

NEWS

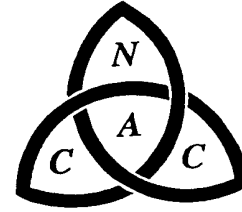
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BRIEFS

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Thoughts on Advent, 2005

An old bit of Yuletide doggerel starts out, "Christmas is coming and the goose is getting fat". Presumably the geese didn't know where their pleasant gain of weight was taking them, but you and I do. We know all about Christmas dinners, and what they mean, for geese and for us. And so some of us are already signing up for workouts at the gym. Others are glumly thinking of New Year's resolutions. Others are buying electronic calorie counters. (Optimists trust the bulges will somehow never actually show up.)

Still, Advent's not really about such matters. It's not about cooks slaving over ovens; or worries about our over-indulgence will demolish the bathroom scales; or about big parties, or over-the-top present-giving. Advent has nothing to do with human excesses; it's all about God's prodigality, and, in particular, it's about the first, the most amazing, the greatest Christmas present ever - Jesus.

The church's two great "pause and think" times are, of course, Advent and Lent. They call us to halt in stunned amazement at what God has done for us in two cataclysmic historical events. So, in Advent it we find ourselves asking ourselves questions like, Who are we, that he should come as one of us? And, in Lent, questions like, Who are we, that he'd die for us? Mind-boggling questions which need to be approached in an attitude of prayer.

For most of us, prayerfulness is hard to achieve amid all the frantic, distracted "Happy Holidays" preparations. But deep down, even the most distracted of us knows the season is really about the Lord's birthday, and that we're again being called to think, deeply, about the earth-shaking event at Bethlehem. While the poor old goose (or turkey, or whatever you fancy) has an excuse for not knowing what's going on, we don't. So let's pray that this Advent the Father will help us to pause from our busyness so that we can absorb again the mystery of this holy season.

Need a Christmas Present Suggestion?

Please consider making a donation (tax deductible) to the NACC's Legal Defence Fund (LDF), whose sole concern at present is to help pay the legal costs of Ted Wigglesworth's desperately drawn out wrongful dismissal suit against the United Church.

For those who don't know this sad story, here is a pocket summary -- In 1997, Ted, the NACC's second Chairman, was abruptly removed from his Alberta Charge by his Presbytery, which acted without warning. Simultaneously, he was barred from accepting a call anywhere else. Eventually, his ordination in the UCC was revoked. The reasons for all this have never been made clear. However, what is clear is that the church's own procedures were not followed at a number of critical junctures, and that Ted was therefore denied due process. After exhausting the UCC's appeal process, he is now forced to take his case into the secular court system.

Through most of this time the UCC has been able to use its considerable financial resources to obtain legal advice and representation. Ted was obviously at a huge disadvantage, so, through the generosity of many, many donors from across Canada, the LDF has been able to help pay for the legal assistance he needed – to the tune, now (believe it or not), of over \$133,000. With the matter now moving toward the Court of Queen's Bench in Alberta (hopefully for resolution in 2006), we find we need to appeal again for help. Please respond as you can - in doing so you will be helping both Ted and the United Church, which apparently needs to be reminded that its own mandated procedures are there for the protection of everyone, including the church itself.

All donations, small and large, will be received most gratefully, and please be careful to specify they are for the "Legal Defence Fund". They should be sent to the Treasurer, Cameron Smith, 3 Sunshine Gardens, SUSSEX NB E4E 2E3. Tax receipts will be issued.

Highlights from the Chairman's Year

In thinking about what brought me particular personal satisfaction during 2005, three instances come to mind immediately.

- The first is how the NACC's relationship with the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada has developed. As an "umbrella" organization of Protestant Christians who think much like us on many issues, the EFC has provided us with the opportunity to contribute on matters of national significance (sometimes in opposition to our denomination). The most immediate example was the federal government's recent marriage legislation. With our advice (along with that of many others), the EFC was able to argue for traditional marriage before both the national government and the federal Supreme Court, something we obviously lack the resources to do on our own. (I had the privilege of representing you at two EFC events this year, in NS and BC.)
- The second example is the tour my wife and I made of NACC congregations in Newfoundland in the spring. The 13-14 congregations we contacted are sprinkled across Central NF and along the Avalon Peninsula. Some are big and flourishing, some small and struggling; their worship styles vary quite a bit; but all remain deeply committed to the traditional understanding of the faith upon which the UCC was founded. We were received everywhere with great warmth and (this will be no surprise) with much food. (The 2006 tour is slated for Ontario.)
- The third (and very recent) example, was thanks to the EFC meeting in Halifax. Once that was over, we stayed on for a meeting with the Maritime Alliance and then did a mini-tour of the region, visiting three NACC congregations, one in PEI, one in New Brunswick, and one in Nova Scotia. All three face considerable challenges, and it was good to think about these difficulties with them – as well as to renew old acquaintances (and, once again, to over-eat).

Snapper: Congregational treasurers are reminded that, whichever way you normally do this (i.e. directly or through your regions), contributions to the NACC's operational fund would now be most welcome. That particular cupboard is presently close to bare.

Closing Thoughts for Dog Lovers: "If there are no dogs in heaven, then when I die I want to go where they went." (*Will Rogers*) "Anybody who doesn't know what soap tastes like has never washed a dog." (*Franklin P. Jones*) "If your dog is too fat, you aren't getting enough exercise." (*Anon*) -- *with acknowledgements to Touchstone*

And a blessed Christmas to everyone, including dog lovers --

Geoff