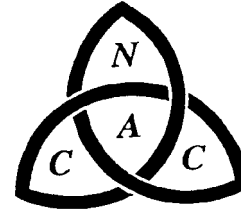


# NEWS

# BRIEFS

Volume 5, Issue 1

July, 2002



489 E. Osborne Road  
North Vancouver BC  
V7N 1M4

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

Editor: Geoff Wilkins

**Celebration Time!** -- The University of Toronto recently conferred the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, on our esteemed Immediate Past Chairman, Bob Blackburn. This was to honour Bob's long and distinguished career as the university's Chief Librarian. (Actually, "long and distinguished" doesn't begin to do justice to Bob's time at U of T – the word "dazzling" was used in the introduction, and the speaker made it abundantly clear why that was exactly the right word.)

In his address to the graduating class, Bob told a revealing anecdote from his early days on the family farm, about how he learned that "good enough" *wasn't* good enough. That idea was essentially the theme of his remarks. And he underlined it at the end of his address, when he wished the graduands, "In the long run, may you and your children and grandchildren be able to know, whatever you have done and been, that it *has* been good enough: as good as you could make it."

While that sentiment was what guided Bob as he built the U of T's library into the stellar study and research vehicle it is today, it also describes how, since retirement, he has laboured for renewal in the United Church. Here too, what he's been doing for the last dozen years has always been as good as he could make it – and that is very good indeed. It's the reason we – and so many others - are so very deeply in his debt.

Thank you so much, Bob – and congratulations, friend!

## Small Congregations

This year's NACC AGM was in PEI, where our hosts, the United Church folk of Bread-albane, welcomed us so warmly, fed us so amply, worshipped with us so joyfully.

In future NBs we'll say more about the AGM and the MACC Rally. However, prior to crossing to PEI, Geoff Wilkins our Chairman and Joan his wife spent a couple of weeks meeting with people from as many Maritime NACC congregations as possible - nine in all by the time a very tired rental car returned to its Halifax stable.

Seven of the nine congregations could be fairly described as small – as are many others belonging to the Alliance. Almost all of the seven are facing real difficulties, but what was impressive was how they were soldiering on, keeping the faith,

quietly and stubbornly resisting the pressures to compromise on what they know to be right. One of Geoff's satisfactions was to be able to confirm to them that they – and no-one else - have the right to call the shots on most of what they think is important regarding their own churches. (His authority for that? – The UCC's own Manual.)

Being small often goes with feeling vulnerable and unimportant, but that's to get it quite wrong. Almost a year ago, *World Vision* put out a short, but thought provoking, publication to argue the opposite.

In Small Churches – Being True to Who We Are, Andrew Irvine defines smallness as having an average Sunday attendance of

75 or less. (That means 60% of Canadian churches are "small"!)

And he insists the small church has a unique calling: "It is not a miniature version of a large church. . . . It is radically different." For instance,

- One of its most obvious gifts is the increased opportunity for intimacy;
- Regular attendees are well known, so new-comers stand out and can be made to feel welcome at once;
- Individual needs are quickly known, so ministry to those people can be focused and immediate;
- The church's relationship to its immediate community can be more easily defined, its response more easily focused.

Admittedly, resources – energy, time, money – may be limited, but there are also advantages like those above to exploit. To do that, the church leadership needs:

- To recognize God has something important in mind for this congregation;
- To identify that purpose by looking carefully at the needs of the church itself and the wider community;
- To assess the gifts available and how they can serve the needs;
- To set priorities and make plans to

address them.

According to Irvine, the biggest obstacle to vibrant small churches is one of attitude. Too few, overworked members, overly centralized control, limited vision often force a survival mentality. But, he says, "the healthy small church excels not because of its programs, but because of its emphasis on people. . . . It is a relational community where people come first."

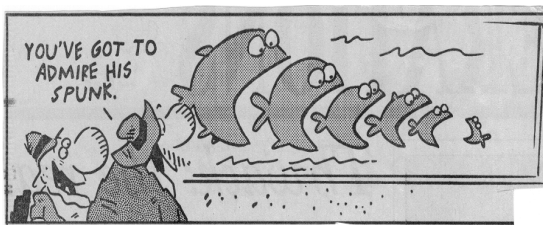
If any of this makes sense, if any of it piques your interest, there are all sorts of help for congregations wishing to revitalize themselves – including small ones.

Undeniably, some effort is involved, but approaches like Natural Church Development can really help make sure all that effort is targeted and orderly. The NACC is happy to recommend NCD, and even for cash-strapped congregations, the help of a trained coach can be affordable!

To learn more, contact Rev. Art Hiley, [byronuc@execulink.com](mailto:byronuc@execulink.com), 420 Boler Rd., London, ON N6K 2K5. Phone (519) 471-1250 Fax (519) 471-4721.

**THERE IS NO CHARGE FOR ASKING!**

Small, but . . .



-- with thanks to Lester Settle

rejection, principally because of the negative effects on local congregations. The deadline now is October 22, and well before that we will issue an updated explanation of what is at stake. Hopefully, Sessions/Councils/Boards will not vote until that's received.

In the meantime, though, there's a new problem to chew on: after a careful reading of page 218 of the 37<sup>th</sup> GC's *Proceedings*, Bob Blackburn suggests Remit 7 would allow GC to put aside its present financial reliance on donations to the M&S Fund (voluntary), replacing that with a system of congregational assessments (involuntary). This will obviously be of interest to congregations unhappy with how M&S funds are being spent.

**Déjà Vu – Remit 7 All Over Again**

About a year ago, the 37<sup>th</sup> General Council approved asking the wider church (the presbyteries and pastoral charges) to vote on a major reorganization, which would replace conferences and presbyteries with regional councils. Criticism caused GC Executive to delay the deadline so the proposal could be re-explained.

However, the NACC still recommends