

The idea of the Butterfly Effect makes meditation easy, because it lifts all the pressure. It eliminates all demands on how long I do it or how little. Whatever I put in, big or small, all is magnified Whatever your meditation practice is, and the best one is always the one that works for you, even if you are spending only two minutes a day getting still, getting anchored, connecting with your inner stillness, the great part is this: because of your quantum nature, your practice has a butterfly effect for you. The benefits, even those as soft as one flap of a butterfly's wings, ripple throughout all of your mind, emotions, spirit and body. And at the same time they do something else. They also ripple throughout the whole cosmos, restoring peace and wholeness.

Sophia Wisdom: **Let there be stillness on earth and let it begin with me.**

Commentary On The Constitution On The Church

by Gregory Baum

Gregory Baum's Commentary on *The Constitution On The Church* of Vatican Council II was written in 1964 when the Council document was new and before sensitivity to inclusive language was in vogue. It is a necessary reminder of a Church that allowed The Holy Spirit to flourish in the Church and of the debt owed to Council experts such as Gregory Baum for the explanations they provided.

Gregory with Ruth Diamond whom he baptized, January, 1968

Excerpt

There is a strong consciousness in the Church of our day that the Gospel is a living reality and that, therefore, the Christian people show progress in understanding it. While the Church's highest magisterium, which the Council is, authoritatively proposes its understanding of divine revelation in the present situation, it does not wish to close the door to future developments and growth of insight into God's Word...

The conciliar teaching must be regarded as a stage in the Church's quest, guided by the Spirit, to understand more deeply the meaning of God's self-revelation and his covenant of mercy with his People...

The Church is a mystery. While the Church is a community of men on earth and even a society with structure and laws, it is, first of all, the presence of God's merciful action among men. This is what we mean by mystery. In and behind the visible community, we encounter God himself who declares his love over and over again. This is one reason why we are members of the Church: we firmly believe that it is in this community that we encounter the God of salvation. Even when some historical manifestations of ecclesiastical life discourage us and the burden of human weakness distorts the face of the Church before our eyes, we firmly believe that it is among our brothers in Christ that we encounter the God of mercy, of forgiveness, of vivifying grace...

While we do not know the details of God's plan for the peoples of the world, we do know from the Scriptures that God is a God of love who never leaves himself without a witness among men...

"At all times and in every nation God has given welcome to whomever fears (i.e. respects ed.) him and does what is right." (Ch. 2) And "As God never limits his grace to the visible sacraments but offers mercy to those whose heart he touches, we may firmly hold that the grace of reconciliation which is manifest in the Church is also active among men who have not heard of Christ or have misunderstood and rejected the message we have preached." (Ch.1)

The Church is a communion. It is not in the first place a society created by a legal foundation; but the redemptive gifts in which the many participate... gifts of faith, hope, and charity, of sacrament and service; the many charisms given to build up the community into a holy temple of God... Church is the presence of God's love among men... The faithful gathered in the eucharistic liturgy are the Church of God. They are not simply a section of the Church, a little part of it, a cog in a big wheel; but the entire ecclesial mystery is present in the local congregation at worship.

Corpus Canada

Who Are We?

We are a faith community of men and women empowered by our baptism in Jesus' Spirit to reach out to others in their need as Jesus did. We also provide support for married Roman Catholic priests, their family and friends.

Where Are We Going?

This faith community is dedicated to

- Renewal of ministries in the Church, including an ordained ministry open to men and women, married and unmarried;
- A vision of Church that includes all people who profess faith in Jesus Christ;
- Development of leadership among all the baptised in the Church;
- Promotion of a wholesome view of sexuality;
- Justice for all based on Gospel values.

Our message is a healing one and is directed to everyone, especially the marginalized in the Church. It is our hope to reach people through many ministries, and in a special way through the creation of small faith communities.

How Do We Get There?

Through a collegial approach based on consensus reached through communal discernment in the Spirit, we share our gifts that all creation might be transformed according to God's loving plan.

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Corpus Canada National Coordinating Team

Coordinator
Joe Gubbels
Email: jgubbs@shaw.ca

François Brassard
(see box at lower right)

Chris Diamond
(see page 2 column one)

Emil Kutarna
113 Tibbets Road, Regina SK S4S 2Y9
Tel: (306) 586-2853
Email: emil@kutarna.net

Jim Lynn
Box 2702, Yellowknife, NT X1A 2R1
Tel: (867) 873-8529
Email: jjniteowl@hotmail.com

John Palardy
Tel: (403) 556-7855
Email: palardyj@telusplanet.net

Dianne Peck
7163 Royal Pine Avenue, Halifax, NS B3L 2G3
Tel: (902) 454-2406
Email: diannep@ns.sympatico.ca

Leonard Schmidt
902 Borebank Street, Winnipeg MB R3N 1G6
Tel: (204) 487-3553
Email: adeline.leonard.schmidtl@shaw.ca

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Corpus Canada Treasurer
Alanna Menu
****
Corpus Canada Media Representative
François Brassard
422 Davis Rd., Ladysmith, BC V9G 1V3
Tel: (250) 245-3365
Email: ckfb@telus.net
****
Corpus Canada Web Site Manager
Michael Irving
Email: ballinderry@shaw.ca

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