

the merry Andrew



St. Andrew's United Church,

Nanaimo, B.C. March 2010

Message from Bert

My Reluctance to Put Words onto Paper (or, for that Matter, to Speak Them from a Pulpit)

My first guess is that it has something to do with the lasting resonance of that quote from Abraham Lincoln: "Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak out and remove all doubt." And I have unfortunately "removed all doubt" exactly so. Speaking recently to another St. Andrew's person who suffers as I do from foot-in-mouth disorder, I remembered an especially awkward incident from 1985. I was meeting with a young couple to plan their wedding. We seemed to hit it off, they being recent college graduates like me. "Where did you go to school," I asked, and they admitted it had been The University of Regina. Magnanimously forgiving them that much, I inquired as to their fields of study. Both had in fact graduated from the Faculty of Education. This sent me off on a lengthy oration on the central importance of teachers in our society, except, of course, for Phys. Ed. teachers. I regaled the couple with stories of my campus days, seeing the Phys. Ed. majors always lounging around, little more than party animals, really, and getting course credits for golfing and worse. I ended my discourse with a rhetorical flourish: "Isn't it a good and democratic thing, though, that universities have Phys. Ed. programs available for people who aren't smart enough to earn *real* degrees?" This was met with silence. I asked therefore, "What precisely do you two teach?" Inevitably, horribly, they answered, "Phys. Ed."

Clearly it *is* often "better to remain silent..."

A far more serious incident happened this last week to bring the point home. My children and I were out one evening walking our fine new dog. As we passed by a house a couple of blocks away we could hear two people inside shouting vile epithets at each other. It could be argued that what they were exchanging was nothing more than words, certainly preferable to

punches, and yet it seemed to us out on the street like the very fabric of creation was being torn. Their choice of words--indeed, their having chosen to speak at all--was at the very least unwise. Words carry a charge.

By way of contrast, at this Wednesday morning's silent prayer gathering a poem was read which told of the enormous power we have to bless other people by what we say (and do). I'll try to reproduce it here:

When I understand I stand under
When I stand under I support.
When I support I lift up.
When I lift up I raise.
When I raise I praise.
When I praise I encourage.
When I encourage I strengthen.
When I strengthen I empower.
When I empower I release.
When I release I let go.
When I let go I let God.
When I let God I understand.

Enough said....

Best thoughts (and words), Bert R.

Contrast: Selling Moorecroft and Restoring

St. Andrew's

By Elaine Winquest

(At its Feb. 26-27 meeting, Comox Nanaimo Presbytery agreed to the sale of Camp Moorecroft. Elaine, one of our Presbytery representatives, shares her thoughts on this.)

When I was encouraged to write an article reporting my experience at the last Presbytery meeting, I was excited. I wanted to share my observations of how I believe the preplanned agenda was formed to ensure the Moorecroft Decision went in line with the BC Conference wishes. I wanted to vent about how I think leaders with power who appear to be filled with

fear can influence tired voters. I'd have to write you a forty seven page document to express my feelings of what I thought I saw- not just my disappointment knowing that Majestic Moorecroft will no longer belong to the United Church but my sadness in thinking that I just witnessed an event that will contribute to the further decline of the United Church. The charts and facts that were presented at this meeting may continue to show a downward trend and the prophecy presented at this meeting will come true and they can say "see I told you so". I believe it could have been different.

As I know you do not want to read a forty seven page document, I would just like to take this opportunity to express my great relief when coming back to St. Andrews United from that meeting where we were told that passion and influence from the outer community were not welcome.

The folks at St. Andrew's United are full of courage. They are not afraid to take calculated risks. They realize it is risky to undertake a campaign to repair and improve our church but they take on the challenge because they know it is even more risky to not take action. To not take action is to take the easy way out and there are consequences. Sure we could sell the property and suggest we send our members to other bigger better churches...maybe there is one in Victoria. Perhaps, we could use some of the money to hire a bus every Sunday and then put the rest in a term deposit. That would be nice and safe. Hmmmm: reminds me of a story I once heard about burying a coin. The folks at St. Andrew's believe that the love of God will be with them as they attempt to do things differently. That is what the Moorecroft Camp Society board believed as they worked through challenges and solved problems with love and conviction. I suspect the folks at St. Andrew's United know there will be set backs and days when things look bleak but they will gather and make a revision if needed, be restored and carry on with God's work. That is what the Moorecroft Camp Society Board was hoping the Comox-Nanaimo Presbytery would let them do.

The folks at St. Andrew's United know that our church is a blessing even though at times it seems maintenance and replacing a roof can seem like a burden.

St. Andrew's has history and while we are all for the future we embrace that history. St. Andrew's United is used by the community and we see this as an opportunity to allow that community to help us preserve this well used venue. Every time a person enters the building it is an advertisement for the United Church. We are not asking the community to take over control and do the work but to help us for the good of our congregation and for the community at large. The vision Moorecroft Camp Society and supporters had for Moorecroft Camp was very similar.

The folks at St. Andrew's United are not afraid of passion. Passion feels good, it gives you energy. They are not afraid to disagree. It gives you insight. They are not afraid of hard work. When you work hard side by side with a person who believes in the future it often doesn't even seem like work and the rewards are unbelievable. The rewards of a successful camping and outreach ministry at Moorecroft Camp may now not be possible but I have no doubt the people at St. Andrew's United will experience great rewards for their efforts.

I feel as if my heart is broken but the people of St. Andrew's United Church restore my soul.

Morning Prayer

submitted by Marguerite Hodgson

I arose in the cool of the morning

Dipped my soul in the stream of life

Remembered to pray for my neighbour

And thanked God for being alive,

I heard the birds singing so sweetly,

Saw the meadow all wet with dew

The spirit of eternal morning

Was sharing the secret she knew!

That God in His infinite greatness

Reveals to us every day

His love amid concern for His children

Again I bowed and I prayed.

Thank you, Lord, that You gave me this moment

To feel your presence divine,

To know earth is Yours, and not ours to claim.

Knowing this, then. Heaven is mine.

The Spirit Moves

by Richard Zurbrigg

I fear being a classic bore about the *Catch the Spirit!* Campaign, but it's impossible to ignore how our fellowship and focus at St. Andrew's United have risen to a stratospheric level of shared purpose and involvement since we got under way. Everybody is excited and involved. Our communication and sharing are unprecedented – transformational!

Recently we've tapped into the community as never before. As we continue to crank up the campaign, the Nanaimo community is rediscovering St. Andrew's United – both as a meeting/performance venue and as a relevant, welcoming church. Many people have approached us to say how welcome and comfortable they feel within our walls; they had not realized the social and spiritual void in their lives. Many have mused that St. Andrew's United might just be theirs to attend. Others have talked of joining the choir. Some have already declared their financial support for the campaign.

After the Community Breakfast in February, several individuals expressed how comfortable they felt in our church – how evident the wondrous spirit is in our congregation. Let me quote from one letter:

“Thank you so much for inviting me to St. Andrew's United church breakfast. I was so delighted to be there and enjoyed immensely the warm and sincere hospitality that you and your members showed me. Throughout my entire day, I felt happy and joyful inside knowing I had met so many wonderful people at the St. Andrew's United Church. You gave me a sense of belonging; just what a church is designed to do. It felt like one big family re-union. Thank you again and I would like to attend some services or events if that is ok with you.”

Wow! Is it ok with us? Welcome aboard!

If we don't raise even a dime in this Campaign (and we will, no worries), it's testimonials like this that tell me beyond question: this exercise is worth it – in spades!

Bible Quiz: What is the most difficult verse in the Bible for United Church ministers to believe?

(answer on page 5)

Three Churches

by Carl Burton.

Last fall I flew down to Ontario to spend some time with my sister Faye, who lives in Listowel, a town just north of Kitchener/Waterloo. She had not been well and was to be admitted to the University Hospital in London, Ontario for an operation.

During the month of October I did what I could to help her– tidying up the yard; splitting wood and kindling and piling it in the in the woodshed for her beloved fireplace to ward off the coming winter's cold. Driving her to the store for groceries or to her hairdresser. Even trying my hand at making meals under her watchful eye, as she is a gourmet cook. Fortunately I was exempted from housecleaning – vacuuming and dusting and washing floors - as each week Sheryl, a young Mennonite woman from the district, would come in and look after those chores.

Listowel is well supplied with places of worship. A short distance from Faye's home there are three. Two are large, imposing structures built during the period of 1860 to 1880 from the quarries and brickyards of that area. One of these is Trinity United Church, whose congregation was derived from the Methodist persuasion. One is an even larger edifice , equally old, beautifully lighted outside at night. This is Knox Presbyterian Church. Some distance further there is a much smaller church not sharing the cathedral-like aura of the other two, and of more recent vintage. This is Calvary United. It grew from an Evangelical German beginning, according to a small sign in the narthex. (To be correct there is also a fourth church nearby – a lovely fieldstone Anglican Church built in 1889, but it is without a priest at this time and is only opened on occasion.)

On my first Sunday in town I thought I would go to a morning service. As my sister is not known as a morning person, I quietly dressed, had breakfast and walked the short block to Trinity United. On entering the narthex I was met by a person who nodded his head at me and disappeared. Seeing two large oaken doors ahead of me I quietly opened one and peaked in. A very impressive but empty sanctuary, capable of seating probably three hundred worshippers, with a beautiful oaken ceiling that soared sixty feet above me, greeted my gaze. Below the large pipes of the organ was a raised choir loft. I stepped back out and closed the door. A voice said ”We are painting the sanctuary for our one hundred and thirtieth

anniversary next month. We are meeting temporarily in the basement”.

So down I went. A large number of people had already gathered but I found an empty chair and sat down. To this point no one had welcomed me as a stranger. At the close of the service, which did include a wonderful male soloist, I rose from my seat and headed out the door . The Minister was at the door and shook hands with me and said `Good Morning `and I walked home.

The following Sunday I thought I would try the Presbyterian Church. With our ten-thirty a.m. service on my mind I walked into the church to find that it had started at ten and the service was already underway. Taking a seat at the back I quietly enjoyed the balance of the service including the offertory. The service closely resembled our own United Church service and there was a large choir. No one spoke to me but on my exit from the church the minister did greet me warmly and shook my hand. Two down one to go.

On my third and last Sunday in Listowel I drove over to Calvary United Church. As I walked into the church I was met warmly by not one but two gentlemen who asked my name and was I a visitor to the town and advised me that in view of the H1N1 concerns they would not shake hands but with a laugh did rub elbows with me. The minister, a tall, young fellow was standing to one side and in turn welcomed me and asked my name. When I was seated in the pew an elderly woman (not as elderly as me, mind you) smiled at me and handed me the church bulletin and a Voices United hymn book. The hymns were familiar to me and a truly memorable sermon was given by a visiting Minister from Presbytery. Like Bert`s, his sermon was punctuated with great humour.

On leaving this church I was greeted by a number of people and invited to stay for coffee. As I shook hands with the minister at the door he said `Come again, Carl, if you are ever down this way again.” I left that little church with a warm feeling of having been among friends. And with the thought , ”I know which church I would attend if I ever moved to Listowel “.

(Note from Richard Z.: Listowel is my home town! My church was Trinity United, which was not as “frigid” then as Carl found it. In 1925, dissenting Knox Presbyterian Church members retained control

of their church - almost an architectural clone of St. Andrew’s United Nanaimo. Calvary always was a spirited, friendly little church where my cousins attended. I’m glad the welcoming tradition continues!

The Cross is Lifted

by Marguerite Hodgson

A story from my time as Church Secretary

During the 1980's there was not yet a burglar alarm in the church and there were quite a few break-ins. In one of them a man stole a number of articles from the church including some dishes from the kitchen and the brass cross from the Communion Table.

He evidently broke in about 3:00 am and returned to his home waving the cross in front of his girl friend's face. Terrified , she screamed "It's the second coming of Jesus Christ - Take it back" She made him take the cross back to the church

Sometime later after the man was found and arrested, the church office received a phone call from a woman. She asked if, after the stolen articles were released, the St. Andrew's women would consider selling her the dishes her boyfriend had stolen as she had become quite fond of them. She never phoned back.

How To Stay Safe In The World Today

submitted by Carl Sorenson

1. Avoid riding in automobiles because they are responsible for 20% of all fatal accidents.
2. Do not stay home because 17% of all accidents occur in the home.
3. Avoid walking on streets or sidewalks as 14% of all accidents occur to pedestrians.
4. Avoid travelling by air, rail, or water because 16% of all accidents involves these forms of transportation.
5. Of the remaining 33%, 32% of all deaths occur in hospitals. So,... above all else, avoid hospitals.

But... you will be pleased to learn that only .001% of all deaths occur in worship services in church, and these are usually related to previous physical disorders. Therefore, logic tells us that the safest place for you to be at any given point in time is at church! And Bible study is safe too. The percentage of deaths during Bible study is even less.

So attend Church and read your Bible. It could save your life!

Cherokee Legend

submitted by Bill White (Snuneymuxw Nation)

Do you know the legend of the Cherokee Indian youth's rite of passage? His father takes him into the forest, blindfolds him and leaves him alone. He is required to sit on a stump the whole night and not remove the blindfold until the rays of the morning sun shine through it. He cannot cry out for help to anyone. Once he survives the night, he is a MAN. He cannot tell the other boys of this experience, because each lad must come into manhood on his own. The boy is naturally terrified. He can hear all kinds of noises. Wild beasts must surely be all around him. Maybe even some human might do him harm. The wind blew the grass and earth, and shook his stump, but he sat stoically, never removing the blindfold. It would be the only way he could become a man! Finally, after a horrific night the sun appeared and he removed his blindfold. It was then that he discovered his father sitting on the stump next to him. He had been at watch the entire night, protecting his son from harm.

We, too, are never alone, even when we don't know it, God is watching over us, sitting on the stump beside us. When trouble comes, all we have to do is reach out to Him. If you liked this story, pass it on. If not, you took off your blindfold before dawn.

Moral of the story: just because you can't see God, doesn't mean He is not there.

"For we walk by faith, not by sight."

Somewhere

by Cardinal Spellman

(The Christian Century, March 4, 1970)

Somewhere—the place it matters not—somewhere
I saw a child, hungry and thin of face__
Eyes in whose pools life's joys no longer stirred,
Lips that were dead to laughter's eager kiss,
Yet parted fiercely to a crust of bread.

Answer to Bible Quiz

Acts 13:42 "The people begged to have all this repeated to them the following Sabbath."
(Moffatt Translation; other translations tend to play down the miracle)

Canary in the Coal Mine OR Coming Out of the Closet!

By Eva Manly

As some of you know I am acutely sensitive to carpets laden with fire retardants. I have mentioned to some people that I, along with others, was forced to leave another church where new carpeting loaded with these toxic chemicals was installed.

I am also one of a growing number of people who is **acutely sensitive** to perfumes & other scented products (shampoo, hair spray, after shave, hair gel, cleaning products, plastics, and rubber all give off toxins that make some people feel sick.) Some thoughtful people have given up wearing perfume but don't realize that scented laundry products are equally problematic. (For me TIDE & BOUNCE are the worst- a sure fire recipe for migraine when I am near people who use them or when I use the laundromat during the summer)

Sometimes I know people for some time before discovering that they too are sensitive to chemicals in carpets & scented products. They share my reluctance to talk about this health problem as it sometimes leads to comments like "Oh, you are one of those..." Dealing with people's skepticism is an important side issue

Each of us is different in how we react to chemicals but some of us are "*the canaries in the coal mine.*"

We are also different in how we deal with this problem. One new friend recently told me that while she likes to socialize she is forced to withdraw from social situations because the chemicals people use make her physically ill. **Please note:** If someone **seems to be** avoiding you it may not be about you but simply because of scents in your personal care products or cosmetics that they can't tolerate.

At the last meeting of Presbytery one acutely sensitive presbyter had to be physically supported so she could walk out of the church after someone arrived wearing a scented product. At a church we attended in Ottawa there were frequent reminders that if people did not stop using scented products the gifted organist would have to quit.

In a recent book, *Exposed: The Toxic Chemistry of Everyday Products...*, respected journalist **Mark Shapiro** says that "the average American adult is exposed to more than 100 distinct chemicals from

personal-care products every day.” Cancer is one of the major risks .i.e. Hair dyes lead to risk of bladder cancer. *Exposed* p.23

I read in Andrew Nikiforuk’s book *Tar Sands* that chemicals (naphthenic acids) from the toxic tailings ponds are used as a wood preservative and in textiles as a fire retardant. P. 82

According to a recent article “Scent sensitive people don’t react to odours, but to **the chemicals in scented products and the off-gases they produce.....** Allergist Dr Michael Lin estimates up to 30 per cent of the population has some form of sensitivity to chemicals..... Some people probably don’t even know they have chemical sensitivity but that is changing as it becomes more recognized and acknowledged by the public & doctors.” Van.Sun,Sat. Dec. 19th

Please make St Andrew’s an even more welcoming place by providing a Scent Free environment! Please “come out of the closet” and share your experience with others. Check out: www.canaryreport.com

A Time To Plant

(Anonymous)

Plant four rows of squash:
Squash gossip
Squash Indifference
Squash grumbling
Squash selfishness
Plant four rows of lettuce:
Lettuce be faithful
Lettuce be kind
Lettuce be happy
Let us truly love one another

No garden should be without turnips:
Turnip for service when needed
Turnip to help one another
Turnip the music and dance

Water freely with patience and cultivate with love.
There is much fruit in your garden. Because what you reap you sow.
To conclude our garden we must have thyme:
Thyme for fun
Thyme for rest
Thyme for ourselves.

Shirley Goodnest
submitted by Pat Foley

A mom was concerned about her kindergarten son walking to school. He didn't want his mother to walk with him. She wanted to give him the feeling that he had some independence but yet know that he was safe.

So she had an idea of how to handle it. She asked a neighbor if she would please follow him to school in the mornings, staying at a distance, so he probably wouldn't notice her.

The neighbor said that since she was up early with her toddler anyway, it would be a good way for them to get some exercise as well, so she agreed.

The next school day, the neighbor and her little girl set out following behind Timmy as he walked to school with another neighbor girl he knew. She did this for the whole week.

As the two walked and chatted, kicking stones and twigs, Timmy's little friend noticed the same lady was following them. as she seemed to do every day all week. Finally she said to Timmy, 'Have you noticed that lady following us to school all week? Do you know her?'

Timmy nonchalantly replied, 'Yeah, I know who she is.'

The little girl said, 'Well, who is she?'

'That's just Shirley Goodnest,' Timmy replied, 'and her daughter Marcy.'

'Shirley Goodnest? Who the heck is she and why is she following us?'

'Well,' Timmy explained, 'every night my Mom makes me say the 23rd Psalm with my prayers, 'cuz she worries about me so much. And in the Psalm, I says, 'Shirley Goodnest and Marcy shall follow me all the days of my life,' so I guess I'll just have to get used to it!'

May Shirley Goodnest and Marcy be with you all the days of your life.

Norm Bunnin Memoirs

(Following is the first of a few excerpts from Norman Bunnin's memoirs. He wrote them in his eighties and nineties. His memoirs in their entirety will be placed on a website prior to his 100th birthday on June 19, 2010.)

I left England in mid-1928 on the SS Megantic bound for Quebec. Arriving was a really spectacular sight, however, the impression would have been even more remarkable had I not seen pictures of the fortress and chateau before. It was, nevertheless, the most imposing sight. Upon disembarkation and making my way to the station, an elderly gentleman walking beside me asked if it was my intention to stay in Canada. When I told him that was my intent, he said there is something you should know: "In Canada there are more horses' asses than there are horses."

The train journey to Edmonton took three days and was, of course, intensely interesting for a newcomer. . . .

My application for employment with the Canadian Bank of Commerce necessitated my taking a Grade 12 examination, which was sent to Head Office in Toronto. While awaiting the results of the exam, two of my other applications bore fruit. Solloway Mills, the stockbroker, offered to take me on at twice what the bank would pay if I passed the exam. Marshall Wells, the wholesale hardware, also asked me to pass the exam first. Then they would pay me half as much again as the bank.

When the results came through I had no idea what to do. But Uncle Alf said you should go with the bank first, to find out how the country operates, so I became a banker

I was sent to St Paul de Métis, now known as St. Paul, to be a junior clerk: in other words, the office boy. I little realized that my term in this French Canadian Roman Catholic community in Athabasca territory would last more than five long years. My starting salary, \$800 per year, worked out to \$66.66 per month but I had a room in the staff apartments above the bank, free of charge. My purpose there was to safeguard the safe as a combination of the safe could be seen through a hole cut in the floor.

The building was of frame construction, and had previously served as an implement shed and was poorly built with no insulation or double glazing.

This made winter weather most uncomfortable. The only heat was provided by two pot-bellied stoves, one below and one above.

Access to the staff apartments was by way of an outside stairway nailed to the wall. There was no plumbing; water was brought in by pails daily and the slop buckets were emptied periodically. In cold weather the downstairs stove was crammed full of coal just before going to bed in the forlorn hope that it would keep the upstairs from freezing in the night. First thing each winter morning chairs would be placed around the stove, with adding machines, typewriters and inkwells, so as to thaw them out before business began. . . .

Our cash came by railway express in canvas bags, usually \$10,000 or \$20,000 at a time from Edmonton. I remember when I was a junior going with another member of the staff to collect the money parcels. We used to play catch with the parcels until we were within sight of the office. One of us always carried a revolver on these trips . . .

The manager of the bank, Donald Telfort Munroe, was an avid huntsman and he and I would frequently go hunting. We went after geese, ducks, partridge (Hungarians), ruffled grouse and had some very successful trips in his Chrysler coupe with rumble seat. On one occasion we took Joe O'Neill in the rumble seat and wished we hadn't. He called for a stop when he saw a fool hen in a tree and without waiting leaned his shotgun on the top of the car, and fired. The car was full of dust and we choked until we could get out. Of course shotguns are not for fool hen. That is why we carried 22s. All O'Neill got was a bunch of feathers.

In the late fall, after the crop moving season was over, I was allowed to take three weeks holiday, instead of the normal two weeks. On a few of these I would go trapping muskrats to supplement my pittance from the bank. A prime rat in those days would bring 75 cents, which would purchase three steaks. The selling of pelts was no problem as in addition to the two big stores there were smaller ones specializing in skins. The store of Katz, next door to the bank was one and another one was Sam Janssen, who spoke about ten languages and spoke Cree and had most of the Indian trade. The store reeked of buckskin.

Being a member of the Volunteer Fire Brigade, I was often called out at night. During my term in the town, the majority of the livery stables burned down and there was a memorable occasion when the liquor store burned—what a time that was! Our fire hall, next door but one to the bank, housed a soda acid extinguisher that was on wheels and pulled by hand. I was wearing a new suit when called out to one fire, and some stupid ass didn't realize what soda acid was all about. I was liberally sprayed and the suit would have made a good colander.

The cold weather most of the time was a real trial trying to keep warm. I was fortunate enough to have a large buffalo robe and a poof in which I could put my feet. Quite frequently the pail of water that I put on the stove at night, in the hope of using warm water for washing and shaving in the morning, was frozen over when I got up . . . (To be continued)

The Growing Edge
by Howard Thurman

(Howard Thurman was a great Afro-American preacher, for many years pastor of the Church for Fellowship of All Peoples in San Francisco.)

All around us worlds are dying and new worlds are being born
All around us life is dying and life is being born.
 The fruit ripens on the tree;
 The roots are silently at work in the darkness of the earth
Against the time when there shall be new leaves, fresh blossoms, green fruit.
 Such is the growing edge!
 It is the extra breath from the exhausted lung,
The one more thing to try when all else has failed,
The upward reach of life when weariness closes in upon all endeavour.
This is the basis of hope in moments of despair,
The incentive to carry on when times are out of joint
And men have lost their reason; the source of confidence
When worlds crash and dreams whiten into ash.
The birth of a child—life's most dramatic answer to death—

This is the Growing Edge incarnate.
Look well to the growing edge!

Suffer Little Children

A young minister was in full flight in his sermon when he noticed a young mother walking out carrying a crying baby. Wanting to show how broadminded and tolerant he was the minister interrupted himself and said, "There's no need to leave; he doesn't bother me." "No" replied the mother, "but you bother him."

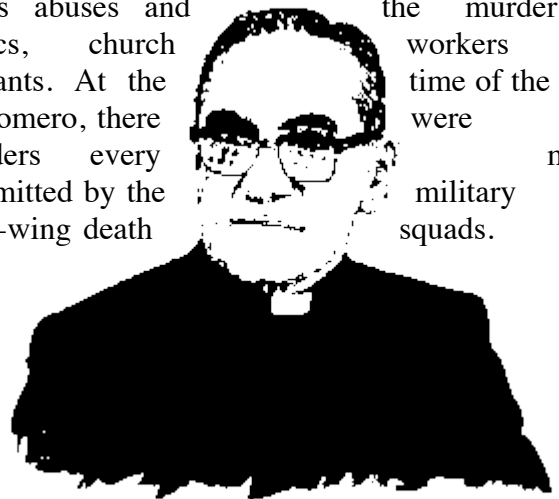
Oscar Romero Commemoration

Contributed by Eva Manly

*On Sunday, March 28 at 7:00 p.m., St. Andrew's will host a commemoration event to mark the 30th anniversary of the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero. Bishop Emeritus Remi DeRoo, who knew Romero, will be our special guest speaker. Special music will be provided by the **RabbleBerries**, a Victoria folk group, and **Charlie Fox** of Ladysmith.*

The following article was written by Phil Little, a former Catholic missionary in Peru, now residing in Saltair. Phil helped to plan the commemoration.

On March 24, 1980, Oscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, was assassinated by a professional killer sent by the government. The current President of El Salvador, has already declared that the government of that period was responsible for human rights abuses and the murder of clerics, church workers and peasants. At the time of the death of Romero, there were 3000 murders every month committed by the military and right-wing death squads.



Oscar Romero was a bishop by accident. He was a compromise candidate, chosen to be Archbishop because he was considered to be a scholarly bookworm, an academic who shunned political action and was critical of proponents of a theology that supported the struggle for liberation. He was a friend

of the affluent and considered to be a “safe” choice to lead the church that traditionally supported the small minority of landowners who owned the country.

Only a few weeks after being installed as Archbishop, the army killed Rutilio Grande, one of Romero’s priests and a friend, along with an old man and a young boy who were travelling with him. It was a pivotal event for Romero, like Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus. Romero at that moment became the Bishop of the people, rather than the bishop of the State. Romero began to question the role of the Church in its traditional support of the oligarchy. All but one of the Salvadoran bishops turned against him and wrote to Pope John Paul II accusing him of being “politicized” (on the wrong side). John Paul II had already decided to sack Romero and bring him to Rome, consistent with his accord with the US in opposing church support for social justice movements in exchange for US support for the Solidarity movement in Poland.

Romero’s conversion was profound. God was not found in his textbooks but among the suffering of the poor and the oppressed. He said "God needs the people themselves, to save the world . . . The world of the poor teaches us that liberation will arrive only when the poor are not simply on the receiving end of hand-outs from governments or from the churches, but when they themselves are the masters and protagonists of their own struggle for liberation."

The Sunday before his death, Romero used the radio broadcast of his homily to plead with the military to cease their repression. He called out to the troops "Brothers, you are from the same people; you kill your fellow peasant . . . No soldier is obliged to obey an order that is contrary to the will of God . . ." And then with clarity of purpose he demanded: “In the name of God then, in the name of this suffering people I ask you, I beg you, I command you in the name of God: stop the repression."

The military could not even wait a few more weeks to let the Pope do their bidding. While Romero celebrated mass in a hospital chapel, he was assassinated. At his funeral, mourners, including international delegates, were met with military snipers shooting from nearby rooftops.

Pope John Paul II eventually replaced Romero by installing the Opus Dei military chaplain as his successor, hoping that all would return to “normal”.

The repression continued, killing more than 75,000 people and a million sent into exile, until a populist government was elected in 2009.

The example of Romero did not die. He was a bishop of the people. He understood that the “preferential option for the poor” was not exclusive but preferential. He walked among the poor. He would go himself to the garbage dumps to pick up the bodies of victims dumped by the military. He opened the seminary as a shelter for refugees fleeing the persecution. When no one else could speak, he became the “voice” of the poor clamouring for justice and peace.

Romero knew that he was making powerful enemies. He instructed the people “if they don't let us speak, if they kill all the priests and the bishop too, and you are left a people without priests, each one of you must become God's microphone, each one of you must become a prophet."

News of Sister Churches

Palestinian Christians Call for an End to Israeli Occupation.

On December 11 a group of Palestinian Christians and Church leaders issued a call to Christians around the world, as well as political leaders and the international community, to take action to end the Israeli occupation of their land.

Called “**A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering**”, it expresses their pain and decries false promises of peace. It reminds the world about the “separation wall erected on Palestinian territory, the blockade of Gaza, the way Israeli settlements ravage their land, the humiliation at military checkpoints, the restriction of religious liberty and controlled access to holy places, the plight of refugees awaiting their right of return, prisoners languishing in Israeli prisons and Israel’s blatant disregard of international law, as well as the paralysis of the international community in the face of this tragedy.”

“We ask our sister churches not to offer a theological cover-up for the injustice we suffer, for the sin of the occupation imposed upon us. Our question to our brothers and sisters in the Churches today is: Are you able to help us get our freedom back, for this is

the only way you can help the two peoples attain justice, peace, security and love?"

"We condemn all forms of racism, whether religious or ethnic, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, and we call on you to condemn it and oppose it in all its manifestations. At the same time we call on you to say a word of truth and to take a position of truth with regard to Israel's occupation of Palestinian land. ... *We see boycott and disinvestment as tools of non-violence for justice, peace and security for all.*"

The document ends with this powerful message of hope. **"In the absence of all hope, we cry out our cry of hope. We believe in God, good and just. We believe that God's goodness will finally triumph over the evil of hate and of death that still persist in our land. We will see here "a new land" and "a new human being," capable of rising up in the spirit to love each one of his or her brothers and sisters."**

(For a full copy of the text, contact Jim Manly or go to the World Council of Churches website.)

Congratulations to **Comox United Church** which at the Annual Meeting voted to become an *Affirming Congregation*. By so doing they declare that they openly welcome gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people into their fellowship. At present the congregation is studying how they can most effectively do this.

Best wishes to **Hope Lutheran Church** and their new pastor, Rev. Terry Richardson, formerly Director General for the Chaplaincy and Restorative Justice Branch.

Anglican Church "moved to the far margins of public life."

A report from the Anglican Diocese of British Columbia calls on Anglicans on Vancouver Island to face up to the alarming decline of their denomination. (They are not alone in this regard!) 50 years ago 40% of the people on Vancouver Island called themselves Anglican; today only 1.2% do! The report calls for the closure of 19 of their 54 churches, including some of the most historic. Others like **Gabriola** are urged to seek closer ties with the United Church.

Life's Journey

contributed by Dharma Sheherazade

Life's journey is not to
Arrive at the grave safely
In a well preserved body,
But rather to skid in sideways,
Totally used up and worn out, shouting

"Man, What a Ride!"