

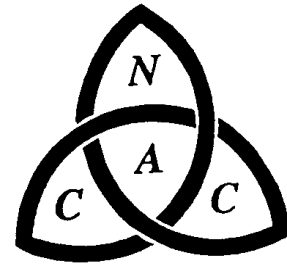
# NEWS BRIEFS

Volume 3, Issue 3

April, 2001

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## Our Task

This last Sunday the scripture readings at my home church included two very familiar passages - the "dry bones" episode in Ezekiel and John's account of the raising of Lazarus. What struck me as so significant for the NACC was that in the Ezekiel passage God doesn't say the words that raise the bones, he tells the prophet to speak them. And the miraculous happens - life returns to the scattered, desiccated bones. On his part, John tells us how Jesus calls the very dead Lazarus out from the tomb, but then tells the bystanders to release him from the grave clothes which bind his head and his hands and his feet.

What a pair of parables for us, for, like Ezekiel, God commands us to speak his life-giving words, calling the church back from death towards which it is headed. And like the bystanders in Bethany, Jesus commands us to release the church from what binds it so inescapably to death.

To rescue the whole United Church from death seems like a monstrous task to lay on a little handful of congregations like us. But that does seem to be what God has told us to do. Can we do it? - No! Can He do it? - No question! Really, what God seems to have in mind looks like pretty small potatoes beside what's just coming up - the miracle of Easter and what it tells us about God's power and about what He intends to do with it.

**SO, HAPPY EASTER!**

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**Note** - People periodically ask how things are going for the Wigglesworths, and over page is another update. We make no apology for returning again to this matter, since, quite apart from how we may feel about how the church has treated Ted, our own self-interest should prompt our staying actively engaged in his struggle. Read on. (GW)

## **Ted Wigglesworth . . . Again . . . Still**

We recently received this from Ted:

*To all My Friends in and Associated  
with the NACC,*

*As I reflect back over the last four  
years, I have a great sense of  
gratitude and thanksgiving for the  
many people who have supported  
Orlene and me with cards, letters,  
phone calls, prayers and personal  
greetings.*

*We had no real idea of the  
controversy and fierce opposition  
that would be mounted by the  
United Church against our simple  
request for justice, including our  
appeal of Coronation Presbytery  
Executive's decision to remove me  
from the Bashaw-Mirror Pastoral  
Charge - against the wishes of the  
congregation.*

*As a result, Orlene and I are in many  
ways exhausted and at times would  
like just to give up. Then, when we  
reach this point, when we feel really  
discouraged and isolated, one or  
more of you contact us. We are  
again reminded that we are not  
alone, that we are surrounded by a  
great cloud of witnesses who are  
praying for us and asking God's Holy  
Spirit to be with us in this journey.*

*At those times, tears of gratitude  
come into my eyes, and I thank God  
for all of you who carry us in your  
hearts. Without your prayers and  
support it would be impossible to  
continue.*

*In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord  
and Saviour, I thank you. You  
enable us to be strong.*

*Ever the servant of Jesus Christ,*

*Ted Wigglesworth*

(If you want to contact Ted directly,  
his address is RR #1, Ferintosh AB  
T0B 1M0; phone (780) 877-2383; fax  
(780) 877-2197; e-mail  
towigg@telusplanet.net. GW)

## **So, A "Wigglesworth" Sunday?**

The well-established reluctance of the civil courts to interfere in internal church matters probably had a good deal to do with the recent ruling from the Court of Queen's Bench in Alberta, where the judge did not grant an injunction ordering the United Church to reinstate Ted Wigglesworth to the clergy pending his suit against the church. However, in her ruling Madam Justice Sulyama offered some encouragement about how that final case might go, saying, for example, "I am satisfied that . . . with respect to this matter [the suit] it has some reasonable chance of success." Elsewhere she states, "In my view, Reverend Wigglesworth's ability to practice as a United Church Minister is a matter that is beyond employment. . . . [T]he church's actions have deprived him of the ability to pursue a Ministry and earn a livelihood in that manner. On that basis, . . . I would be prepared to find irreparable harm."

For those to whom this is all new, here's a brief synopsis: the Presbytery

Executive abruptly removed Ted from his pastoral charge in January, 1997, and he was forbidden to apply to any other charge until he had satisfied a number of requirements set by the presbytery and had its approval. No cause was given at the time, and when one was eventually given, the explanation was that his ministry had been deemed "ineffective". (No specifics.)

Ted duly completed all the requirements, but as he did so, he found more and more being added. After several years of this, he refused to continue and appealed through the courts of the church that he was being treated unfairly and not according to mandated church process. As you know, he was turned down at all stages.

Ted is not alone in this: there have been a number of instances of the church ignoring due process when dealing with its ministers, including avoiding the provisions of the *Manual*. In several instances the church has had to apologize, more often ministers have capitulated or just left the ministry. Infrequently, (e.g. the suit brought by Rev. Ron McCaw) the minister has managed to stay the course as far as the civil courts. (McCaw settled for undisclosed damages.)

Why is Ted's case so important? Well, most obviously because it is critical that a church, even if not compassionate, be just and scrupulous in its processes. In Ted's case, the UCC maintains it has been. Many of us remain convinced it hasn't.

But besides that, the time has come for an objective body with clout – e.g. the Alberta court – to draw a line in the sand and require the United Church to adhere to normal Canadian legal practice and to its prescribed processes. If that line isn't drawn, there will be very little to deter other arbitrary actions against ministers – and congregations.

The costs of having to argue the injunction have left the Legal Defence Fund seriously in the red. While we hope many individuals will continue to contribute, this particular appeal is aimed primarily at congregations. The suggestion is that they set aside a Sunday in the next month or so when a freewill offering will be taken to help maintain this cause to its conclusion. As the poet famously pointed out (I paraphrase), "Ted ain't an island. If the bell tolls for him, it tolls for all of us."

All donations should be sent to Jack Scott, Financial Officer, 792 Headley Dr, London ON N6H 3V8. Cheques should be made out to "NACC Legal Defence Fund".

## World Day of Prayer

Last month Bob Blackburn, our National Chairman, wrote to the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada, objecting on our behalf about the order of service the WICC released this year for use in Canada. In his letter, Bob protested the way the Council represented the order as the work of the "women of Samoa", when, in the words of the Secretary of the Samoan Women's

Fellowship, the WICC's changes altered "not only the language but the context of our service" so that it did "not reflect the original draft".

Apart from the misrepresentation of which Bob wrote, the WICC's changes represent a "cutting edge", "politically correct" theology that most orthodox Christians find deeply distasteful. For instance, the word "Father" was deleted throughout except for two troubling occurrences: in the refrain to the prayer of confession ("Loving God, father and mother of us all, . . ."), and in the so-called "Jesus Prayer". This latter is much favoured in the courts of the UCC where, as here, it is often substituted for the Lord's Prayer, being introduced, like the LP, with the words, "And now let us pray as Jesus taught us". The prayer then starts with the words, "Eternal Spirit, Earth Maker, Pain-bearer, Life-Giver, Source of all that is and that shall be, Father and Mother of us all". (Most definitely not the words of Jesus, if the gospels are trustworthy!)

Many of our congregations will have actively promoted WDP, and many will feel they have been misused. What can one do after the fact? – Well, women's groups, Sessions, Boards, Councils can write to the WICC to express their dismay and advise they will not promote WDP in future until they have examined the order of service. Letters should be addressed to: Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada, 201 – 394 Bloor Street West, Toronto ON M5S 1X4.

## Funny Bone

Hitting your funny bone can be very painful – just as much of what goes

on around us in the church is painful. Still, here's something from *The New Oxford Review* which in turn picked it up from *Envoy*.

Apparently there is a new hymnal out, called *A Treasury of Relativist Hymns*. The publisher's blurb describes it as "guaranteed not to offend anyone except maybe the most orthodox". Sample hymns: "Now Thank We All Our Gods", "Faith of Our Parents", "Joyful, Joyful, I Adore Me", and "Sing a New Song unto Whatever". A companion volume, *A Treasury of Materialist Hymns*, features "A Mighty Fortress Is Our Pension".

If the penny hasn't yet dropped, please don't write me letters of indignation, convene a congregational meeting to block purchase, etc. - **THIS IS A SPOOF!**

## GC 37 and Sexuality

Sexuality will, presumably, have to remain on our agenda as long as General Councils continue to make alarming rulings on the matter.

The NACC's position is that all sexual relationships outside marriage are sinful. (That is heterosexual marriage, of course.) This is Biblical and has always been the position of the Christian Church – and the United Church. However, last year's General Council took a very different position, asserting that "lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered as well as heterosexual orientations are gifts from God, part of the marvellous diversity of creation". It specifically renounced the UCC's "1960

statement that homosexuality is a sin".

The NACC believes that GC 37, while represented as acting for the UCC, did not, in this case, reflect the thinking of the church as a whole – any more than it did in 1988 re. the ordination of practising homosexuals.

So what can the grassroots do? One option is to request a remit (a vote) of the whole United Church, and we are here suggesting that local sessions (or equivalents) make such a request, using this wording, which is adapted from what was already used by Niagara Presbytery, thanks to the influence of Graham Scott:

"Be it resolved that XXXXX Pastoral Charge request the General Council Executive to submit the resolutions on homosexuality, bisexuality and transgendered sexuality passed by the 37<sup>th</sup>. General Council to the presbyteries and pastoral charges by way of a Remit, on the grounds that the action taken has contravened the Basis of union, Articles XX, VII, I and XIV."

(Contact persons will be receiving the complete wording of the resolution, including the "whereases". They are asked to pass it on to their sessions, or equivalent.)

## On the Care of Clergy

We all owe our ministers - and they owe themselves – the duty of pastoral care. Consider:

1. God placed our ministers with us for a purpose. – He had US in mind. God also gave us to our ministers. He had THEM in mind.  
Implication: we and our ministers are called to cherish each other, . . . even when the "fit" may not feel ideal.
2. What do we expect of our ministers? – to evangelize, to administer the sacraments, to preach, to counsel, to teach, to promote social change, to manage/administer, to "point us to God", . . . . **(And all of them well.)**  
Implication: this is a tough calling!

Many of us do not cherish our ministers as we should. Many ministers don't look after themselves as well as they should. So, here are two sets of suggestions, one for us lay people, one for our ministers.

### Want to support and encourage your minister? –

- Go to Church! – As one writer puts it, "The empty pew has an eloquent tongue. To the preacher it says, 'Your sermon is not worthwhile.' The empty pew is a weight. The occupied pew is a wing."
- Take a Friend! – That you invite someone to attend on a Sunday tells your minister you feel nourished by the worship.

- Say Thank You – Depressingly, no minister can ever meet everyone’s expectations - let alone his own. Your specific, honest thanks for something he has done will help redress the balance.
- Pray – Ministers pray for us. Who prays for them? And if we do, do they know we’re doing it? Pray regularly for your minister – and the prayer that will speak most powerfully to him is the one you pray with him.
- Offer to Serve – Frustratingly for clergy, many congregations suffer seriously from “consumer” mentality. Buoy up your minister by saying, “What can I do? Where can I help out in the church?”
- Share Your Spiritual Growth – If something in a worship service particularly touches you – sermon, prayer, scripture – tell your minister.
- Criticize in Private – If you’re concerned, the proper person to speak to is the minister. He needs your feedback; you need to hear his perspective. Talking to others behind his back really poisons the pool.
- Be an Advocate – The other side of that particular coin is to balance the criticisms of others by suggesting factors which they may have overlooked, even if the concerns seem to have some merit. Suggest they go to the minister directly.
- Remember Your Minister on Special Days – Send a note, a card, or gift to mark a birthday, a wedding anniversary, the anniversary of his arrival, the anniversary of a time your minister really helped you, Christmas, Easter, . . .
- Befriend the Family – Being part of a minister’s family can be stressful, and everyone in the family needs to feel personally valued by the church family. Some ways of helping: an offer to baby sit, so the parents can go out; an invitation to supper, to your family outing, to a picnic, to a sporting event, . . .

#### **Ministers: Want to care for yourselves better? -**

- Control your calendar – Block time for prayer, spiritual regeneration, . . .
- Build in personal time – time with your spouse and family, time for things you like to do.
- Nourish your spiritual self – with meditation, prayer, reading, retreats, . . .
- Keep a faith journal – record how you are with God, track your spiritual ups and downs – and the apparent reasons.
- Recharge your “worship batteries” – take a Sunday to worship in another church, in another tradition – somewhere where God may well surprise you.
- Schedule some “non-church” activities – hobbies, sports, exercise, . . .
- Fight the isolation that comes with ministry – get into a lectionary group, a relaxed study group, a prayer fellowship with other ministers, . . .
- Find someone (other than your spouse) with whom you can “let it all hang out” – a trusted elder, a fellow minister, a spiritual director, . . .
- Decide what is critical in God’s eyes and then be ready to say no to some of the rest.
- Delegate! Delegate! Delegate! – there are people with great gifts out there, and God wants to use them too.

**Snapper** – Bob Blackburn’s heart bypass is tentatively scheduled for May 25.