

Project Reconciliation

Since the mid 1970's, Project Reconciliation has been representing the BCOQ community in ministry to offenders who reintegrate into the community (as well to inmate families). First Baptist Church, Kingston has provided the base of operation for "The Project" (as it is affectionately known) and it is contracted by the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) as a community chaplaincy program (which designates director Greg Rodgers the CSC community chaplain for Kingston).

Project Reconciliation was founded in the mid 1970's by the late Rev. Alan Mathews, a "frontline" urban pastor from Hamilton who in many ways was a man ahead of his time. Many of our pastors who began their ministries in that era were influenced by Alan's heart for the needs of those on the margins of society. He was a mentor to many and one of our justice voices. (He actually marched with Martin Luther King jr. at Selma).

Originally known under the name "Alienated Youth," the program moved to Kingston in 1978 under the name of "Project Reconciliation" in a joint effort between James St. Baptist and First Baptist Kingston, mostly for practical reasons. At that time Alan Mathews was ministering so much to individuals prior to their release from Kingston area institutions that it became more effective for him to minister within a closer proximity.

Kingston is known as "The prison capital of Canada." Our federal corrections service (CSC) operates 8 prisons and 2 halfway houses in the greater Kingston area. Potentially, as many as 2500 offenders can be housed

collectively among these facilities. This makes Kingston a kind of "Mecca" for those individuals and organizations that have a heart for and "calling" to corrections based ministry.

Contrary to common understanding, though, Project Reconciliation is not a "Prison Ministry" per se. It is a community ministry. Our role is to be "a bridge" for the returning offender to his or her community. We strive to link the offender to the right resources (based on individual needs) and ultimately to welcoming and supportive faith communities. We not only seek to support those returning to Kingston, but as well, those who will go to other communities throughout Ontario.

Crime is an issue that affects every community. It impacts not only the lives of victims and offenders, but also the families of each. It also impacts the communities where crimes are committed and those to where offenders return. There is a great need for the church to be both a prophetic voice and an instrument of healing within their communities in terms of the impact of crime upon our lives.

Project Reconciliation is striving to be a point of connection between offenders and the community, ultimately helping local churches embrace opportunities that can deeply enrich congregational life; the opportunity to be part of the healing process of offenders, their families and victims. We believe strongly that this has renewal implications for our congregations.

The story of Juan is one that illustrates the opportunity that awaits faith communities in terms of ministering to those who have been incarcerated. An immigrant from South America who has since attained refugee status, Juan left his family 6 years ago to pave the way for them

to come to Canada. (Their lives continue to be in danger in their homeland). The biggest mistake that Juan ever made was in trusting the wrong people (who he genuinely believed wanted to help him). Through a series of unfortunate events, Juan ended up serving a 3 year federal sentence. As a favor to someone who was helping him, he unknowingly transported a package containing drugs on a flight to Toronto.

Mercifully, the Canadian Government upheld Juan's refugee status after his release. Project Reconciliation was instrumental in finding him the initial community resources that he needed, but more importantly a church home as well. He is now a thriving congregant within the Spanish Congregation of First Baptist, Kingston. A First Baptist Family (and fellow Gatherers) took him into their home, offering free room and board for as long as he needs to get established. As well, the First Baptist Congregation has committed to sponsoring Juan's family as refugees. First Baptist continues to support an advocate for Juan in spite of a recent decision by the Canadian Government ruling against his family's application for refugee status.

Juan's story represents two important issues in why correctional ministry is so important to our churches. First, there are many offenders in this country who represent far more varied circumstances than we are often aware of. There are many different stories that are representative of God's grace, mercy, and hope; stories that are blessings awaiting the faith communities that will journey with them.

Secondly, this story represents the new emerging vision of Project Reconciliation as a community chaplaincy program. Historically, organizations such as ours have been treated as specialized ministries that are funded by the larger faith community to perform ministry that local churches tend to be uncomfortable participating in directly. However, we are now in a time when it is crucial for the local church to be more directly engaged, rather than merely directing funding to para-church organizations to do the work for them. Therefore, our dream is to become a resource that helps faith communities engage in our work, not merely support it financially.

Even though (as I mentioned previously), Project Reconciliation is not technically a "prison ministry," we are involved in the chapel programs of several of the area prisons. The objective of our involvement inside "the walls" is to build relationships and trust with those who are preparing for release. The nature of our involvement varies from institution to institution, but includes weekly chapel service participation, involvement in the Alternatives to Violence Program, and in leading Prison ALPHA programs.

I have met countless inmates whose lives have been changed dramatically by the grace of God. These generally are the inmates who are always there to greet us with big bear hugs when we go inside and spend time with them. These are also the guys who will need church communities when they are released. They will also need church members who will greet them with open arms at the front door of the church in the same way they are there to greet us inside of the walls.

Project Reconciliation wants to partner with our congregations. Whether a congregation seeks to minister to an offender, a victim or an inmate family; or is trying to be a voice of hope amidst a community that has been traumatized by crime, we want to be the link that helps churches become part of potentially powerful grace stories.

- Greg Rodgers

Letters are welcome at gnl@gatheringbaptists.ca, fax: (local Toronto) 416-922-4359 or by post to Michael Steeves, at 70 Linsmore Cr., Toronto ON M4J 4K1. Letters may be edited for clarity and length. Please include full name, address, phone number and email if applicable. Editorial board: Michael Steeves – editor, Cam Watts, Colleen Furry, bob paterson-watt, Daphne L. Hunt (production). Views expressed in *The Gathering Newsletter* are those of the writers, and do not necessarily reflect those of the editor, nor of all members of the Gathering of Baptists. They are published in the interests of free and open discussion of matters of concern to many Baptists seeking to live with integrity as followers of Jesus the Christ. Material published in *The Gathering Newsletter* is the property of its authors, who are members of The Gathering of Baptists. If you wish to use material from any issue, it is polite to ask our permission first. *The Gathering Newsletter* is published three times per year. ISSN 1499-111X. © The Gathering of Baptists.

Fairness, Equality and Compassion

Most, if not all, of us have been in a group which shares their favorite Scripture passages. Mine has always been Micah 6, verse 8:

"He has told you, O mortal, what is good: and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

This verse has been with me for so long I cannot remember when it first captivated me.

I have studied it, meditated on it and prayed to live it.

As my teachers and friends will attest, languages are not my forte, but I think the words mean:

justice, from the Hebrew *mishpat*, is fairness and equality in all social relationships;

kindness, *hesed*, is integrity

humble, *hatsnea*, is not to exploit our power.

So, I would paraphrase this verse '... what does God expect from me?' - to be fair and equal in all my relationships; to be a person of integrity, and to accept God's supremacy.'

All of this is background to who I am today.

The Cristos, the always incarnating Creator, has combined people and events to produce my present avocation as a volunteer Yoga and meditation leader in a Young Offender's facility.

In a sense this part of the journey began while I was ministering in Wyoming, Ontario and a number of continuing educational events on Christian meditation.

Then, when ministering with First Baptist Church, Oshawa, in 1981 I met Rev. Sylvia Dunstan who was the chaplain at the Whitby Correction Institution. Sylvia was also a gifted hymn writer and contributed many of the hymns in the present hymn book of the United Church of Canada. She became one of my great friends and teachers.

She asked me to assist her, on a volunteer basis, with interviewing and counseling inmates. In doing that, she also undertook to expand my ministry in the areas of justice and sexuality by deliberately(!) assigning me inmates who stretched me emotionally and spiritually.

During those years a conference we attended led by Dr. Stanton E. Samenow called "Inside the Criminal Mind" became the basis of a program we developed to challenge, and initiate change in, inmates' attitudes and behaviours. I believe a similar program was running at the Guelph Correctional Institution around the same time.

Moving to Simcoe, Ontario in 1989 ended that shared ministry and Sylvia's death in 1993 has deprived us of a true 'priest of God'.

Eventually I volunteered again with young offenders in a program of values and behaviour. In a small group (maximum of 8, usually 6) I would introduce a value (e.g: forgiveness) by way of a story from different spiritual traditions or a movie clip and the group itself would be responsible for the discussion's success or failure. A responsibility they took seriously since non-participation would reflect upon the evaluation they received at the course's conclusion. Honesty was attained through their pledged mutual accountability as a prerequisite to attending.

Turning 50 initiated a change that I thought was just a personal quest.

I began to study in the martial arts and after nine strenuous years earned my black belt. Turning 60 led me to seek something less physically demanding. I choose to study Yoga for its emphasis upon strength and flexibility. All yoga sessions end with a period of meditation, more

designed for relaxation and recuperation but it is not a big 'stretch' for it to become spiritual.

Sensing yoga could be a part of the Values Program I invited my yoga teacher to join in leading the group.

An hour of power yoga was followed by a relaxation exercise which ended with a directed meditation on the value for that session's discussion.

The yoga appealed to them physically. The relaxation cut through the noise of life to hear what really mattered. The Meditation led them into their own spirituality.

There were amazing moments of insight and breakthrough. Minds opened to the role their values have played in their lives and spirits nurtured to the possibility of new values.

Small steps to be sure, but better than no steps at all!

Research has revealed that we have not begun anything new. Many other penal institutions throughout the world use Yoga in a variety of ways.

All of this has become the catalyst to some thoughts on justice.

Justice is not to be confused with any legal system. Our legal system, at its best, seeks to preserve social well-being. That usually ends up meaning the social well-being of those with the power.

Justice is, to go back to the prophet Micah, the establishing of fairness and equality.

Marc Ian Barasch in his book "Field Notes on the Compassionate Life: A Search for the Soul of Kindness" wrote:

"The techniques for awakening compassion are the same across all cultures: Loosen the bonds of discursive thought. Extend the circle of caring. Open yourself to the suffering of others and wish them the happiness you'd want for yourself. Be a tender-minded steward of Creation. ... On my

better days, I feel I'm witnessing, across the planet, some popular uprising of the heart - the subversive spread of a neural net of kindness... Yes, our task is made more difficult by the institutionalization of intolerance and harm. But we are, collectively, wiser than our leaders, kinder than our institutions, more open-minded than our dogmas. Beneath the daily headlines with their recurring note of doom, the true state of affairs is almost laughably obvious. We live in a world poised on the brink of self-discovery, knowing the only god we can now afford is a god of love, and if we are to go anywhere, we must all go there together." (quoted from the April, 2005 issue of "Utne" magazine)

- Bruce Coombe

Fall Gathering

"Baptists Without Borders"

with Daniel Pryfogle

Saturday October 28

9:00 a.m.

Altadore Room

Quality Hotel and Suites, Woodstock ON
(Highway 59 just north of the 401)

Registration: \$25 paid members, \$30 otherwise.

Bio for Daniel Pryfogle



Daniel Pryfogle is the principal of Signal Hill, a mission-driven consulting company that emphasizes the power of story in organizational development, leadership training, and marketing and communications. Signal Hill serves nonprofits, churches and social enterprises throughout the U.S. The son and grandson of Baptist preachers, Daniel is an ordained American Baptist minister. Much of his work in recent years has been with Baptist groups, such as the Alliance of Baptists, Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, and National Ministries of the American Baptist Churches USA. From 2004-2005, Daniel was interim director of the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists.

Fall Gathering Con't

Friday Night Soiree at John and Judy Furry's

330 Drew Street, Woodstock

Friday evening October 27, 7 pm until whenever

(relax, chat, be together)

Please bring shareable refreshments.

Accommodations are available at the Quality Hotel.

You must reserve by September 28th.

Contact the hotel (519-537-5586) indicating when you phone that you are part of the Gathering.

The costs are \$95.00 per room in standard room with two queen size beds (with an additional \$10.00 premium for the 3rd or 4th person in a room, i.e. \$105.00) and \$185.00 per room for a suite (two rooms, kitchenette, etc.).

These prices include a continental breakfast.

There are also other options for accommodation that are likely cheaper.

The Super 8 (519-421-4588) is right beside the Quality Hotel.

There are also a couple of motels on Highway 2 coming into Woodstock from the east, whose quality the Furry's can't personally vouch for: The Tulip (519-537-3446) and the Mariner (519-537-5332).

There is a Travelodge (519-425-1100) in nearby Ingersoll. There are a number of B and B's in Woodstock, Ingersoll and area. Go to www.tourismoxford.ca for a listing, or I can send a copy of same to anyone who requests it to find a very limited number of billeting spots.

Directions to the Furry's:

Get yourself onto Woodstock's main east-west street (which is Dundas St., also Highway 2)

Proceed from either direction to Vansittart Ave (which is hwy. 59 north and is at the top of a hill, Mac's Milk store on corner).

Go north on Vansittart three blocks to Drew St. (small park on corner).

Turn left, then to third house on left (#330)

Gathering Family Fun Day

August 19

at

The Caldwell Estate

2464 Concession 2 West, Harrisburg ON
(beside the Apollo Golf Course)

Featuring Golf, Hayrides, Swimming, East Coast Games and talking with your friends

10 am until whenever

You are welcome to camp overnight too!

Bring your own bathing suits, potluck food and beverages (and coolers) and games (no lawn darts please)

Please let the Caldwell's know if you are coming.

email: caldwell@pathcom.com **or call:** 519 647-3504

You also can call this number in case of inclement weather (we have a "rain date" of August 26)

Here's how to find the Estate:

Directions

If you are coming from north of St. George and Dundas, find Highway 5: from the north west travel Hwy #5 east of St. George about a mile to turn right (south) on Harrisburg Road then left (east) on Concession 2 West; from the north east, find Hwys #5 & #6 intersection, travel west several miles to turn left (south) on Lynden Road then right (west) onto Concession 2 West.

From the south-west, follow Hwy 403 to Brantford, exit north on Wayne Gretsky Parkway. Follow the Parkway north to its end, jog left on Powerline Rd. then right onto Park Road North. At the T into Hwy 99, turn right and continue east on #99. Turn left onto St George Road; turn right onto German School Road, left at Harrisburg Road, and right (straight through actually) onto Concession 2 West.

From the east, follow #403 through Ancaster to Hwy #52 exit - turn right and proceed north to the lights at Copetown, then left

(#99) to Lynden. Turn right at Main Street (United

“The Unkindest Cut of All”

- Cam Watts

Ransom, our 25 kg. Golden Retriever puppy was neutered last month. As a male I found it harder to do this than having Buffy spayed all those years ago. Remember, I'm a recovering sexist. Ransom coped better than I. He is a bright dog, for a golden, and I was pretty sure that he was obeying my edict not to lick there. But the swelling persisted and I had a chat with the vet and he started to wear an Elizabethan collar (Ransom, not the vet). He was a little frustrated but seemed to be healing more quickly. The collar itself is provided some good moments. Like in the Tim Horton's drive through he got two free timbits instead of one. And when we threw him a cookie it didn't matter if he missed it, the collar snagged it and all he had to do was tilt his head down and wonder of wonders that annoying flexible piece of plastic produced a gourmet Paul Newman Peanut Butter Heart (all profit to Humane Societies). There were disadvantages, other than banging into things. Like I forgot the window was down as we exited Tim Horton's and as I accelerated he started yelling "Too fast! Too fast!" A glance in my side view mirror revealed a head trying to push a funnel back around so he could duck back into the car.

Walking was frustrating. He trotted ahead of me for 5 or 6 paces and then had to sit down on the cool concrete or grass because it felt better. Or less annoying. People commented on how well trained he is because he sat whenever he stopped. It's like walking a bungee cord. And because the collar is translucent he couldn't see around corners too well. His field of view was limited out of necessity. Temporarily.

It's been easy to picture people around me wearing their own e-collars. Some out of necessity, needing to limit the amount of stimulus in their lives because more is overwhelming. But there are those who choose these collars. Vision is limited to what they look at. There are shadows and images on the periphery that can be momentarily distracting, but that's all. They miss the sheer joy of chasing their own tail, and the wonder of seeing what the rest of the world sees. Maybe that's what Isaiah meant when he wrote "see but do not see."

“God Becomes Visible”

Quoted from “Peacemaking Day by Day”

Pax Christi, Erie PA. Source unknown.

God decided to become visible to a king and a peasant and sent an angel to inform them of the blessed event. "O king," the angel announced, "God has deigned to be revealed to you in whatever manner you wish. In what form do you want God to appear?"

Seated pompously on his throne and surrounded by awestruck subjects, the king royally proclaimed: "How else would I wish to see God, save in majesty and power. Show God to us in the full glory of power."

God granted his wish and appeared as a bolt of lightning that instantly pulverized the king and his court. Nothing, not even a cinder, remained.

The angel then manifested herself to a peasant, saying, "God deigns to be revealed to you in whatever manner you desire. How do you wish to see God?"

Scratching his head and puzzling a long while, the peasant finally said, "I am a poor man and not worthy to see God face-to-face. But if it is God's will to be revealed to me, let it be in those things with which I am familiar. Let me see God in the earth I plough, the water I drink, and the food I eat. Let me see the presence of God in the faces of my family, neighbours, and - if God deems it as good for myself and others - even in my own reflection as well."

God granted the peasant his wish, and he lived a long and happy life.

- Bruce Coombe

Spring Gathering at Selkirk



Photos provided by Daphne L. Hunt



**Baptist Peace Fellowship
of North America**

*The Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America gathers, equips
and mobilizes Baptists to build a culture of peace rooted in justice.
We labour with a wonderful array of peacemakers to change the world.*



Becoming the Beloved Community

BPFNA's 21st Annual Summer Conference
July 10-15, 2006 | Atlanta, GA

Come explore the immensity of Dr. King's vision of justice for all - of becoming the beloved community.

We will celebrate the Civil Rights Movement as we share stories of its workers both well known and unknown. We will seek to look honestly at where the movement for full racial equality and justice stands. Far from being a static moment mired in the past, that movement will serve as a touchstone, a call to consider the many movements that stir among us, movements for justice, inclusion, and welcome for all.

Together in music, worship, story, study, and workshops, in relationships old and new:

We will celebrate and we will lament
We will listen and we will be heard
We will struggle and we will learn
-and together we will move forward.

If you have questions about the conference, contact Summer Conference Coordinator LeDayne McLeese Polaski at (704) 521-6051 or ledayne@bpfna.org.