

**Subject: National Church
Council Of The ELCIC
Declares Eastern Synod
Motion
Unconstitutional**

EDITORIAL:

by Michael Steeves

I want to commend the Eastern Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada for their process and decision on same sex marriage (see the news release below). While they have been overruled by the national church they have taken a courageous step that will enable a helpful dialogue. Their approach is one that I hoped and prayed Baptists would employ because it is so much in keeping with Baptist polity. The Lutherans studied the issue carefully. They provided scriptural study guides exploring both sides of the issue. They prayed for guidance and when decision time came they recognized that this is a matter for the local congregation and pastor to decide for their fellowship. Sounds like a sound Baptist process to me. Of course it makes the local church grapple with a potentially divisive issue but it places the matter where it ought to be resolved. If allowed to proceed some churches would perform same sex marriages and some would not. That would be a victory for local church autonomy and soul freedom. Contrast this thoughtful, open and sensitive process with the heavy handed, top down dictum of the BCOQ leadership to ban the performance of or participation in a same sex marriage on penalty of removing ones right to marry and possibly more.

It's still not too late to reconsider this draconian measure that violates everything we hold dear as Baptists and enter into a reasoned dialogue on an issue where there are clearly differing points of view held by sincere Christians.

**Tommy Douglas: A
Remarkable Canadian
Baptist**

By Walter Mulkewich

“My friends, watch out for the little fellow with an idea.” - Tommy Douglas, 1961

Tommy Douglas, a father of Canada's medicare and voted “The Greatest Canadian of All Times” in a CBC nationwide poll, was a Baptist preacher of the social gospel tradition. Influenced by his religious beliefs, Douglas helped reframe the politics of his time and was a powerful influence in shaping modern Canada.

Born in Scotland in 1904 to a working class family, Tommy immigrated to Winnipeg in 1910. His passion for medicare was seeded as young boy when he almost lost his leg to osteomyelitis, but a kind surgeon performed surgery pro bono. His social activism was inspired by his observation of police brutality on “Bloody Sunday” of the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike as well as by J.S. Woodsworth who was pastor of a local Methodist mission and who later became the first leader of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), the precursor of the NDP.

As a student at the Baptist Brandon College in the nineteen twenties, Tommy rejected the dogmatism of emerging fundamentalism and found a solid foundation in scientific logic which would influence his decision making. He also embraced the social gospel, then a powerful force with such proponents as the American Baptist Walter Raushenbusch who saw Christianity as a “radical religion”. For Tommy, the social gospel was “practical Christianity”.

Social gospelers such as Tommy Douglas understood that the God of the Bible wants to redeem the whole of human existence as well as individual lives - and that Christians are on the same side as God is reported to have taken in the Bible, the side of the poor, the fatherless, the marginalized and the oppressed.

As pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Weyburn in 1930, Tommy soon found himself politically organizing on behalf of his community devastated by the economic depression and prairie dustbowl. When a member of the Baptist hierarchy suggested his pastoral career would be in jeopardy if he continued his political activities, Tommy traded his pulpit for a larger political stage.

As Premier of Saskatchewan from 1944 to 1961, Tommy’s greatest achievement may have been the pioneering of Canada’s first universal public medicare. But, his legacy was much more. North America’s first socialist government remade Saskatchewan with new infrastructure, industrial and resource development, modernized administration, and balanced budgets. Saskatchewan became a laboratory of social reform copied across Canada: health, education, labour, pensions, welfare, low cost insurance, Canada’s first Bill of Rights, and much more.

As the first leader of the federal New Democratic Party (NDP) from 1961 to 1971 and as the NDP Energy Critic until from 1971 to 1979, Tommy was a major force in

establishing North America’s only mainstream social democratic party.

History will remember his principled stand against the invoking of the War Measures Act in 1970.

Canadians will remember this little man with big ideas for his human decency, civility, powerful oratory, sense of humour, and his mastery of radio and television.

By the time Tommy died in 1986, medicare and many of the social and economic reforms for which he had fought were under attack through combined forces of privatization, global market worship, and the reassertion of individualism and private property over community and the common good.

Since the nineteen eighties, the voices of the social gospel that had influenced progressive reforms from the 1920’s to the 1970’s were overshadowed by conservative Christian voices which played to public fears, emphasized a privatized religion, but also brought a religion based movement into the public realm rallying around hot button so-called “social issues” such as capital punishment, family values, sexual orientation, and abortion.

Tommy Douglas did not bring a religious movement into politics, but as he brought a broad range of powerful ideas which were influenced by his religious beliefs. Tommy’s political message was one of hope, that there was a better world for all. Tommy Douglas made a huge difference.

The more caring Canada which the social gospel helped create is now under stress. The rich grow richer while the poor grow poorer.

The social gospel was fundamental to the ideas Tommy Douglas used to reframe the politics of his day, helping to create a better Canada. How can the same social gospel be articulated and used to reframe today’s politics?

Walter Mulkewich is a member of Burlington Baptist Church. A community activist, and a former Mayor of Burlington, Mr. Mulkewich has had careers in education, business, social services, and municipal politics. A member of the New Democratic Party for over 40 years, he has been a Provincial and Federal NDP candidate.

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*The Tommy Douglas website
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*The Tommy Douglas Research Institute website
<http://www.tommydouglas.ca/>*

*The Douglas Coldwell Foundation website
<http://www.dcf.ca/>*

Local Option for Blessing Same-Gender Unions

On Thursday, July 6, 2006, at its biennial Synod Assembly, the Eastern Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) voted to allow the blessing of same-gender unions as a matter of local option.

Approved by 72% of the voting delegates, the resolution said, "That the Eastern Synod of the ELCIC recognizes that the blessing of same-

gender couples who want to make a life-long commitment to one another in the presence of God and their community of faith is a matter of pastoral and congregational discretion. Authorization to perform such blessings shall require the consent of the pastor and the consent of the congregation or calling agency, as expressed by a 2/3 majority vote at a duly called meeting of the congregation or calling agency, and in consultation with the bishop."

Synod Bishop Michael J. Pryse said in a pastoral letter on July 9th that, while this decision of the Synod Assembly would be viewed as controversial and be received with mixed emotions by different individuals, he is "very supportive of the action taken by our synod. In my view, it represents a reasonable accommodation that allows for a diversity of pastoral practice."

Reflecting on the decision by the Synod Assembly and the Bishop's pastoral letter, the Rev. Dawn Hutchings, pastor of Holy Cross Lutheran, New Market, Ontario, said "The passage of this resolution by such a clear majority at the Assembly, followed by Bishop Pryse's pastoral letter indicating his understanding that "by virtue of this action, same-gender couples may now have their unions blessed" makes space for those congregations who are longing for the day when Baptism will be the only criteria for equality in our church; a space where in the meantime we can bless, but not marry; bless but not ordain. As a pastor of a Reconciling in Christ congregation, this modest step provides me with the encouragement to assure our congregation that we can indeed be hopeful as the Eastern Synod inches forward."

Lionel Ketola, speaking for the leadership of Lutherans Concerned-Canada, said "This day marks a significant milestone in the long journey towards sexual justice for queer people in the church, especially given its long awaited witness to the all-embracing love of God for all

people - a love which we often discover and celebrate through the gift of intimate relationship."

While this decision affects only the Eastern Synod of the ELCIC, it sends a clear message to the wider denomination which defeated a similar motion at its biennial convention in July 2005. Currently, the policy of the ELCIC precludes the blessing of same-gender relationships.

The Eastern Synod is one of five synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. The Eastern Synod has more than 200 member congregations and 78,000 baptized members. The territory of the Eastern Synod runs from Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario to Halifax, Nova Scotia. Its headquarters are in Kitchener, Ontario.

Information about the Eastern Synod and the recently completed Synod Assembly is available at www.easternsynod.org. A copy of Bishop Pryse's pastoral letter to the synod is posted to the Lutherans Concerned/North America website, www.lcna.org
Phil Soucy
Director Communications LC/NA
communications@lcna.org

Not the Baptists they were expecting...

Maybe it was the Golden Rule poster hanging in the hall at the back entrance. You know the one? Celebrating the connectedness between 13 world religions around love of neighbour. Maybe it was the comments, in answer to a direct question about our theology, on the first morning of their visit, comments that honestly talked about the openness and diversity of the congregation. Maybe it was the discussion before lunch on the first day about the location of their B & B, in a place known as "The Village", a discussion that featured a Woodbine renovator unwilling to categorically condemn gay persons. Maybe it was my comments

about 'BUSH' around the lunch table—not contemptuously spoken, but certainly not unqualified praise—only to discover they are all capital "R" Republicans. Oops. Maybe it was all these things added together, combined with our serious (fatal) lack of Jesus-talk. Whatever it was, we were not the Baptists they were expecting.

But to be fair, they were not the Baptists I was expecting. When our little congregation connected with Toronto Mission Partnerships (a cooperative effort linking the Toronto Area Association of Baptist Churches and four Virginia Baptist Associations for the purpose of mission partnerships) I thought the folks from the south of us were Cooperative Baptist Fellowship churches. Nope. Not remotely.

By the second evening, it was clear there was an undercurrent of dissatisfaction amongst our guests. So we sat down in a circle on Thursday morning to talk about the congregation they had come to serve as renovators/painters/labourers, a congregation that cared for a pastor and his family through the excruciating journey of Madeleine's illness and death. A congregation that gives sacrificially of their resources to welcome the stranger, feed the hungry, tend to the sick and imprisoned, clothe the naked and give drink to those who thirst. A congregation that walks with the least of these down some of life's perilous paths. Not enough, apparently. Too much talk about "God" and "community" and not enough talk about 'Jesus' and 'Judgment'. But by Jesus, a representative or three from this group of eight had us nailed right quick. It was stunning to behold how quickly we were condemned as a people after two days of working together on building tasks. Stunning. At some level, I am still stunned.

At another level, I'm just sad. Sad that it seems nearly impossible to bridge the gap between groups that choose to emphasize certain parts of Jesus' life and message over others. It's okay for **them** to concentrate on the great commission (Go ye into all the world...) but not

okay for **us** to major on the great commandment (love of God and neighbour). What is saddest of all is that the strengths of our congregation at Woodbine Heights Baptist Church in areas of compassion, generosity, kindness, patience, and love were utterly dismissed because they didn't see evidence or hear language that tells them we are like them. They want to know how many people we've brought to Jesus.

My question for them: for how many people have they been Jesus?

Not a relevant question, seemingly. We continued some of the tasks on our shared list. But they had enough of us a day early, and decided to turn south to get back to the land of free and the home of the brave. One thing is clear after this experience: I'm glad we're not the Baptists they were expecting.

- bob paterson-watt

Letters are welcome at gnl@gathering Baptists.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, Rose Mary Cummings (production).

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SPRING GATHERING -

**April 28: Donway Baptist Church,
Toronto**

Bill Herzog (Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty for Andover Newton Theological School, which he began on July 1, 2006) will offer input for our day together.

Thou Shalt Not Kill

Thou shalt not kill.

Throughout the world these words are found in many codes of law.

The Hebrew, Christian and Islamic faiths condemn above all other crimes the taking of another life.

From early childhood we are taught

The greatest of all sins is this:

Thou shalt not kill.

But as we age we realize that to this basic law are made exceptions.

The first is that, if **you** should kill another human, you may be yourself subjected to the penalty of death.

The state may legally apply capital punishment for such a crime; However, in enlightened lands such sentences have been replaced by life imprisonment.

The second takes away the guilt that civil killing leaves upon a man. If one should don a uniform and kill, not one, but many in a war, then guilt gives way to glory.

Instead of punishment one receives the title "hero".

Medals and great commendation are given to the one who kills.

Perhaps some day, just as the penalty of death has been removed in some enlightened lands, nations may face the inconsistency of war.

They may seek a more humane alternative to "might is right", such as "negotiate".

Thus they would re-instate that ancient basic law,

Thou shalt not kill.

- Ron Watts

PATEFO 2006

Report by Ray Hobbs

PATEFO stands for Pancrac Teologicky Forum, (pronounced Pankratz Teologitzky Forum) which is a loose organisation of students, pastors and theologians who disputed the radical changes in the European Baptist scene, especially around the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague. The Forum meets every two years in Prague and then in the Moravian countryside to discuss issues of importance for Baptists.

In 2000 the first of the PATEFO conferences was held in the Czech Republic. It was commented upon in the Gathering Newsletter, Fall 2000. Since then the group has met every two years at the end of June or the beginning of July.

It is both sad and yet encouraging to participate in active groups like PATEFO (whose name is an acronym for Pancrac Teologicky Forum, Pancrac being the location of our hosts, Na Topolce Baptist Church, Prague). They witness to a malaise in Baptist life throughout the world, yet also give testimony to a positive, theological and reflective response to this malaise.

I think it is fair to say that the group is composed of disillusioned Baptists, that is Baptists who have seen their denominations all over Europe and elsewhere, abandon traditional Baptist beliefs and practices in favour of concentration of power, central control, all under the guise of efficiency. Because of this, the papers at PATEFO have in the past reflected many of these frustrations and disillusionments. A glance at the first conference bears this out. However, in recent years the group has sought to tackle theological issues on a deeper level, and to wrestle with the nature of discipleship.

This year PATEFO met from June 28th until July 5th in Prague, and then in Rovecne in the Moravian Highlands east of the capital. The group focused on the themes of “repentance”

and “witness”, and the following papers were given and discussed.

1. Dozen (Associate Professor) Petr Macek of the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University, Prague, offered some insights into Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s struggles with the nature of following Jesus.

2. Prof. Warren Kay, Professor of Theology at Merrimack College, Boston, Mass. analysed the “Intelligent design” movement in the United States as a false witness.

3. Ray Hobbs, led a journey through some uncomfortable sayings of Jesus related to conversion and discipleship.

4. Ain Riistan, of the University of Tartu, Estonia conducted a brilliant analysis of “witness and repentance” in the Estonian setting. Estonia is reputedly one of the most secular countries in the world.

5. Prof. Charles Kay, Professor of Philosophy at Wofford College, South Carolina, helped us understand the current debate on stem-cell research beyond a utilitarian approach into the realm of medical ethics.

6. Rev. Colin Bond of Hillhead Baptist Church, Glasgow, offered some penetrating insights into Ministry in the Void.

The Czech Baptist Union is currently struggling with several issues of great importance to which Baptist theology and practice needs to be brought to bear. A recent vote of their assembly of churches agreed to accept state money for the payment of pastors, and they are currently anticipating a growing call to start a new seminary funded by Southern Baptists. Four churches have dissented from these moves, and are under intense pressure to conform.

PATEFO 2008 is “in the works”, and further notice will be given closer to the time.

...I thought I would fill you in the latest actions of our Convention where the following motion was passed:

Pastoral leaders accredited by the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches shall not officiate or co-officiate at a same-sex marriage ceremony.

A complaint that a pastoral leader accredited by the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches has officiated or co-officiated at a same-sex marriage ceremony will be investigated by the Board of Ministerial Standards and Education according to the Board's protocol (Section 5-7). If the complaint is proven to be true, the Board of Ministerial Standards and Education will revoke his/her authorization by the Convention to perform marriages. The Board will also take appropriate disciplinary measures according to its protocol (Section 5.6), which could ultimately lead to the loss of the individual's standing as an accredited minister within our Convention.

I am attaching the “points of order” that I raised in an attempt to have the motion ruled out of order. Each of them was refused, but a great deal of the debate time was spent on them and in the end 81 voted with us in opposing the motion. (Last year there were only 13 of us willing to stand against their efforts to enshrine this prohibition in our regulations!)

John Boyd

Grand Opening – Parkdale Neighbourhood Church

Leaving behind a 400 square foot storefront, Parkdale Neighbourhood Church (PNC) celebrated the grand opening of its new space at 201 Cowan Road in Epiphany and St. Mark's Anglican Church (ESAC), Toronto on 30 September 2006.

The Rector and the Bishop of the Diocese gave wide support to PNC's new beginnings in a

renovated 1800 square foot space that includes a commercial kitchen.

After a year of an unsuccessful search for a new place, in April 2006, PNC closed its doors uncertain of its future. The summer produced a number of developments that led ESAC to open up space for PNC who had already been using a room for Sunday services.

Food, fellowship, music, an open stage and colourful lighting set the tone as Pastoral Director, Joe Abbey-Colborne shared PNC's story of concern about closing and then affirmation in its rebirth in west-end Toronto's Parkdale community.

Story and Photos submitted by Daphne L.Hunt (photos on page 8)

“Baptists Without Borders”

This is the theme of the Fall 2006 Gathering of Baptists 27 and 28 October in Woodstock, Ontario at the Quality Inn, Altadore Room.

Guest speaker, 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 and Affirming Baptists.

For registration, accommodation information and directions, please visit

<http://www.gatheringbaptists.ca/Fall/>

