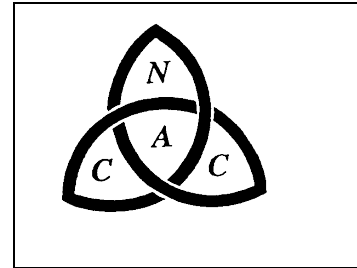


NEWS BRIEFS

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Happy 10th Birthday, News Briefs! The first News Briefs came out in 1999, to help keep our Table Officers and Regional Presidents up to date on what was going on. A year later, the Alliance's AGM decided to send it to all NACC congregations, for general distribution to their members. As time passed, that congregationally-based circulation broadened, and NBs now goes to a number of others, including individuals at General Council Office and even abroad.

Marriage etc., Some Editorial Thoughts Last Saturday afternoon, as my wife and I had a late lunch on the Vancouver harbour-front, we were part of an intrigued group of lunchers who watched with interest as a mysterious event unfolded at the end of the jetty beside us. The initial attention getter was a bagpiper, who played his slow way out to a small crowd at the jetty's tip. Behind followed two young women in long burgundy dresses. After them came an older man, a young woman on his arm, this one in white, wearing a long white veil. Finally all was clear - It's a wedding! On a jetty! Way out in the harbour! The man in front of me turned to his wife and said, "Well! Can't get much more public than that!", and indeed the event almost shouted, "WE'RE GETTING MARRIED!"

Given the dismal marriage statistics StatsCan has just reported, there was something touching about what we watched that afternoon - after all, we'd just heard that the proportion of married adults in Canada is on a steep slide, dropping from 61.4% (in 1986) to 48.5% (2006). We'd just been watching a charming but vanishing anachronism if the statistics mean anything.

So, what's going on? Well, over the last hundred years and more, the world has seen a flood of what is sometimes termed "social engineering" - manipulating conditions to bring about social change. Not all of it has been in totalitarian countries. No doubt some of the change has been beneficial, at least in the short term. Some has demonstrably been the opposite. But "engineering", it is not. To use that word is a gross libel of engineers: If *they* built bridges, developed chemical processes, designed electrical grids in this "let's-do-this-and-see-what-happens" way, the nation would be a basket case.

Indeed, what we've actually witnessed is "social *experimentation*", and you and I, our children, our grandchildren, are the guinea pigs. Much of it has been ideologically driven, and the social theoreticians and their agents - governments, courts, media, even the churches - have a lot of explaining to do.

In Canada, the focus is presently on the marriage-family-children nexus, with the latest experimentation hinging on the redefinition of marriage. What are going to be the lasting effects of expanding the legal definition from the traditional one man-one woman

understanding? What's going to be the effect on families? How about children? The honest answer is that no one really knows.

But as StatsCan has just demonstrated, the slide is already well along. . Not really a surprise, actually. Consider: for decades

- Families have been disadvantageously taxed;
- Commerce and media have promoted life-style "toys" more than children;
- which has led couples to feel the need for two incomes;
- which in its turn saps the time and energy needed to be a good parent;
- To compound the confusion, cutting edge genetics has blurred the whole idea of "parent"; and then
- there's the softening of social views on that classic family-destroyer, extra-marital "fooling around" (a useful phrase, avoiding that nasty word adultery")
- The list goes on and on – for instance the Supreme Court of Canada has just refused to hear an appeal of a decision by the Ontario Court of Appeal that a child may have more than two legal parents. (Three in the case in question. But if three, why not four, or even more?) And now, likely just over the horizon, are decisions about polygamy. And if polygamy, why not polyandry? . . . plus whatever other "polys" people may come up with?

Quoted in the *Vancouver Sun* of September 15, Professor James White of UBC's Sociology Department said, "[T]hese are questions integral to our society, but we don't pay them much attention. We have never had a white paper on the family. We have never had a royal commission on marriage. . . . I think our valuation of children both personally and governmentally is a problem. [The StatsCan report] is a wake-up call."

These are indeed "experimental" times, and if the experiments – with real people, and on a bigger and bigger scale – go wrong, who is going to re-bottle the genie?

Update: A Song of Faith As you may know, grave worries about the theology of "A Song" (the new statement approved in 2006 by General Council) caused the NACC to ask the General Secretary for a Ruling on whether the Manual requires the wider church be asked for its reaction before it is approved. The General Secretary ruled against us, and we have appealed to the Judicial Committee. The General Secretary has now recommended that the Judicial Committee not hear our Appeal. Taking exception to the justifications she offered, the NACC submitted a substantial rebuttal. However, the Secretary of the Committee has notified us that it may not agree to read our submission. We'll keep you posted.

From the General Secretary: Instructions from the last General Council and continuing budget constraints have led the GC Executive to reduce GC Office staff by 20 fulltime positions, 11 of them administrative. As well as a good deal of internal re-organization and re-focusing, in-house production of AV resources will be halted, as will that of the TV program "Spirit Connection". Mission support grants, both at home and abroad, will be reduced, as will work on adult faith formation, and (tellingly, given the editorial thoughts above) marriage resources, and family and seniors' ministries.

Briefly: Last month (Aug 15) our national Chairman was interviewed by OMNI TV regarding the NACC and the United Church. Click <http://www.unitedrenewal.org/v.html> to view the short interview. If not there, there'll be a link at www.unitedrenewal.org/.