



TSP TIMES

October, 2011

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*Express your best,
most authentic
thoughts with your
actions.*

*Focus and
empower your
actions with your
thoughts.*

Ministers' Message

By Vicki Obedkoff and Hans van Nie

Every fall the TSP congregation designates a period of 6 weeks to focus on our stewardship in the annual Season for Commitment. This year the season begins on October 2nd and concludes on November 13th. During the Season for Commitment we celebrate the life and work of our congregation and the United Church of Canada; we learn as much as we can about the operation of our work together and we make personal decisions about the level of support that we intend to offer in the year ahead. Our support can be offered in various ways such as moral support, the contribution of "time and talent," and regular or occasional gifts of money. The viability of our life and work together depends on these gifts and it is important to plan ahead each year so that we can carry out the ministry that we are called to provide to each other and to the world around us.

Our commitment to the life and work of the church is rooted in our gratitude for the profound sense of well-being we have come to know through the experience of living our lives in "the Way of Christ." This way of life has led us to appreciate the central role of the gifts of the Spirit in making our lives worth living. The exercise of spiritual gifts like compassion, patience, generosity, peace and justice making has given us genuine joy and satisfaction. As our gratitude for these gifts deepens, our commitment to exercise them strengthens. This commitment will be evident in all our activities: in our relationships and life at home; in our vocations and life at work; in our leisure and life at play; and also in our community endeavours and life at church.

It takes a tremendous communal effort to operate an organization like Trinity-St. Paul's United Church and Centre for Faith, Justice and the Arts, let alone the United Church of Canada. We, the supporters of the TSP congregation contribute substantial chunks of our time, talent, and money to both of these organizations; to study the details, please read carefully the material being distributed in this year's Season for Commitment package. At the same time, the requirements for maintaining a healthy viability are increasing and we will continue to look at ways to stay viable in the years ahead. In the meantime we are deeply grateful for every

Ministry Messages

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contribution from each supporter to the ministry we all hold very dear.

We have an important role to play as a home and community centre for all of the resident organizations and groups that share in our vision for a just, compassionate and arts-friendly society in our neighbourhood, our city and beyond. Thanks for your commitment to this wonderful vision in each of your lives and in our TSP life together.

Hans and Vicki



- VOLUNTEER ASSESSMENT -

Greetings!

As part of TSP's five-year plan, the Board has set up our Volunteer Assessment Group to gather members' experiences and then develop recommendations for changes to our approach. We are asking everyone in the congregation to take about 5 minutes to fill in an on-line survey about your current contributions to the church.

We are interested in hearing both from people who do not presently volunteer as well as people who are currently giving of their time and talents. The results of the survey will be kept confidential. However, you are invited to provide us with your name to allow us to contact you and follow-up on your responses, but this is entirely voluntary.

The results of the survey will be reported on the TSP website and in a future issue of the TSP Times. To complete the survey on-line just visit

www.trinitystpauls.ca/content/volunteer-survey-2011

Thank you for your participation and we look forward to hearing from you!

Susan Craig, Carolyn Barber, Jeanne Moffat



- Island Wiener Roast -

After being delayed for a week due to the weather, on October 5th we had a splendid Season for Commitment opening gathering. Tucked in a secluded spot on Toronto Island with a view of our beautiful downtown Toronto, we gathered around the fire - roasting sausages, enjoying other yummy side dishes, and singing a few songs. The night was also a productive one, for we had a lively discussion around ideas of how to celebrate TSP's 125th Anniversary. James and Willy, thanks for creating and hosting such a wonderful event.

Reflections on Season of Commitment

By Duncan Holmes

Earlier this month, I conducted a training course for an international Christian NGO group. Each day we began with staff led devotions. One day the reading was from one of Paul's letters and what it means to be brothers and sisters and the responsibility involved. I talked at the session about meeting people who used the term brother and sister but whose behaviour did not reflect the term they used. The sense I derived from the usage of the term carried a sense of "that is what we call each other here" rather than a sense of responsibility and caring being attached to the words being said.

The next Sunday I was at TSP, the Season for Commitment was being discussed. I found myself thinking "It's easy to call one's self part of the community. How each of us see our individual responsibility as part of this Faith community."

Responsibility takes on many forms and faces: The one with the greatest impact is showing up. It may not be the easiest for some and yet it carries with it the strongest impact and most significant way of symbolizing one's commitment to the community. If no one showed up, there would be no community. Conceivably one could show up and discover no one else was there!

There are numerous ways of being involved and of indicating one's commitment to the community. Some are visible and others are not. There's coffee preparation, our welcome table, the handing out of bulletins, sitting on a Circle or the Board, being part of the Pastoral

Care team ... and the list goes on. Many people are involved in numerous ways and simultaneously we have many empty spaces where someone has not been available to fill a spot?!

I have discovered that some of us sit and wait to be asked and other times we are asked to do something, we really don't want to do. Maybe this season of commitment is about thinking about what each of us would like to be doing and letting someone know.

A young man once told me that if he was on welcoming every Sunday he would be there early and I forgot to pass that information on. If someone shares with you that they would like to do a certain task, let someone know who can follow through on the request.

This season is the launch of our new year of programming in our community. The *commitment question* begins here and peaks at the Annual Meeting when we nominate people to Circles, Boards, and Committees.

So it is time to think about:

- ❖ How you would like to be involved at TSP this year and perhaps next year.
- ❖ What would you find rewarding?
- ❖ What would challenge you?
- ❖ What support would you require to assist you in successfully taking on this new role? Then,
- ❖ Let somebody know
- ❖ And begin the journey - wherever it might lead.



TSP's Expanded Board Retreat

September 24, 2011

On Saturday, Sept 24th, TSP's Board met with our Trustees, the Property Management Committee and some members from the Circles and other committees of the Congregation.

Since the Annual Meeting in March, the Board and other groups have been working to respond to questions raised during the meeting and questions that moved beyond those raised at the meeting. A series of reports were presented to the June Board meeting from Stewardship Circle and Property Management Committee (See website in TSP Documents for Financial Sustainability Reports June 2011). In preparation for this retreat further work had been done by those groups and by the CFJA committee.

The retreat began with a panel of 4 presenters who talked about their perspective on TSP:

- John Patcai of the Morris Dancers - with TSP for 10 years
- Trish Baldwin of Tafelmusik - at TSP for 30 years and just agreed to another 10 years
- Brendan McMurtry-Howlett who grew up at TSP and has returned as an active playwright, and
- Craig Pickthorne who arranged for a # of group events at in the Sanctuary or Gym.

Key Points of their Presentations:

- ❖ TSP is at the center of the City. It has a soul and spirit that you don't find elsewhere and certainly not at Yonge and Bloor
- ❖ Stewardship of our resources is key so we can be the centre for Faith Justice and Arts as those are the first areas to be cut in tough economic times
- ❖ TSP can be a concert space, a lecture space etc - How do we open it up for inclusivity?
- ❖ Don't try to recreate a golden age of the past - create a new golden age. Listen intently to those around you in the community. Invest in the audience/community of tomorrow.
- ❖ Many foundations/governments will not fund a place of worship.
- ❖ TSP is a community of individuals who feed me; it is a gathering place of soul and energy that crosses all boundaries.
- ❖ Create a cultural exchange with renters - create a template for exchange of services. Some can provide services easier than they can provide money.
- ❖ Tell your story from the other's point of view so they can understand it.
- ❖ Foundations are often looking for the capacity to do events. Provide some additional services that make it easier to host an event - e.g. paperless ticketing,
- ❖ TSP's role may be building partnerships with others interested in Faith, Justice and Arts.

After these reports, the groups heard the reports and recommendations from CFJA, Stewardship and Property Management. The rest of the day was spent working on concerns that came up with the reports and working through new recommendations and directions.

CFJA's 3 recommendations:

1. Develop a Democracy Institute as a "signature" CFJA program, and
2. Partner with and intentionally include the wider community in developing the CFJA. Establishing a "Friends of Trinity-St. Paul's Centre" donor base and membership program could be a first step toward involving more stakeholders in the CFJA.
3. Increase staffing support for the CFJA from one to two days per week.

Board Retreat

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The group asked the CFJA Committee to:

1. Refine the understanding of CFJA in terms of
 - a) Mission/Vision,
 - b) Congregational governance,
 - c) Building management and use ... and bring the report to the Board.
2. Discuss with Stewardship Committee fund raising in terms of friends of CFJA and TSP capital funding plans
3. Gain clarity on the role and relationship of proposed building Manager to CFJA vision
4. Clarify how to achieve benefit of “community integration” i.e. how to be a ‘community’
5. Take action to initiate Social Justice Program. Work with social justice groups to focus efforts of CFJA re: Public Witness Circle

The group also looked at using the name of TSP Center instead of TSP United Church

Stewardship Circle recommendations re finances are as follows:

- Reduce Operating Expenses
- Increase Congregational Income
- Increase Building Income
- Hold a Building (Capital) Fund Campaign
- Hold a 125th Anniversary Campaign
- ❖ Conduct a Volunteer Assessment
- ❖ Conduct a Congregation Staffing Needs Assessment

Group recommendations to the Stewardship Circle re exploring the following:

- ❖ New volunteer model including training, volunteer budget
- ❖ Clarification of timing and relationship between anniversary/capital/building campaign and CFJA ‘Friends’ campaign
- ❖ ‘Building Fund’ line be added to the budget
- ❖ Focus fund raising on building the future

Property Management Committee’s draft proposal:

The administration of the property/building aspects of 427 Bloor West be entrusted to a non-profit, legally separate, incorporated “427 Bloor Board” of five persons, named by the TSP Church Board (and the Trustees if needed) with a mandate to move closer to operational and financial sustainability for this property within five years. This “427 Board” would budget for and control all building-related income and expenses, set up short and medium term plans for the property, manage the building staff and set policies as required. The 427 Board would hire a Property Manager to help formulate and implement these plans, and to promote the usage of our facilities. This proposal would come into effect at the March 2012 TSP AGM.

Property Management Committee was asked to do the following:

- ❖ Establish 2 prior agreements 1) Bylaws etc defining priority, values & criteria of mandate of Board of 427 Bloor W.
- ❖ Draft Rental agreement (5yr) for board of 427 Bloor W. and TSP UC Congregation
- ❖ Explore the relationship with CFJA at level of building use in conjunction with the establishment of 427 Bloor W. mandate

Board Retreat

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3 Proposed Groups were as follows:

1. **A Volunteers Working Group** to assess the recent experiences of volunteers at TSP with particular focus on leadership positions, to determine the scope and shape of volunteering at TSP over the next five years, and based on this to develop recommendations for changes to volunteer orientation, support and recognition. Recommendations will also include recommended changes to the formal structures that draw congregational time, in line with the existing volunteer strength. Where possible, to reference broader studies of volunteerism within church contexts.
2. **Governance Working Group** to explore the Property Committee's recommended establishment of a new entity/Board to manage the TSP building. This task group will explore the possibilities and pitfalls opened up by this recommendation, address the following issues and present its recommendation to the Church Board, Trustees and to the March 4, 2012 TSP AGM.
 - ❖ Preferred option: a separately incorporated NGO (with TSP representatives) or a separate body reporting annually to the Church Board and Trustees
 - ❖ The appropriate mandate, responsibilities and powers of this new body vis-a-vis the Church Board and the Trustees
 - ❖ The appropriate makeup of the new body and its reporting requirements
 - ❖ Sources for ongoing financing of its budget
 - ❖ Respective responsibilities of the new body and Ministry & Personnel for building staff and pastoral staff
 - ❖ Proposed timeline for implementation as appropriate
3. **Staffing Working Group** to assess the ways and the extent to which congregation draws on staff and to determine anticipated need for staff over the next five years. Based on this, and bearing in mind financial constraints, to recommend changes to the staff level and functions. The focus will be on the extent to which the congregation draws on staff and determine anticipated needs over the coming five year period. Specifically, pastoral, music, education and office support. It is not focusing on the building staff.

People have volunteered for each of these task groups. They will be reporting to the Board at each meeting and their work will be brought to the Annual meeting in 2012.

Documents from the retreat including a more detailed report are available on the website in the TSP Documents section. I encourage you to read them knowing that more work is being done on each one to bring us to the next stage.

As a board we are listening intently to discern the future that is required for TSP. We appreciate your ongoing support and encourage your ongoing dialogue with us.

Duncan Holmes

Chair

Restorative Justice Concert at TSP

Friday November 18, 2011

By Elda Thomas

Restorative Justice has been a part of TSP's mission for many years; we hosted the Restorative Justice Conference on several occasions to enthusiastic receptions. This year, Steve Bell, a guitarist who tours the world with his music is giving a concert here on Friday, November 18th from 7:30 - 9:30 to round off the events around Restorative Justice Week. Tickets are \$15.00.



Steve's interest in Restorative Justice began when he first learned to play the guitar. In his words, "My father was the Chaplain at Drumheller prison. Some of the inmates were great pickers in the Chet Atkins style. They asked my Dad if they could have jam sessions in the Chapel on Saturday afternoons.... They'd sit in a circle and have these wonderful bluegrass jams. Once my Dad let me sit and watch and I was absolutely enthralled. When the inmates realized I wanted to play they invited me to grab a guitar and sit in...." Looking back, Steve notes that, "One reason I tour the world now is because some of Canada's most unwanted men invested in me when I was eight years old!" for this concert Steve will be joined by pianist Mike Janzen. Mike, a classically trained musician also plays rock, funk, folk and jazz. With these two incredibly talented and enthusiastic musicians this is a concert not to be missed.

Following the concert on Saturday, November 19, there will be a morning information and training session on Restorative Justice from 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon, based on the three-part model of Restorative Justice Victim / Offender / Community. The program, led by Community Chap-lain, Harry Nigh, well known to this community, and Elaine Henderson, coordinator of circles of Support and

Accountability, will include speakers who work in each of these aspects of Restorative Justice. There will be interactive sessions which will include information on how and where to become involved. The admission for this program is included in the ticket to the concert.

Hope to see you there.

Elda Thomas

The Work that Reconnects

A workshop to connect soul and action for the environment
 Saturday, October 15, 2011
 9 AM -12: 30 PM
 Trinity St. Paul's United Church, Rainbow Room

The "Work that Reconnects" is a transformative process developed by Joanna Macy to awaken us to - and root us in - the source of our collective power to effect change: The compassion and insight that enable us to experience our interconnection with all life.

This experiential, interactive workshop, facilitated by Mark Hathaway, Sarah Shepherd and Vicki Obedkoff,

- starts from a perspective of gratitude
- encourages seeing with new eyes,
- reconnects with past and future generations
- draws on Jesus' wisdom as revealed in the Aramaic versions of the Beatitudes.

Registration: www.theworkthatreconnects.eventbrite.com

Limited Spaces – register soon!

For questions, please contact Ali Hayes at 905.771.5124 ext. 31 or networkcoordinator@tucc.ca

The Green Awakening Network is a network of United Church congregations and other faith communities in the Toronto area and beyond committed to responding to the challenge of climate change by encouraging lifestyle changes and by reducing the carbon footprint of church buildings.

TSP's Public Witness Circle is co-sponsoring this October 15th event.

Centre for Faith, Justice and the Arts (CFJA) Update

By: Lyn Gaetz

The CFJA Implementation Committee has been meeting once a month all year. Amber Cunningham, Mary Lou Fallis, Lyn Gaetz, Brendan Howlett, Janet Mairs, Brad Ratzlaff, Ted Reeve and Patty Zuver are our committee members. Vicki Obedkoff is our TSP Ministry Staff Adviser. Vicki has been devoting one day a week to CFJA work and this has enabled her to connect with many social justice and arts groups in the city. We are very excited about the potential the Centre has to be a place in the centre of our city that stands as a steward for faith, justice and the arts.

The following is a synopsis of our work since last January:

1. Play readings and “useful” (David Craig’s word) theatre:

On March 20th, 2011 the CFJA partnered with Roseneath Theatre to produce the play reading of “Tough Case”, written by TSP member David Craig. This was a resounding success with a full house and many connections made to the restorative justice work important to our congregation. Our costs were more than recovered by the word getting out in the theatre community of our “hospitality”, resulting in The Guild Festival Theatre, for example, choosing to rent rehearsal space here. We are partnering with several young playwrights and developing collaborative potential for future play readings here.

2. Public speakers/community forums on important social/spiritual/ environmental issues:

- The May 29th “Bike Blessing” generated widespread media coverage for TSP, among other good things.
- The Oct. 1st “Songs of Peace and Protest” Hootenanny is a step towards re-animating TSP as a home and venue for the wider folk music community. Donations will be directed towards the TSP building sustainability.
- Plans are underway for Don Tapscott, a luminary with university students, to speak in the fall.
- On Nov. 3rd we are collaborating with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives on a public lecture by Stephen Lewis and Michelle Landsberg on the future of social democracy.

On October 16th during the morning worship service, the CFJA Implementation Committee will present an update on our work and plans. Committee members will be available to answer questions after the service. A full written report will be available at that time.



Middle East Working Group (MEWG) Updates

Upcoming Advent Study Series

By Barbara Lloyd



The Middle East Working Group of TSP and Bathurst United Churches will be offering an Advent Study based on the new ecumenical study guide called, ***A Moment of Truth: Kairos Palestine*** which includes the full text of the 2010 Kairos Palestine document. In this Advent season of waiting, looking for and learning about God's inbreaking new life in our world, the Kairos Palestine document offers a word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering. The reality on the ground for the Palestinian people is described, as they experience it, and there is a call for a prophetic Christian response and challenge.

In ***Measures Towards Peace in the Middle East***, The United Church of Canada's 40th General Council in 2009 recommended that "United Church Conferences, presbyteries, congregations and community ministries immediately enter into consultation, dialogue, study and prayer, and then take appropriate action toward ending the illegal occupation of Palestinian territory...."

In November 2010, the United Church's General Council Executive named ***A Moment of Truth: Kairos Palestine*** as "an authentic voice of Palestinian Christians" and offered it and responses to it to United Church as a whole.

This Advent study group will be facilitated by Barbara Lloyd and will be held in the Memorial Room at TSP on three Wednesday evenings - Nov. 23rd, 30th and Dec 7th from 7 - 9 pm. To register for the series and to pick up your study guide (\$2.50), please contact Emma Prestwich after Sunday services in November or contact her at emma.prestwich@gmail.com .

We hope many of you can participate

Affirmed or Affirming?

Song of Songs 2: 8-13; Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30

Bv Rev. Dr. Jennifer Janzen-Ball

Arise, my love, and come away with me.

Such a delightful phrase that we heard from the *Song of Songs* - the only time in the three-year lectionary cycle that the *Song of Songs* is read. So it is truly wonderful that this is one of the passages for today, as we celebrate Pride Sunday. Many commentators have tried to remove some of the sexual passion from the *Song of Songs* by saying that is it a metaphor for the love of God for the Hebrews - or as some Christian commentators erroneously read back into it, the love of God for the church. We continue to wrestle, in our Christian faith, with accepting the goodness of our bodies, including our sexuality. So on this day, of all days, I want to celebrate the sexual imagery and passion that is present in the *Song of Songs*!

But I also want to pick up on Matthew's somewhat different imagery of the yoke. Now those two could be related - I won't go into that here but will let your imaginations run wild, as you choose: The point I do want to make is that the yoke referred to is Jesus' call to a particular way of life, seeking justice and loving our neighbours, Walking with Christ, yoked together in a way that shares burdens and new life.

On Pride Sunday - as on all days - what these two passages hold for me is an image of celebrating sexual diversity, celebrating our whole beings (mind, body, soul), and working together to ensure that all peoples in all their diversities are truly celebrated and affirmed, as beloved children of God.

One of the delights of being part of the TSP community for me is the clear commitment to social justice in its many different forms. One of the primary commitments of this community has been to equal rights for those of any sexual orientation or gender identity. To that end, TSP and Bloor Street became Affirming congregations

many years ago and have been consistently involved in promoting equal rights for all people.

But it is also important to re-visit periodically what being Affirming congregation means.

I had the opportunity last week to preach at Eastminster United Church at their celebration of becoming an Affirming congregation. In some ways, Eastminster is in a different place than TSP and Bloor Street, having just taken this step. In other ways, however, Eastminster, TSP, and Bloor Street are in the same place:

What now? What next? What does it mean to live into being an affirming congregation at this time and place in the life and work of each congregation and at this time and place in this country?

I don't often have titles for my sermon, but for today, I wrote "Affirmed or Affirming?" This actually picks up on the Latin phrase, *semper reformanda, semper reformandum*, once reformed, always reforming, which is a key Protestant Reformed Church phrase. The Latin phrase indicates that the church is called to be in an ongoing process of reformation. Or as the United Church's 1940 Statement of Faith states (and as we followed with "Song of Faith"), "Christians of each new generation are called to state [our faith] afresh in terms of the thought of their own age and with the emphasis their age needs."

I think this is a key insight for us as we look again at what it means to be an Affirming congregation, not an Affirmed congregation. We are affirming - in an ongoing process of determining what that means for us in our lived expressions of faith in these communities, in this time and place in the life of our church and in the life of the country.

So I think it's important to re-visit the question of what it means, for TSP and Bloor

Affirmed or Affirming

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Street, at this time, in this place, to be Affirming congregations. In what ways is Jesus the Christ calling us into new life together? How is God calling us in embodied love, to build new relationships?

I know that for many of us, straight allies and members of the LGBTTIQQ/queer community, it feels like many of the battles are won, since there are many more civil rights for those in the queer community than ever before - and for which I am truly grateful for all the queer and straight activists who spent years working towards this day.

We have same-sex marriage rights, partner benefits, adoption and child-raising equality, protection under Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The reality also remains that life is not yet equal for those who are not straight, who are LGBTTI2-SQQ/queer - particularly for those who are youth, who

face bullying, who are trans, who face ongoing discrimination, and whose equal human rights are not yet enshrined in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. And as members of a church that has some global partners who are struggling with issues around sexuality, including sexual orientation, how might we learn from and support others in their struggles? How might we, as members of a church in the midst of an incredible diverse city, reach out to others in diverse, racialized communities, who are also working for sexual justice?

I think these two pieces of work are very important right now as we see the reaction to Toronto's mayor of Toronto's very deliberate absence from all aspects of Pride this past week.

While some of us may not care if he's in the parade or not (or even find it a good thing

that he's not in the parade), the reality is, as *Globe and Mail* columnist, Marcus Gee, notes, that Ford's very deliberate snub of Pride - the parade, the flag-raising, various other formal activities that Mayors of Toronto have been present at in the past - Ford's very deliberate snub has opened up public space for homophobic comments and actions to become more acceptable.

We still live in a reality where publicly funded schools and organizations discriminate on the bases of sexual orientation. United Church

is still the only mainline denomination that has taken a public stand, saying that sexual orientation is not a bar to membership in the church and therefore not a bar to ministry in the church. And yet, within the United Church, there are only about 80 congregations - out of about 3000 - that are Affirming. There are many congregations who might be welcoming, but there are

also many congregations who still would absolutely not tolerate an LGBTQ minister.

So as we celebrate Pride today, let us also take a good look at the commitments TSP and Bloor Street have made to be affirming congregations. How is this being lived out among us today? Where are the new edges/borders for queer rights and acceptance today? What does it mean to live every day as members of an Affirming congregation? How do those who are straight allies and those who are queer continue to push themselves to live into that Affirming status?

Matthew's gospel reminds us that the yoke is easy, as we discern next steps together. May we take delight in one another's company, as do the lovers in the *Song of Songs*, as we seek passionate justice for all peoples!



What It Means To Be an Affirming Congregation?

July 3rd, 2011 Pride Service

By: Christian Rangel

I was invited to a meeting to prepare for the Pride Service few weeks ago and the question raised in that meeting with Vicki and a social worker was “What it means to be an affirming congregation in these days and times? To that question I have no specific answer but I have a series of thoughts based on personal reflection that I’d like to share with you today.

I was born within a Catholic culture. I went to a Catholic school not because my parents thought that there was anything especially spiritual, neither moral about it. Their choice was indeed, a practical one: they knew that for those with middle class aspirations a Catholic School was the place to go to - after all those priests and nuns know what they have been doing for centuries now, they have been perpetuating ‘faith’, culture, class and so forth.

The school of their choosing was a liberal one, with a calling to educate the poor while charging the rich the full-ticket. In that school I got to meet a bunch of renegade Spanish and Italian priests that in the 60s and 70s have been deeply inspired by the theology of liberation. The mass, the rituals and so forth were not at the center of school life; in its place they had football, a religion to which I refused to bow. I just couldn’t understand why there was so much fuss about a rolling ball and a bunch of screaming kids - and I still don’t know!

Perhaps rooted in a very difficult childhood product of a series of family catastrophes, in my early twenties I started to feel a need that I couldn’t pinpoint. After feeling depressed for a while and much thought, I came to the conclusion that it seemed that I needed some sort of spiritual understanding of myself. After much back and forth, I decided to go “priest shopping.” I knew that my frame of reference about the church, the Catholic Church in this case, was different from those of other people around me. I knew that not all priests and

religious communities were created equal.

After a while, perhaps a couple of years, a settled for a priest in his late 60s. He used to discuss difficult matters from the altar, making people feel uncomfortable, and I loved it. One day I asked him, I guess with some pomposity, to meet with me because I had very important questions for him. During that meeting, I told him and discussed the things that I just mentioned, my upbringing and family tragedies, my nascent ideas about faith and religion, and so forth. I remember him looking at me through his glasses hanging low from his nose, so what is the problem? What brings you today? You seem to be doing just fine, he said.

With a lot of difficulty, to my surprise, I tried to figure out the best way to express my big question. Somehow I started to tell him that by religiously going every Sunday to church, I have discovered a source of profound comfort, and perhaps even, wellbeing. At the same time I felt a challenging calling to continue on that path, I told him. I remember saying that it took me a long time, but at some point, I started to feel the love of God in my life, that I could feel that love pulsating in me, and after a pause, I said, and I cannot believe, perhaps I refuse to believe, that God doesn’t love me because of my sexuality, because I like men.

There was a short pause, he took his glasses off and looking straight at me he told me, “and I cannot believe that either” from that moment on he and I became my first affirming congregation.

So I guess, an affirming congregation is not made out of a particular faith, church or congregation, but it’s an attitude, a feeling, a desire even, to truly listen, to grow, to learn, to be there for those who need us the most, to be there to be the physical manifestation of God’s love -a difficult calling for sure.

Affirming Congregation

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I wasn't looking for one when I came to TSP. I just wanted to gather in community to continue to think and feel about God; and to continue my emotional and spiritual self-discovery. And that first week that I came here, I couldn't help it but being moved when Colin's prayers of the people recognized the needs of gay people - something I have never heard directly expressed. Few weeks later, James and Willie thanked the congregation for its support throughout all those years as a couple; that was something I found truly especial and I was moved to tears. Then, I met Duncan and Derek who have embraced me not just friend but as family member. Thank you by the way. And the long conversations with Hans and Duncan and Derek about the spiritual anxieties that relationships bring into one's life: The ending of a great love and the beginning and the struggles through new relationships.

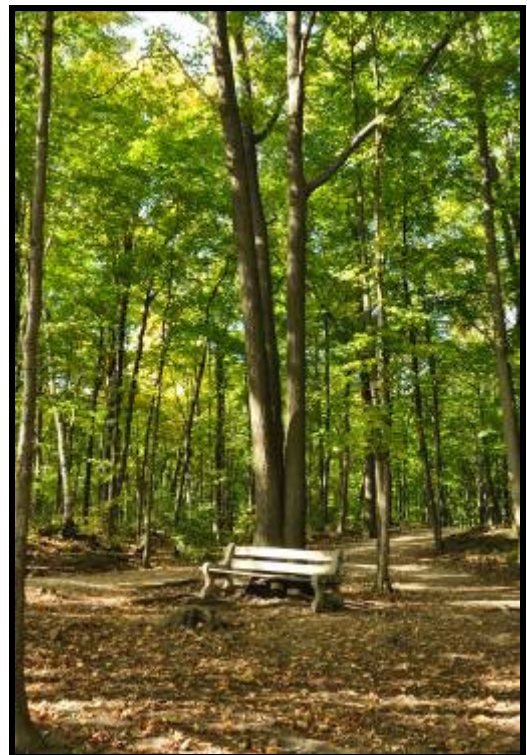
To be sure, I have no tragedy to tell you about my coming out, I have a mother who adores me, and a brother who admires me. And yet I didn't know that I could be fully embraced by a faith community, not just with my way of believing, but also with my political ideas, my sexuality, my emotional life and all, and this is a gift in and of itself.

The thing is that not all of us are so lucky, there are people out there in need of unconditional acceptance and if possible some love. There are people who have been rejected by their families and by their entire communities, people who have received a gospel of hate instead of gospel of love. They are, I would like to suggest, in need of an affirming congregation, in need of companionship, and in need of a community where they can find their own callings. And this point takes me back to that meeting for Pride Service a few weeks ago.

We all know that youth is conspicuous by its absence in the church. Disenchantment with the church has left people adrift in search for transcendental meanings in their lives. The vacuum may be felt even stronger for those

without strong community and cultural bonds like newcomers and queer youth -and even stronger for queer youth who are new to the city and to the country. LGBTQ youth -or queer youth for brevity, in this city may need a place where they feel welcomed and encouraged to grow both as people and as spiritual beings. Perhaps being an affirming congregation in this day and age, and this chaotic and yet wonderful city, may be to respond actively to those in more need for an affirming space.

Some of these youth may have experienced traumatic events coming out in the context of their own families, communities and religious traditions, so the work we have ahead is plenty. Perhaps to be an affirming congregation may imply a process of spiritual companionship for these youth as they navigate the risks and opportunities of an open gay culture in the midst of continuing homophobia. To be sure, we need hands to do this work and to open up our congregation for that youth in need a strong spiritual base in order to build healthy and productive lives. Perhaps this is our calling.



What's Happening Around TSP

TOGOGO

The AIDS pandemic in Africa is the focus of the over 200 “Granny” groups in Canada. They work to support the Stephen Lewis Foundation that distributes the money to hundreds of grannies looking after the children orphaned by AIDS. One group, the TOGOGOs (GOGO means granny and TO stands for Toronto) meet once a month. All are welcome to their upcoming meetings. The group also lobbies the government for generic drugs for Africa. It would be great to combine the energies of our two churches for some of our groups.

When: Sunday, October 23rd, 12.00 pm

Where: at 379 Huron Street

and

When: Sunday, November 13th (after the church service)

Where: at Bloor Street UC

For further information, contact Shirley Farlinger.

Examining Our Worship

A series of four *Saturday morning* sessions looking at our worship patterns in the United Church and Trinity-St. Paul's in particular. Whether you are new to TSP or a long time member, you will find these sessions stimulating and informative. There will be plenty of opportunity for interaction with the presenters.

Attend any or all of the sessions.

Time: 10:00 - 11:30 a.m. Saturday mornings

WEEK 1 - October 22nd Overview of United Church worship - Bill Kervin

WEEK 2 - October 29th Scripture and Sermon - Hans van Nie

WEEK 3 - November 5th Music in Worship - Paul Stott

WEEK 4 - November 12th Prayer - Yvonne Stewart

- Who Are You? -

In this busy city with so many people coming and going, it's easy to draw a blank when you see a familiar face. And TSP is no exception. Please help those of us who have a moment of forgetfulness, and wear your name tag. And if you don't have a name tag, please leave your name at the Welcome Table. Thank you!

About the TSP Times

The TSP Times is a tri-monthly newsletter for members and friends of Trinity-St. Paul's United Church and CFJA. Submissions from all members of the congregation are welcome.

Please send your items to BuyandSellwithSarah@yahoo.com. The deadline for the next issue is 30 Nov. 2011
Sarah Landry, Editor; Vivi Santosa, Publisher.

Are you on the List?

TSP has an on-line **list serve** that sends out information on activities, upcoming events, the weekly announcements, and other items of interest to people at TSP. You can get each email message or a daily digest. It is an easy way to keep track of what is going on. To join the list serve, log into the website. (You will need to register if you haven't already) On the right side of the page, there is a grey box with your name at the top of it. Click on the "My Account / Mailing Lists" link. Scroll down to TSP list on the left and click on the button for emails. Then you too can be up-to-date!

Alternatively, you can go to: <http://lists.trinitystpauls.ca/listinfo.cgi/tsplist-trinitystpauls.ca> and provide your name and e-mail.

Trinity St. Paul's United Church and Centre for Faith, Justice and the Arts

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David Macmillan (x22)

Building Attendants (x21)

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Jim Burgess | Lynn Jondreville | Martin Louis
Marc Young



Church Board

Circles

Nurturing Community & Discipleship	Ann Russell
Public Witness	Lis Leggett Richards
Stewardship of Resources	Lynn Jondreville
Worship and Faith Formation	Betsy Anderson
	Anne Sheppard

Church Board

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Vice-Chair	<i>vacant</i>
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Presbytery Representative	Gordon MacNeill
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	Lynne Brennan
	Omega Bula
	Lyn Gaetz
	Chris Gort
	Mary Simpson

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Board of Trustees (Chair)	<i>vacant</i>
Pastoral Care Team Coordinator	Yvonne Stewart
Adult Faith Formation Coordinator	Paul Stott
Communications Convener	Kate Robson,
	Emilie Butler
TSP Times Editor	Sarah Landry
	Vivianti Santosa
Other Presbytery Representatives	Roger Hutchinson
	Paul Stott

Children's Church

Coordinator	Cathy Watson
Teacher, Ages 3-6	Martha Silva
Teacher, Ages 7-11	Christy Bray
Teacher, Ages 12+ (YouthonBloor)	Sheryl Johnson