

NEWS

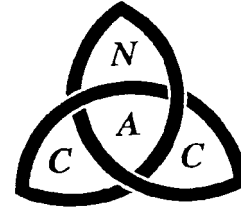
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BRIEFS

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An Apology and an Opening Thought

This *News Briefs* comes to you a bit late - by the (unofficial) schedule, you should have had it in November. Still, one benefit is that, being late, it can bring my warmest wishes for a joyous Christmas and a blessed New Year. It also allows me to declare, publicly (and somewhat smugly), that my wife's Christmas present is now safely taken care of!

That announcement is not intended to trigger spousal panic out there. The purpose is to introduce a question: Where exactly did all this Christmas present business start? Did that shadowy St. Nicholas fellow start it, back in the Third Century? Were the ancient Romans, with their rowdy festival of Saturnalia responsible? Or was it a very early Birks (for her)? A very early Canadian Tire (for him)? A very early Toys R Us (for us kids)?

Well, the correct answer of course is that the first real **Christmas** present was given "upon a midnight clear" a little more than 2000 years ago. That Christmas present is the only *true* one, the only *perfect* Christmas present there ever has been. (And it's the only one that must never be taken back for an exchange.)

A Cockeyed Optimist?

Besides being *NBs* Editor, I am also current NACC Chairman, which gives me the honour of attending a number of meetings - some very rewarding, others less so. A single week this last October saw me at two of the very rewarding kind, one in Washington, DC (the Association for Church Renewal) and the other in Burnaby, BC (the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada). I came away from that week recharged with optimism about the future of the NACC and its member congregations. Why? Well, for the specifics you'll have to read what I've written up for the December *Fellowship Magazine*. However, briefly put, the two meetings confirmed again for me that: (1) the little NACC canoe is riding the Western Church's most vigorous faith current (described by Tom Oden in his recent [The Rebirth of Orthodoxy](#)); (2) other parts of the Body of Christ know about us and pray regularly for us; and (3) there are more people like us in the United Church than is commonly realized - including by ourselves. (In contradiction of what is often stated about the UCC, a recent major Canadian survey reveals that over 50% of members believe, with us, that Jesus is God and Saviour, the Bible is God's Word, and so on.)

Incidentally, if you don't already get *Fellowship Magazine* (and you really should!), contact Fellowship Publications by mail (Box 237, Barrie ON L4M 4T2), phone (1(800) 678-2607), or email (felmag@csolve.net).

. . . Try it - you'll like it!

The Purpose of *News Briefs*

In the last month two NACC congregations have approached us with this question: "What (if anything) is the Alliance doing for us?" Fair enough, perhaps, but what is puzzling is that, when they were asked if *NBs* isn't sufficiently informative, the response in both cases was that only a very few of their people actually see it. Disturbing! - Given that *NBs* is our main means of keeping NACC folk informed about the issues and what the NACC is trying to do about them.

Just for clarification: *News Briefs* is emailed five times a year to every congregational contact person identified to us. They in their turn are asked to print up a copy for the church office, which then runs off inserts for the next Sunday's order of service. If that isn't happening in *your* congregation, you might like to ask why. (*NBs* is also posted at the NACC website, www.unitedrenewal.org/nacc/nacc.stm.)

The New Moderator

The last issue of *News Briefs* promised to say something soon about the Rev. Peter Short, elected Moderator at this summer's General Council. Last month, he and your Editor had a friendly chat on the phone, and he said he'd be pleased to meet and talk when he's next in BC. In the meantime, see the December *Fellowship Magazine* for an interview with him, and the October *Observer* for an introductory profile.

NACC AGM 2004

Each year our AGM is held in a different part of the country, and in 2004 it'll be Alberta's turn. So, May 6-8 we will be meeting in Ferintosh, in farming country about halfway between Edmonton and Calgary. Last year we met in London, Ontario, and the year before that in Breadalbane, Prince Edward Island. As in previous years, I plan to touch base with as many NACC congregations in Alberta as possible.

Closing Thought: Our Present-Giving God

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praise of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1Pet 2:9,10.)

The reason we, like Peter, know that to be true is *Jesus* - Jesus, the first, the one true Christmas present. As we unwrap that present, what do we find inside? - That God has deliberately chosen us as his people; that he speaks to us, clearly and directly; that he makes extravagant promises to us - and keeps them; that, in his compassion, he redeems us from our sin and bondage and guilt; that, like a Father, he protects and nurtures us; that he has set aside an amazing inheritance for us; that he binds us to himself with a love that puts the best of human love to shame.

And what does he tell us he'd like back from us? What's our Christmas present to him? - Just the best of our halting, feeble, humble attempts to love and serve him in holiness and faithfulness.

So what's *not* to celebrate at Christmas!