

Spring 2009 Vol. 14 Issue 3 — ISSN 1499-111X ©The Gathering of Baptists

**SPRING GATHERING 2009**

*Lawrence Martin will be our speaker and animator for our 2009 Spring Gathering. He is a Juno Award-winning singer and musician, a politician, Executive Director of an Aboriginal Community Health Centre in Timmins, father, husband and grandfather. A Mushkego Cree, also known by the name Wapistan, Lawrence grew up in the small village of Moose River Crossing, with his Mum, sister and grandparents. As in the Cree tradition, the whole village became his extended family. One of his aunts, Abba, recognised his talent for music at an early age, buying him his first acoustic guitar and teaching him to play. Once he had learned how to strum three chords, he began to write songs. At the age of 14, he had to leave his village and family to attend high school in the far away city of North Bay. This was his first trip out of Moose River and his first time on his own. With the guitar and a pack sack of clothes, he reluctantly boarded the train one early September morning. North Bay was a different world, expanding Lawrence's exposure to music. With fellow students he formed a band and cemented friendships that would last forever. Together with one of them, Vern Cheechoo, Lawrence was nominated for a 2003 June Award for Aboriginal Recording of the Year. In 1994, Lawrence became the mayor of Sioux Lookout, becoming the first aboriginal person in the province ever elected to the mayoralty of a municipality that was not a First Nations reserve. He later moved to Cochrane, and was elected mayor of that town in 2003. As one of many gathered in Ottawa last June to hear the federal government's apology to aboriginal, Inuit, Métis and First Nations peoples, Lawrence sang Anishnawbe Child, the moving story of a child taken from his home and sent to live in a residential school..*



*Lawrence will talk to us about what it means to be an aboriginal person in Canada today, tell us some of his life story, teach us about ceremony and ritual, and spirituality. Along with his wife, Betty, who is an artist (and who will be bringing some of her art work for sale), he will lead us through a sweat lodge experience. He will teach us some songs and challenge us and make us laugh!*

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**Saturday 25 April 2009**

**Thornhill Baptist Church, 8018 Yonge Street, Thornhill**

**For directions or billeting, call pastor Paul Gibbon at 905 889 3294**

**Friday Evening Social: Karen and Heather's place 15 Warbrick Lane,**

**Bolton Telephone: 905-857-8193 or 416-410-5823**

**Global Baptist Peace Conference Rome  
9-14 Feb 2009 Vivi in Pace: Live in Peace**



*Five Canadian Baptists attended the Fourth Global Baptist Peace Conference in Castell Gondolfo, Italy: Sadie, Roger and Carl Cann, João Matwavana and Lee McKenna. They joined 350 other Baptists from sixty countries from around the globe. The host organisation, L'Unione cristiana evangelica battista d'Italia (UCEBI), was a marvel!*

Baptist Peacemakers have gathered from around the globe four times in the last 22 years – the first time in Sweden in 1987, then in La Boquita, Nicaragua, in 1992, in Melbourne, Australia and, in February, in Castell Gondolfo, southeast of Rome. Some of us had already met Anna Maffei in Birmingham, England, when the Baptist World Alliance gathered for its centenary meeting in 2005. Anna is a Baptist pastor and General Secretary of UCEBI, married to a Baptist pastor, Massimo Aprile, and mother of a musician of extraordinary giftedness, Emmanuele Aprile.

In Birmingham, as in Melbourne, peacemaking Baptists met in a pre-Congress meeting to encourage one another in what often feels like a lonely profession, a tiny remnant of a minority of a small section of global Baptist Christendom. While the Congress attracted tens of thousands, our wee gathering was a modest group of some dozens of determined enemy-lovers. In the case of the Italian gathering, the list of willing sponsoring organisations was limited to those courageous enough to associate themselves with the unorthodox and clearly Samaritan-loving Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America.

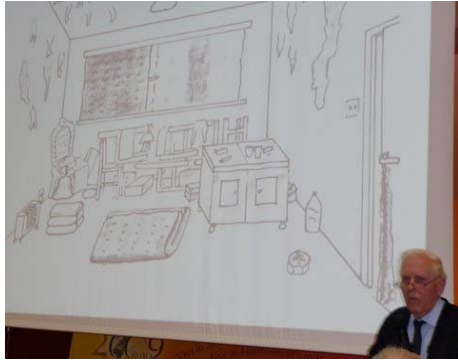
Anna and her amazing company of Italian Baptists decided, three years ago, that their regular gathering would be replaced by this international gathering and thus, all energies and resources usually designated for their own purposes were enthusiastically and unflinchingly devoted to preparations for this gathering.

It seemed like a unique, unrepeatable event—in its quality of logistical support, its beautiful setting, its unparalleled hospitality, its excellence in worship, music, ritual and

story-telling and its range of workshop and debate. On Friday the thirteenth of February, we bused our way back into Rome to give vent to our gospel cry for peace, gathering in la Piazza di San Lorenzo in Lucina – overlooked by the offices of UCEBI – and then marching, filling the *piazze*s and streets the few hundred of us, our Italian rainbow *pace* umbrellas unfurled and each of us wearing vests informing passersby in English, Spanish or Italian of wars, their length, their toll, their perpetrators, their victims.

Amongst the conference story-tellers were Nancy Sehested with stories of her work in a maximum security prison; João Matwawana, Angolan Canadian peacemaker, and Norman Kember, one of four men kidnapped and held for four months in Baghdad while part of a Christian Peacemaker Team delegation.

Since his release from captivity, Norman has written a book (*Hostage in Iraq*) and accepted invitations in a dozen countries to tell his story, illustrated with slides that included drawings of their ‘cell’.



From the British Baptist Peace Fellowship Newsletter, Norman writes:

*Mondo Migliore (better world) is a beautiful conference centre in the hills above Rome (overlooking the Pope’s summer palace across the lake). The accommodation is excellent with modern round chapel, a large conference hall and many small rooms for discussion groups. The entrance hall had a coffee bar and was the place where people met to chat and a few groups sold national homemade wares. The programme was full and it was hard to find time to explore the extensive grounds with shaded arbours for summer sessions.*

*The morning worship was always lively and a small music group (with an excellent cellist) led the singing – invariably in English, then repeated in Spanish and then Italian for each item. The services were strong on symbolic actions, planting seeds, drinking water together at a service about the dire effects of water privatisation schemes on poor populations, receiving a leaf from the peaceful Waldensians, making a web of wool to tie us together, taking the symbols of bread and wine out of the church into the ‘world’ at the end of communion.*

*After morning worship there was a major meeting in the big conference room. We listened to Baptists from the five continents talking about their local projects for reconciliation between communities in conflict. This was followed by stories from particular places – new hopes in Nepal, the struggles of the Naga people for recognition by India, peace-making in a US penitentiary, forgiveness between Baptist and Orthodox believers in Georgia, the painful situations in Zimbabwe and Orissa.*

*After lunch (pasta & wine plus) there were workshop sessions. Pat and I chose workshops on inter-cultural reconciliation, on ‘green’ issues, on inter-faith heroes, on forgiveness and on restorative justice. There were five opportunities to select one out of twelve topics. Some were on women’s*

*struggles, but biblical themes and stories of reconciliation in specific situations were also offered. In the evening after dinner there was music in the chapel.*

*On the Friday we all were taken to the centre of Rome in coaches. We had services in the St Paul-outside-the-Walls Basilica [conducted by Georgian Baptist Bishop, Rusudan Gotsiridze, pictured above in her clerics, a wonderfully perplexing sight to tourists] and, after a demonstration outside the Italian Baptist Offices, we joined together at the Waldensian church where Ken Sebested preached.*



*Which memories will we hold onto? The communion of conversation at meals, the quiet evening worship, singing in the vast basilica of St Paul-outside-the-Walls. Probably the main value of the event was the support given to Baptists striving to be peacemakers in isolated and often hostile situations. The conference produced a statement about our experience together from which I quote the last paragraph: ‘In the midst of a world of violence, terror and division, let us stand together as those who have heard and answered the call of God who wills justice and promises peace. Let us seek the joy of those who know the freedom that is found in Christ. Let us seek the hope that is the gift of the Spirit who unites us.’ [www.globalbaptistpeace.org](http://www.globalbaptistpeace.org)*

**Go Tell John Text: Matthew 11:1-6  
Ken Sehested**

I have to confess that I feel like I’ve been at a banquet table all week. So much passion and wisdom and brilliance and courage! So many creative insights, so many parables of bold efforts, sometimes undertaken at great risk; but also the multitude of ordinary acts of generosity and mercy that repair the world. Learning how to love enemies is at the heart of our evangelical calling. But figuring out how to do that is never simple, often risky. As Clarence Jordan, one of my heroes in the faith, once said, ‘The Holy Spirit doesn’t roost on a person who’s scared to get hurt.’

The reason we are here is not to raise up prophets. The prophets are already in place. Each one of you in this room represent tens of thousands of others who are not here, scattered across the globe, sometimes in the most unlikely places; sometimes in places whose names are hard to pronounce and whose suffering rarely appears in the news. You are among those who have not forgotten the ancient stories of redemption and promises of deliverance, stories made new by the power of the Spirit even in our day, stories that speak of a new and different future, of the coming of a new heaven and a new earth.

But prophets get tired. Disciples get weary. Followers of the Way are tempted to sing the song of resignation: 'O Lord, I've made you a place in my heart, and I hope now you'll leave it alone.'

Sometimes our knees grow weak and our hearts grow faint. The prophets, like the great Elijah, get frightened by the King Ahabs and the Queen Jezebels of this age. Prophets get weary. No one listens. No one pays attention. The devil has every appearance of being in charge. Every day brings more evidence that the market is rigged, that when the rich wage war it is the poor that die, that even the cries of persistent widows fail to reach corrupt judges.

The news is saturated with evidence that *Beelzebub* still rules, that truth is bartered to the highest bidder, that the wicked will forever prosper, that the land itself is enslaved to ravage, ruin and robbery. Daily we are bombarded with fresh reminders that Naboth's vineyard will never be secure from imperial greed; that the lame will never be permitted in Caiaphas' temple; that we will never know the name of the raped and murdered woman in Judges 19, that her cries will never be heard. All of these cries carry the voice of Jesus who will not leave our hearts alone.

'Sometimes I feel discouraged, and think my work's in vain. But then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again.' Oh, yes, there is a balm in Gilead, and one of the ways we enjoy it is when we gather, to learn each other's names and hear each other's stories. There are a lot more of us out there than anybody knows, and we need to find more ways to stay connected, to instruct and encourage each other, sometimes to argue with each other, because it's not just the world that refuses to listen—sometimes our churches refuse to listen as well. Sometimes the very communities which baptized us—who heard our promises to renounce every Caesar's rule in favour of the Reign of God—sometimes even they fail to understand. You won't be surprised when I say that not everyone in the Baptist world is happy about this gathering.

The text for this evening is a little disturbing. Being disturbed is always necessary to being delivered. Being confused is often the first step toward being converted. I hate to tell you this, but that little place in your heart that you made for Jesus—he's not going to leave it alone.

Jesus has been teaching and healing when, suddenly, the narrative is interrupted by the arrival of two men, two disciples of John the Baptizer. You know the earlier story of how Jesus, as he began his public ministry, was baptized by John. John, who, when he saw Jesus, said 'Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' John, who first

resisted, saying to Jesus 'it is I who need to be baptized by you.' John, who said 'the one who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry.'

John was a great disturbance to King Herod and was



now in Herod's prison. From the lonely isolation of that dark, dank prison cell he began to question his earlier confirmation of Jesus as the Anointed One. Jesus wasn't sticking to the plan. Something's amiss here; something's not quite right. Can't you hear John talking to himself in that dungeon of doubt, 'Could I

have gotten it wrong?'

The story of Jesus is always disturbing. Jesus had previously warned the disciples about the inevitable conflict they would face. On the face of it, these warnings seem to contradict the theme of this conference, 'Live in harmony, live in peace,' taken from Romans 12. But look at the way Paul ends that chapter: 'Beloved, never avenge yourselves...' And then, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them' (vv. 19-20). The refusal of vengeance, and the feeding of enemies, are treasonous in the eyes of every empire.

When I was in high school, I spent many Saturdays working at Cagle's Amoco gas station. For twelve hours I worked pumping gasoline, doing oil changes and washing cars. I still have a vivid memory of coming into work early one morning. Mr. Cagle had just arrived. As we busied ourselves getting ready, a news report came on the radio, with a story about Martin Luther King Jr. I don't recall any details. Some conflict of one kind or another.

Then Mr. Cagle muttered his disgust, loud enough for me to hear. 'That Martin Luther King, he ain't no Christian. Everywhere he goes he causes trouble.' It would be many years before it occurred to me that you could say the same thing about Jesus. Peacemaking can get you into trouble.

I recall my first trip to South Africa, during the apartheid regime. I was stunned to find out that the word 'reconciliation' was a bad word. *Not* for the white minority rulers, but for those seeking change. What I finally realized is that in that context 'reconciliation' had come to mean 'Once you get reconciled to the fact that we're on top, and you're on the bottom, then we'll have peace.'

The early Christian community here in Rome was not persecuted because they confessed Jesus as Lord. The Roman Empire was actually very enlightened in some ways. They offered freedom of religion to the many peoples they conquered. The reason Christians were

persecuted was that when they said 'Jesus is Lord' they meant Caesar is *not* Lord. And that makes a world of difference. Neither Rome's empire, nor America's empire, minds if you create a little place in your heart for Jesus. Rome doesn't mind your religious decorations, just as long as it doesn't conflict with economic policies and military planning.

There is a fierce ideological struggle going on the Gospel accounts of Jesus birth. It comes through with Mary's song of praise, which prophesies that God has 'shattered the proud' and 'put down the mighty,' 'filled the hungry with good things, and the sent the rich away empty-handed' (Luke 1:51-53).

We sometimes forget the backdrop to the nativity story, particularly of the great Caesar Augustus who ruled the known world. Many inscriptions describing Caesar's divine status can still be found. There you can read about the 'gospel'. In Rome's imperial world, 'gospel' was the good news of Caesar's having established 'peace and security for the world.' Before Jesus, Caesar was described as 'saviour' who brought 'salvation' to the world. Because of this, citizens were to have 'faith' in their 'lord'. Elsewhere Caesar is referred to as 'redeemer' who has 'saved the world' from war and established 'peace on the earth.' *Do you see where this is going? Can you feel the sharp relief of those nativity stories rising from the ornamental rendering we give them each Christmas?*

The birth narratives are more than sweet lullabies. They are incendiary stories; they are bold contradictions to Roman imperial authority. No wonder Herod was troubled when the magi told him of the birth of a new king!

One of my favorite quotes is from the American novelist, Flannery O'Connor, when she paraphrased a line from John's Gospel: 'You shall know the truth, and the truth will make you odd.' The *peace* we are promised is the *Peace of Christ—Pax Christi*, and it is forever at odds with the *peace of Rome—Pax Romana*. Or, for that matter, of *Pax Americana*.

There is something real at stake in the struggle for faith. In the words of one of our Baptist saints in the U.S., 'Faith is not belief in spite of the evidence. Faith is life lived in scorn of the consequences.' Theology doesn't just go through the head. First, it makes blisters on your feet and calluses on your hands.

Imagine the rappeller: when you're there on the edge, you can't be absolutely certain that the rope will hold. You can check and make sure the rope is strong; you can make sure the rope is securely anchored; you can make sure the harness isn't frayed or the metal clip isn't cracked. After a while, though, you lean back over the edge or you don't.

Faith—Godly reverence, the decision to follow Jesus—is

like that. Reverence is not a series of intellectual affirmations, or a pattern of piety and religious practices. The indicator of piety and religious practices, the indicator of reverence is risk. As followers of Jesus we are able to risk not because we are heroes, not because we are pure, not even because we expect to be rewarded in heaven. The reason we risk is because we are in love with God. As the angels sang to the shepherds keeping watch over their flock, 'Glory, to God; peace, to the earth' (Luke 2:14). To glorify God, seek peace for the earth.

When John sat shivering in Herod's prison, he wondered about this promise of peace. Which is why he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, 'Are you the one, or shall we look for another?'

Do you remember Jesus' response? Did he answer in words that are now framed in the Nicene Creed? 'I am the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father as only begotten, that is, from the essence of the Father, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father...?' Did he respond with the words of the Apostles' Creed? 'I am the Lord Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary. I will be crucified, dead, buried... and on the third day ascend into heaven to sit on the right hand of God...?'

Jesus could have saved us a lot of trouble if he'd picked one of those creeds. We could have been spared a lot of hangings and drownings and burnings at the stake, not to mention inquisitions and church splits and seminary faculty firings. But he didn't. This text is the most extensive Christological statement we have from the mouth of Jesus. Instead of resorting to philosophical abstractions, what he said was fleshly, incarnate: Go tell John what you see and hear: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.

Sisters and brothers, the first thing we need to do when we get home is to go tell John—go remind the folk who baptized us—where to look for *Pax Christi*, for the peace of Christ. 'Go tell John'—say that with me. (*Go tell John.*)

Go tell John, and Mary, too: The blind are being hired as wilderness travel guides. And the lame have signed up for ballroom dancing classes. *Go tell John!* Go tell John, and Mary, too: The lepers are parading down the fashion circuit's hottest runways in Milan and Paris. And the deaf are harmonizing over in Rome's opera house. *Go tell John!*

Go tell John, and Mary, too: The dead have kicked off the coffin lid and put obituary writers out of business. The poor have food in the pantry and cash in their pocket. *Go tell John!* Sisters and brothers, this is the Gospel of our



Lord: The grace of God is slowly saturating our lives. Not as some kind of special religious emotion, not as some abstract creedal statement, not as some particular habits of piety. Grace is freeing us to be fearless! And because of this fearlessness we are free to revere those whom the empires revile, those whom the superpowers neglect.

*Go tell John:* We are free to care for those who are useless to the world's political establishments and economic systems. Neither Rome nor Washington—can threaten us anymore; King Herod's regime cannot take anything from us that is essential. From this confidence we can pray as Jesus taught us: 'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven' (Matt. 6:10). Because one day, according to John's Revelation, 'The kingdom of this world shall become the kingdom of our Lord' (11:15).

*Go tell John, and Mary, too.* The grace of God is disarming our hearts and will, in time, disarm the nations. The day is coming, says the Psalmist, when we 'shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living' (27:13). *Go tell John.*

*Go tell John, and Mary, too,* that the mark of Heaven's vision is when wolf and lamb lie together (Isa. 11:6), when justice will roll down like waters, righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24). On that day shame will be turned to praise (Zeph. 3:19), the poor will be lifted from the ash heap (1 Sam. 2:8), and immigrants will be welcomed (Mal. 3:5). *Go tell John.*

*Go tell John, and Mary, too,* that one day slaves will be released, debts will be cancelled, ancestral lands will be returned (Lev. 25) and all shall sit, unafraid, 'neath their vine and fig tree (Micah 4:4) One day, Paul says, creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay (Romans 8:22). Tears will be dried (Rev. 21:4). The bows of the mighty will be broken (1 Sam. 2:4). Swords will be beaten into ploughshares (Micah 4:3).

*Go tell John.*



*Go tell John, and Mary, too,* that, on that glorious day of disarmament, that day when justice and peace will embrace (Ps. 85:10), we shall all meet again on the banks of that great river; and there we will lay down our swords and shields:

*Down by the riverside, down by the riverside. I'm gonna lay down my sword and shield, down by the riverside, down by the riverside...*

## GRAPE JUICE INTO WINE : A GATHERING LISTSERVE THREAD: The Question

Our deacons are in the midst of a conversation about including wine in communion. Most like the idea, focussing on the pragmatic stuff like putting the wine in the middle circle of the tray and the grape juice in the outside circle with a buffer zone in-between. But I want to know if any of you have made this move and how you did it and how well it went. Those of you who simply became Anglicans need not reply, that's cheating ;-).  
Cam Watts, Aylmer



### The Answers

As you know, I am currently serving in a Presbyterian church, so maybe this is 'cheating' too. At some point this church decided to offer both wine and grape juice. They use white wine and red grape juice and put a note in the bulletin to that effect so that people know which they are choosing. They also have a small amount of special bread for those with problems with regular wheat; it is placed in a little paper cup in the middle of the plate of communion bread so that people who need to use it know which is gluten-free.  
Fred Demaray, Ottawa

As one of the 'cheaters', I just want to say that this is the first time I have heard of a Baptists church considering this earth-shattering move and am I ever impressed! I never did buy the argument that Jesus turned the water into grape juice! Karen Turner, Bolton

The congregation I attended while in Prague, a Baptist church founded in 1927 to combat U.S. fundamentalism (my kind of place), had always used wine at their communion services – typical European. Attitudes towards many of the social tabus that we hold dear are much more relaxed in Central Europe—strange to say, especially in those cultures and communities that experienced oppressive communist regimes. The Swiss Baptist church I attended in my post-graduate student days at Zurich was dominated by Southern Baptists, and they used juice. As background, I would recommend Jessica Warner's recent book, on the North American Temperance movement, *The Day George Bush Stopped Drinking*. It clearly demonstrates how recent, and how

misdirected, is the total abstinence movement. I know, typical prof's response, recommend a book. :-) But this one's a gem. Ray Hobbs, Hamilton

I grew up Roman Catholic. I remember when the priest was the only one to drink the wine. My teen years were spent in the Baptist church drinking grape juice and eating cubes of wonder bread and always feeling there was something wrong; something 'meagre' about it. It was all the wrong message. That persisted in one form or another till I went to Sanctuary in the mid-1990s. They were old Gospel Hall Brethren folk there, but they used a cup of wine in the middle and smaller cups of grape juice. They just offered the option. I always



loved that because we worked so much with people off the street who struggled so openly with alcoholism and other substance issues, and so the winos who were trying to stay on the wagon and the tee-totallers who never touched the stuff all shared the cups of grape juice, and the active alcoholics and the people who preferred wine or just didn't care, all shared a common cup of wine. We also used a large loaf of French bread, 'cause that just had a wonderful sense of plenty about it that the little cubes of sliced white bread could never hope to compete with.

At PNC, 'the church under ground', we have started doing the same thing. We just introduced it one day and explained that people were free to choose. We did a little tutorial on the etiquette around using the little cloth to wipe the common cup, and we've continued tutorials as issues have come up: so if you have an active infection or you feel a cold coming on, out of love for the rest of the folks around you, you might want to take the grape juice today.

We experiment a fair bit in our service and so people just felt like this was another thing we were doing differently. We try to keep the things that work well. This seems to be one that will stay for the most part. We are also, since the beginning of Advent, having communion at every service. This may also be something we keep. I think the theology is good and our folks relate to the metaphor of having a meal, or getting something to eat.

Then there was the time several years ago, at Walmer Road, when Mike Blair was in the hospital and I was leading the communion service. We focussed on communion, and the aspect of it being the common food and drink of Jesus' day and culture. And that Jesus raised common food and made it sacred. That getting to truly know someone, as Jesus wants to know us, is a sacred act of intimacy, that draws people into

relationship (communion). However, in our culture wine and bread are not really the common currency for getting to know someone.

So... We had coffee and Tim Bits for communion instead... Some people howled like we had thrown boiling water on them, but others received it with gratitude and some were moved. Some said afterward that going for coffee might never be the same for them – an act of sacred intimacy. The holy barging in on the everyday and contaminating it. I think Jesus believed that Holiness was more contagious than sin, or the profane, or evil. I think that's why he touched everybody, especially those dirty people who were full of sin.

I think Jesus can even turn the coffee and the little deep fried balls of sugar coated dough into something beautiful and deeply sacred. joe abbey colborne, Toronto

I remember my wife, while doing research in seminary, coming across instructions for communion wine-making in mid-19th century Baptist newspapers in the US. And I've seen historical documents (about that same time) that list Baptist pastors being paid with bourbon (along with many other things, like chickens, eggs, ham, etc.). Legend has it that the first bourbon made in Kentucky was made by a Baptist pastor. (He would be my patron saint, if only I knew his name!)

It was Thomas Welch, a doctor/dentist and staunch opponent (on religious grounds) of all alcohol, who applied the pasteurization process to create grape juice. His son, Charles, also a dentist and tee-totaller, later left his medical practice to found, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Welch grape juice company in the US. Ken Sehested, Asheville, NC

Last summer, I attended the BPFNA Summer Peace Conference for the first time. At the end of the week, the young people served us communion. There were several stations and the elements were different at each. While I was intrigued by the idea that I could have chips and salsa, or honey and rice cakes, or milk and cereal, I chose the traditional grape juice and bread cubes. I think it is rather like my experience living in Toronto. I can stay close to familiar things and the exotic is within easy reach from folk who can tell me about its goodness and make me feel welcome as I partake of it. Daphne Hunt, Toronto

I have been waiting for someone who was able to stay for the whole experience at the last Gathering weekend to respond since I had to leave early and missed the Communion service which grew out of the day. I remember a time way back in history when we experimented with Pepsi and Pizza communions but without a very good theological background to undergird it. It was novel and a kind of 'stick-that-in-your ear'

approach to the stuffiness of our elders. So now I am not as concerned about what is served – I prefer wine but can get more than enough of that at home – but what we are doing. As long as we have those whose prayers will be grateful for the blood and broken body I hesitate to include children in this teaching-by-osmosis procedure. I don't want to exclude children I just want them to understand that this is not a blood ritual nor a snack-break. Bruce Coombe, Simcoe

I want to throw my hat in with Bruce. What is used for the elements at communion is of little interest to me. It is the words that need careful rethinking, especially if we want the children to be with us at this celebration by the family. Prayers for broken body and blood need to be replaced with words that clarify what this celebration is meant to reflect. Is it just a memorial or is it much more? I was hoping that after the last meal we shared at the Gathering there would be an effort to create the words we might use for a communion service, given the refreshed view we had of the place of violence in our faith expression. I must confess I am not found in attendance very often at the communion table because the church I attend is not into rethinking such imagery. They seem content with the old words and the images they reference. I want a more celebrative act, one that is less of a memorial using Paul's language and more of a commitment to being the body and life of Christ in the world. Rob Campbell, Ottawa

Before my memory of the afternoon fades further, I will share this and hope others will add pieces and details I have missed. We viewed some images of icons, statues and paintings over the course of history. Over history the images became more graphic in depiction of violent elements of blood flowing and anguish on the face of Jesus. In earlier images, we see rather little pain and suffering depicted.

My experience of our small group discussion prior to the communion was that we were trying to move towards an egalitarian way of serving communion, but coming up with something fresh in the time available was difficult. We wanted to be more inclusive. We also thought that it should be more like a community meal.

Joining the larger group, the chairs were arranged in a circle and elements were laid on a table outside the circle. We were asked what our next step would be. A few spoke. One expressed loneliness and another came alongside. Then after some thoughtful waiting, a few got up to move the elements to the table in the middle of the circle. Then, a few others got up to serve the group.

While in my mind I groped for something different and something new to emerge, there were practices that seemed natural to keep rather than eschew. There was a need for a few to take on roles as servers and others to be served. What was new was that there was a sense of spontaneity about our

communion, with both wine and juice on offer. Daphne

Thanks, Daphne. It was interesting that the artistic images shifted over history. Was that more of a theological swing towards the sacrificial understanding? Also, I sense from your description that the communion was more of a silent, meditative experience but wonder if any 'language/liturgy' emerged as it happened.

Sorry, Cam; not sure that all of this has addressed your question. You already lead a communion service that strives to move the language towards other images. For me, 'shed blood' language never fails to undermine my mood. Oh well, like Rob, I don't attend first Sundays often. You catch me some times though with that un-baptist practice of occasionally moving the Communion Sunday to a different day - like Remembrance Day (don't get me going on that symbol!) Bruce

**THE GNL Challenge: To come up with new words for a non-violent imagery for communion. The winner will be announced in time for Pentecost. Prize to be announced. Send your submissions to [GNL@gatheringbaptists.ca](mailto:GNL@gatheringbaptists.ca) by 21 May 2009.**

## International Women's Day: a memorial

IWD

*Improvised Womanist Devise.*

*What was He thinking?*

*Foul, bloody, moody; bloodied.*

*She. Her. Mother daughter sister crone.*

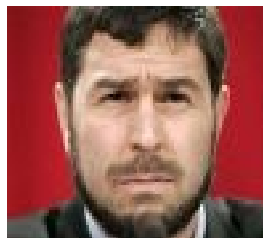
*Dissected, brotherly raped, fatherly killed, husbandly kindled.*

*Hidden, FGM'd, burqa'd, niqab'd, Hilfigered, A&F'd.*

*Sexualised, infantilised, Barbie'd.*

*Killing us softly. Selling us hardly.*

## Who's Next?



Dear Mr Harper (copy to Lawrence Cannon, Minister of Foreign Affairs): I am writing to you to express my dismay at hearing the news that the seat on Flight 99, Air El Etihad, designated for Sudanese-Canadian, Abousfian Abdelrazik, remained empty as it left



Khartoum earlier today. Suitably, this morning's CBC programme, *The Current*, dramatised sections of Kafka's *The Trial*, overlaid with the spoken words of Mr Abdelrazik's lawyer and a Kafka scholar. Perhaps we are slowly, but surely, accommodating ourselves to the post-11

September 2001 madness that is eroding our civility, our sanity, our rights, our humanity, queuing us dutifully up like sheep to the slaughter. We will accede to anything as long as it can be

called 'in the interest of national security'.

Abovsfian came here in 1990 seeking refuge from the violence and violations of Sudan. Thirteen years later, a full (is there such a thing as a 'half?') Canadian citizen, Mr A is arrested – as requested by CSIS – and tortured, Canadians having learned our neighbour's habits of extraordinary rendition. The Sudanese don't want him (them telling us that keeping an innocent man in detention, don't you know, is a human rights violation) and he is released from prison, arranges to go home, but the US have placed him on a no-fly list. His passport expires. The years pass; with neither money, nor hope, he is re-arrested, consular access is denied. Released once more in 2006, he is denied travel documents even though the RCMP told you that he is innocent. A year ago he sought refuge in the Canadian Embassy – where he remains.

He is asked to find an airline that will accommodate him; he does. Then he, without a Sudanese pound to his name, is required to produce a paid-up ticket. Your government, my government, says that his assets (which ones?) must be seized and anyone who chips in on the ticket is guilty of a crime, in violation of our anti-terrorism law. His ticket is presented, his reservation confirmed. And then the bar is raised once more: Mr Abdelrazik must get his own name off the no-fly list (ignoring those provisions that permit repatriation of citizens, no matter what.) As one recent letter to the editor said, '... the government sanctioned denial of the basic rights of a citizen threatens the fabric of the country and stains our moral fibre. If one person is not safe, no one is safe. Who is next?

*Signed, on behalf of those 200 Canadians awaiting arrest.*

### A Litany for Women and Men

**W:** Can you hear?

**M:** O women, whose voices have never been heard:  
we repent of our deafness,  
We confess our stubborn hearts and closed minds.

**W:** You can't know what it's like to be

Absent from history books,  
Missing in Action.

Marked by grammar as minus-male as if you could stand for us.  
Absent from the race whose story is marked by war and conquest,

Battles, broken treaties, planted flags, puffed-out chests,  
race and competition: to the top of the world or the bottom of  
the sea or the heights of space  
or the depths of high-tech killing?

Absent from theologies where God is Man and Man is God;  
invisible or a problem.

Where are we?

Our stories are written in nurseries, at kitchen tables, between  
furrows, on streets and assembly lines;  
whispered, sung, lullabyed and raged.

**M:** O women, whose words have been consigned to  
silence:

We grieve for the wisdom which has been lost.  
O women, whose wisdom has not been heeded:  
We desire that our time will be different and  
We commit ourselves to listen.

**W:** Can you possibly possibly know my pain as I open the Bible,  
the *Word of God* -

and find there in its sacred pages stories that gore me to the  
core of my feminine self - Sarah Dinah Hagar

the Levite's unnamed concubine  
the woman caught in sin  
the unnamed daughter of Jephthah  
Martha Mary of Magdala Tamar

Unworthy of the Lectionary Learned.

How can you possibly know?

**M:** We will turn again to search out the scriptures.  
We will look for the clues of your lives in the margins  
of history's pages.

We will seek out your words in secret places.

We will dig for your treasure hidden deep in the dark.

**W:** Where am I to find myself?

To hear my voice?

To see images that tell me that I, too, am created in the  
likeness of the divine?

**M:** We know our need of your wisdom.

We yearn for the restoration of what has been lost.

Our time is hungry for your forgotten stories,  
for the ancient art of women's wisdom

which will heal our hurt and may yet birth a different world.

**W & M:** Forgive us for every time we have denied the equal  
beauty, integrity, value, calling, leadership, spirit, work of  
the female human being.

Forgive us for every time we have read the texts of women  
sold, tortured, raped, dismembered, subjugated and  
unnamed  
and not cried out with her.

Forgive us for failing to wonder how our human story would  
have told itself

if women were writing: weaving, birthing, nursing, singing,  
bathing, planting, thinking, building, creating.

Forgive us for our failure to re-imagine our way out of  
patriarchy

to a time when you were a woman.

O God, mother, father, female, male, both and neither:

we surrender our days to you,

to be blessed, made sacred, increased by your spirit.

And it is by your spirit that we pray. Amen.



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News, Opinion, Book and Movie Reviews, Sermons,  
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