

NEWS

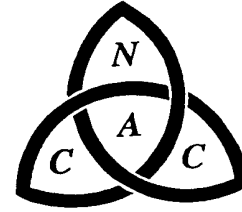
Volume 8, Issue 3

489 E. Osborne Road
North Vancouver BC
V7N 1M4

BRIEFS

February 17, 2006

Phone: (604) 987-9876
Fax: (604) 987-9835
Email: Geoff.Wilkins@telus.net



Editor: Geoff Wilkins

-----Website: www.unitedrenewal.org/-----

"What, Me Worry?"

When they see that phrase, many of the congenitally irreverent among us will suddenly visualize the gap-toothed grin of Alfred E. Newman, *Mad Magazine's* longtime iconic cover boy. But is his signature slogan as mindlessly goofy as his grin? Or is there something to it? After all, people find a lot to worry about these days – our health system, world terrorism, avian flu, global warming, AIDS, natural disasters of all sorts, etc., etc.

And, for those of us who love the United Church, there are worries about the amazing, 40-year decline in the denomination's membership. Now, thoughtful commentators predict a church of just 50,000 members by 2050 – an incredible slump from the 1.1 million of 1965. (See, for instance, " 'Easygoing' Church Turns 80", *Toronto Star*, Aug. 20, 2005, now posted online at www.christianity.ca.) Of course it's not just the mother denomination that's declining; so are its congregations – they are many fewer in number, and their membership and attendance levels lower. For most of us, it's at this local level, that our immediate worries are concentrated.

So, with all this angst, what do A.E. Newman's memorable words have to say to us? Well, without knowing it, AEN does in fact speak a prophetic word to any Christian that hears them. They could be a slogan for anyone who believes that God is completely in control, even if his hand is hidden from us. They could be a reminder not to worry, but to commit to watchful, patient prayer and discipleship.

Quite recently, and without quite putting it this way, the *Financial Post* reminded us that God often works in secret and without any involvement from us. A major article on 06-02-18 described how the corporate world increasingly makes room for religious practice, by making provision for onsite Bible study, by setting aside rooms and time for reflection and prayer, by being flexible about time off for religious observance, etc. Interestingly, the article suggests this is mainly due to expectations brought to Canada by immigrants, many of them from other faiths than ours. Could God be working away below our radar?

Your Prayers are invited:

- For the NACC's AGM, meeting April 21-22, in Toronto;

- For the United Church's General Council meeting in August, in Thunder Bay – and in particular for what it decides when considering the proposed (and highly problematic) new Statement of Faith.

2005 – A good year for children and the family?

Speaking of worry lists, the situation of Canadian children and their families comes near the top for many. Why should anyone worry?

Well, consider the following from 2005 –

- In February the then government introduced Bill C-38, which, in an effort to accommodate same-sex couples, proposed to radically broaden the definition of marriage from the traditional one man, one woman. This despite polling showing 2/3 of the population were not in favour.
- In the same month, the federal budget failed once again to address the needs of stay-at-home parents, instead proposing a two year expenditure of \$1.4 billion for out-of-the-home daycare.
- In July, Bill C-38 (see above) became law across the country in what was clearly not a free vote. The long-term consequences remain unclear.

In recent weeks, the media have shone a spotlight on declining Canadian birth rates, perhaps the most visible consequence of years of wooly thinking about the real needs of children and their families. StatsCan has reported that by 2002 the Canadian rate had dropped to 1.50 births/woman, "the lowest since vital statistics began to be produced nationally in 1921." Commenting on that, a column in the *Globe and Mail* remarked, "Canadian couples are not having enough kids even to replace themselves – and have not for more than three decades now." [The commonly accepted rule of thumb figure for population maintenance is 2.1 children/couple.] The article also challenged the widespread assumption that immigration will take up the slack.

Speaking of the New Statement of Faith (above):

A relatively recent and major UCC initiative called "Emerging Spirit" is aimed at "establishing and nurturing a relationship between the United Church and Canadians aged 30–45." (See <http://www.emergingspirit.ca/>.) A reporter from *Christian Week* recently contacted us, asking, among other things, how effective ES might be in terms of rebuilding the denomination. A paraphrase of what we said in response: "It will not be effective as long as the UCC continues to promote 'junk theology'. As the proposed faith statement confirms, we're hooked on an 'eat-whatever-you-want', fast-food approach to the faith. That low-nutrition approach is not going to satisfy anyone's long-term hunger."

Paul's advice to a young protégé remains pertinent - *"Timothy, guard what God has entrusted to you. Avoid godless, foolish discussions with those who approach you with their so-called knowledge. Some people have wandered from the faith by following such foolishness. (1 Tim 6: 20-21, NLT)*