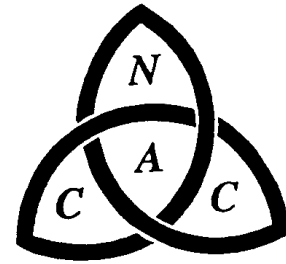


NEWS BRIEFS

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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

Acting in Love

NACC Sunday is an opportunity to remind ourselves of who we are and of what God calls us to do for him. And there's much work to do, because the United Church is in deep trouble – obviously so, even by that most mind glazing of measures, statistics:

Since 1965, Canada's population has grown over 50%, but the UCC hasn't grown at all - in fact it has declined, dramatically; compared to '65, we now have 30% fewer congregations, our membership is down 37%, and we have 77% fewer children in Sunday School. (See box).

Strangely, the UCC has had little official to say about this depressing state of affairs.

So what's going on? What's gone wrong? -

Didn't Jesus' final words in Matthew's Gospel charge the church to grow by going out and making disciples of every person it could? Doesn't that mean some kind of growth should be going on?

God's sorrow over us must surely mirror what he felt so often in Old Testament times. Israel, with great honesty, tells the world of how for long periods she turned her back on him, rejecting true worship, adopting her own agendas rather than his. And she also tells how God turned away from her. However, unlike people today, Israel didn't try to blame her ills on society, or the economy, or the government, or the media, . . .

With others, the NACC believes the root cause of our dismaying record – like Israel's - lies in our denomination's confusion over what it is it believes. But providentially there are in reality two United Churches – there is the confused

United Church of Canada, 1965-99

Canadian Population	'65	20M
	'91	28M
	'99	30.5M
UCC Preaching Places	'65	5,374
	'91	4,112
	'99	3,764
Membership	'65	1,064,033
	'91	900,200
	'99	668,549
Sunday School Membership	'65	609,583
	'91	187,330
	'99	140,129

Sources:

Statistics Canada, UCC Yearbook

“institutional” church (the church of our recent Moderators, of our General Council Executive, of the bureaucracy, of the theological colleges, of the power brokers in many Conferences and Presbyteries), and there is what we might call the “congregational” church. While a portion of this also wanders off in confusion about Jesus Christ, the Godhead, Scripture, much of it continues to soldier on with a quiet sense of purpose that celebrates the Good News. Providing a voice to this second church – and it’s much bigger than the formal membership of the NACC – is what we are all about. We’re here to give the faithful something to hang onto, to call the UCC back to itself, to spread the Good News to those who haven’t heard it, or who’ve lost it. Acting in love of God and neighbour, we’re called to be a sort of “loyal opposition” in the UCC.

What are the signs this role is necessary? The examples are everywhere, but here are a few, almost off the cuff –

- There’s the church’s insouciant acceptance of a very recent Moderator who doesn’t believe the resurrection really happened.
- There’s the UCC’s official rejection of scripture as the primary reference for Christian living (the 1992 General Council).
- There’s her recent attempt to introduce new baptismal formulae (several of them very bad). Expect to be asked to vote on these shortly.
- There’s the creeping rejection of the Fatherhood of God.
- There are rejections of “Jesus Christ as God and Saviour, the only mediator between God and man” (e.g. BC Conference, 1990).

The list goes on.

What agonizes the NACC is the conviction that the people of the UCC are being led, many of them blindly, out of the narrow way that leads to eternal life and onto the broad path that leads to death. Pointing this out doesn’t make you popular, and that’s partly why the NACC has now decided to avoid appointing its national Chairman from among our clergy. Ministers who voice opposition to the institutional church are hugely vulnerable, and the current situations of our first three Chairmen (all clergy) illustrate this – one has left the ministry, another has left the United Church, and one (Ted Wigglesworth) has been drummed out of the clergy. You can expect your Chairmen to be lay persons for the foreseeable future.

This is a time for the 100 covenanting congregations to stand together, and observing an “NACC Sunday” – hopefully on June 10 – is intended to remind us again of our common purpose in the service of God. We also hope that the work of the NACC and its regional associations will receive a huge boost as our prayers rise to the Father through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Our trust is that these loving prayers for the United Church will bring about the renewal we all desire.

And then there’s the Legal Defence Fund. We are also asking that on this Sunday you will remember the needs of the Legal Defence Fund. Currently, it is trying to assist Ted Wigglesworth in his drawn out effort to use his situation to lead the church to act more justly and charitably towards its clergy and congregations. His is in a very real sense a critical test case, one of huge importance to every

minister and congregation. If the action is allowed to lapse, all sorts of procedural game-playing and dangerous regulatory language will become that much more entrenched. His struggle has huge implications for all of us – clergy and congregations - so please give what you can to keep the suit on track – including your prayers.

Admittedly, some people have found it difficult to support the Legal Defence Fund because they just can't believe their United Church would misuse one of its ministers as alleged. But consider: the church has never given specifics about why it originally moved against Ted, and when pressed it merely talks vaguely about his not being "effective". And it consistently refused to reinstate him, despite his jumping successfully through a long sequence of hoops. Finally, it struck him from the clergy.

But is Ted indeed an ineffective minister? - Well, here is what the Chair of the Board of Lac La Biche United Church said in a letter in support of Ted's recent court application:

"About two years ago the Lac La Biche Pastoral Charge asked Rev. Ted Wigglesworth to participate in Sunday worship as a guest preacher and despite the disapproval of the St. Paul Presbytery has continued to invite him to take part in worship service each Sunday since.

"Before Ted's arrival, Lac La Biche was a dying congregation. People were very unhappy with both the United Church policies and the minister that the United Church had settled there. People were leaving the church and others were simply not coming.

"Now we are a small but growing congregation and the reason for this growth is the presence of Ted Wigglesworth. He is a sensitive and caring person who makes people feel comfortable and at home in the Christian environment that he creates.

"Ted is in-tune with the needs of the people in this church and works hard often arriving early on Friday and staying late on Sunday to care for these needs. His tireless ministry includes Sunday worship, Funerals, Baptisms, confirmation classes, Bible study, visiting the sick, counseling the grieving, counseling the troubled and generally caring for the spiritual health of the church.

"Ted is great teacher with great Biblical knowledge who through his Bible-based teachings challenges us to grow spiritually and continually seek the meaning of living our lives as Christian people.

"Ted teaches us what it means to be a Christian by "walking the talk". He is a man who shows love compassion understanding and forgiveness for all, even those who have persecuted him."

So there you have it. Quite a testament!

Ted's struggle has huge implications for all of us, so please give what you can to keep the suit on track. While the "institutional" church probably wouldn't agree, a successful result will be a great gift to the "congregational" church.

God bless you, and God bless the United Church.

Briefly:

- **Immediate Past Chairman Bob Blackburn** underwent bypass surgery on May 31. Please pray for his speedy recovery.
- **Alan Dowber**, President of the Central Ontario region, continues to battle cancer. Please keep him in your prayers.
- Celebrate the Supreme Court's recent 8-1 decision that **Trinity Western University** can indeed expect its students to observe a biblically based code of conduct.
- Pray for the **Interfaith Coalition on Marriage**, which has been granted intervenor status in Ontario and BC court hearings to adjudicate the redefinition of marriage along same-sex lines. Coalition members include Catholic, Muslim, Sikh, and Protestant Evangelical bodies.
- United Church lawyers will shortly argue the denomination's appeal of an earlier ruling in the **Supreme Court of Bermuda**. That judgement broke new ground by ruling that adherence to the faith was the criterion on which property should be awarded to conservative elements in the congregation wishing to leave the UCC. If upheld, the precedent may have application in other jurisdictions.
- Planning is well along for "**Christ Our Light**", this Fall's Ecumenical Renewal Conference in Ontario. A sequel to the earlier very successful "Christ Our Hope" conference, its sponsorship again comes from Anglican, Presbyterian, and United renewal groups. The location is Burlington; the date is November 3. More details later.
- Congregations thinking about reaching their communities through **Alpha**, can borrow the videotapes from the NACC. Just contact us at the address, etc., provided at the top of Page 1.
- Charges in the process of calling a new minister are reminded that the NACC maintains a register of orthodox clergy who would currently entertain a move. To find out more about the **Pastoral Relations Service**, contact us at the same address, etc.
- **Your feedback on News Briefs** – ideas, suggestions, criticisms would be most helpful. Once again, please use the address, etc., provided.

Words of Encouragement: "Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him." (Ps 91:14-16 NIV)

Closing Prayer: LORD, We are grateful that we can absolutely trust you, no matter what the circumstance or situation. We know you will always be faithful to us, and in response, we set our hearts to love you always, to be faithful to you always, and to cherish our relationship with you above all else.

In Jesus' Name.

AMEN