

Between the Aisles

A Robertson-Wesley United Church Quarterly

SPRING



"Good Friday"

Painting by Chaka Zinyemba

Welcome

Hello and welcome to this edition of *Between the Aisles*. It is my distinct delight to act as co-editor for the very first time. I have been attending Robertson-Wesley for over a decade now. And still my passion grows. But more importantly, my faith grows.

My faith grows because my spiritual practices and spiritual experience grow. Yoga, meditation, acting classes, choir, scripture reflection (literature club), fellowship, youth group, and newsletter writing. These spiritual experiences give me a very firm foundation when the "billows roll".

There is a sacred presence at R-W. The architecture and light speak to our spirits in a secret, silent language. Rich woodwork and enduring craftsmanship cradle our souls in a swirl of authenticity. The organ, with its massive silver pipes and thrilling complexity, stokes our spirituality.

The love and acceptance are profoundly real and they bring Transformation. The fervour of intention holds sway. Robertson-Wesley began offering same sex marriage in 2006. This hard won freedom was a very long time coming. I still can't believe it's true.

I am so proud and happy to call R-W my spiritual home. As a first nations chief once wrote:
"There are so many paths to the Creator, I encourage you to get on one."

I hope you enjoy this edition. It was a fantastic experience working on it with my friends.

Maria Adria

More Than One Good Shepherd

Ten lucky Robertson-Wesley members met for four Mondays in November to watch the DVD series *The Good Shepherd*. It, like the book by the same name (Nancy Heule led the discussion of the book a year ago,) was written by Kenneth Bailey, a personable, unassuming Biblical scholar.

The Good Shepherd is virtually steeped in scripture. Bailey lived in the Middle East for many years and actually worked as a real shepherd. His comments are enriched with descriptions of how sheep were practically managed.

The flock trusts their leader, responding to his voice. When frightened, they can become physically paralyzed. They require the shepherd to literally carry them home. A good shepherd was willing to endure a lot to protect his flock. If the sheep were far from home come nightfall, the shepherd would carefully build a small enclosure. Fashioned with a small enough entrance that he could count the sheep as they came in single file. He would then lie across its entrance when he slept so no animals could escape and no prey could enter. Venturing forth in the unknown and threatening night was common if even one animal strayed. Finding the lost animal not only created an incredible sense of trust in the rescued but also in the 99 who were left behind: they knew that if they lost their way, the shepherd would equally risk his life for them.

How these rich background details added to our understanding of the beloved 23rd Psalm! Author Bailey took us through each line, contrasting and comparing it to the Bible. He elucidated the many places in the prophets, Gospels and letters where shepherds and Christ's own shepherd-like actions were mentioned.

On a separate note; how lucky Robertson-Wesley is to have Nancy Heule. Over the years she has shepherded us through discussions of many books: *The Shack*, *The Purchase* and *Saving Jesus from the Church* by Robin Meyers (which I credit most with advancing my thinking from Sunday School to Sanctuary concepts.) She also led a full year study where we read the Bible in its entirety! Christians have Christ as their Good Shepherd; Robertson-Wesley has Nancy as a close second.

Lorna Berlinguette

Membership Class

2017 Mar 1 to Mar 29

Five Wednesdays 7:00 to 8:30 pm

Cost: none

Offered each year, this five-week course is designed to be a brief survey of the foundational elements of church membership with opportunity for discussion and exploration of our religious background. While it is primarily for people preparing for confirmation, we also welcome anyone who would like to just explore their faith, whether they have been confirmed or not. For more information, visit the Membership webpage at www.rwuc.org/membershipclass.html. The first session will begin with the Ash Wednesday service and we will meet afterwards.

Do you have an experience you would like to share with the congregation?

Between the Aisles accepts unsolicited submissions from members for each quarterly issue. Submissions can be emailed to: rwucnews@gmail.com

The Gift of Life

Hi - I guess there are lots of stories out there so here's mine. I was born of unwed parents, so they put me up for adoption. I was advertised in the newspaper and 40 couples showed up wanting me. But my adopting mom was a career nurse in the facility where I was born and everyone knew about her numerous miscarriages. She was given priority and that's how I ended up being raised as her son.

Fast forward to 1998. The province of B.C. opened their adoption files at the end of 1996. I sent for the little package that was available for \$25.00. I received my registration of birth, change of name in the B.C. Supreme Court, from Spong to Squair, and a page on "Neglected Children". Family Services said my parents had married in 1936 and had three more kids. I sent two letters of introduction to "birth brother," Don, but he did not reply.

However, one evening in March of 1998, a woman phoned and said she was my sister, saying, "let's meet." I was so surprised!! So we went out to the lower mainland and checked into the hotel where she was staying for a conference. I left a message on her phone, she came to our room with a bouquet of flowers for my wife, Betty and a hug for me. My sister became very helpful and involved in the exciting process of meeting birth family members.

My parents, after they married, had a boy, a girl, and then a boy. In the process of meeting family, I had many interesting experiences - one when my sister arranged for 4 women to be seated on chairs behind a house in New Westminster. When I walked around the corner of the house, one woman exclaimed "Oh, my God!" I guess I looked so much like my birth dad, who by then had died. At a relative's funeral, a man came up to me in my car and asked if I was Bill Grasby. He was only off by one generation. Bill Grasby was an uncle I'd discovered! And a very welcoming one too.

Then came the moment I'll never forget. My sister took Betty and I to a care facility in Coquitlam where my birth mom was in palliative care. All her teeth had been pulled - she could not enunciate. She'd had a stroke years earlier and was in decline with Alzheimer's. Anyway, I held her hand and said "Mom, I'm Robert Charles, I'm your first baby, I'm your 1932 baby". I repeated that and got a focus and a tear, that my sister wiped away. Obviously, I'll never forget that moment.

My birth mom died about 2 years after that. The pastor at the funeral was another relative of mine I'd discovered. He told me that my sister said I should speak at Mom's funeral. I did. I recounted some of the detail about first meeting my birth mom in these later years. I stated I was thankful that I was carried full term and that she had not compromised her ongoing fertility. At that point my youngest brother, another Robert Charles, got up and ushered his two boys out.

So there you are - I was born Robert Charles Spong, and adopted 10 days later by the Squairs. I had a birth father, an adoptive father and then 2 more step-father's. I am very happy with the raising I experienced. I have absolutely no regrets. I guess my name was changed to Buddy and then Bud which I have been for a long time now.

Years later I heard about the famous abortion rights leader, Dr. Henry Morgentaller being awarded the Order of Canada for his "work". I remembered my own precarious beginnings and made a personal promise to never accept that same award. Thank God my birth mom gave birth to me.

I am so grateful to my birth mom, Helen Mildred Spong. She gave me my life.

Bud Squair



Lent Lends Itself to Learning

Book Buddies



Attention Book Buddies!! Join other book-lovers on **Monday February 27 at 7 pm** in the Club Room to discuss Dr. Walter Brueggemann's *Sabbath as Resistance*; *Saying No to the Culture of Now*. This small but mighty book will stop you in your tracks! It can be purchased from Nancy Heule for \$15.00.

DVD Series

The DVD series *Countering Pharaoh's Production-Consumption Society Today* will be shown on **Saturday March 5** in Room 11, **9:30 am to 2:30 pm**. Refreshments provided. Register in Church office or in Memorial Hall.

Facilitated by Nancy Heule.
www.rwuc.org

Book Review

i-Minds: How Cell Phones, Computers, Gaming and Social Media are Changing our Brains, Our Behavior, and the Evolution of Our Species

We've all seen them; the mother in the coffee shop, bending over her smart-phone, ignoring her child who is nearby in his stroller; the pedestrian, his attention captured by a small device in his hand, narrowly escaping a run-in with another passer-by; and the rude restaurant patron, loudly talking on his cell phone, unaware that the server is at his elbow, trying to take his order. Ah, the power of the visual image and the desire to keep our fingers moving constantly. What once was considered bad manners is now common practice.

Perhaps our digital age is doing more than reducing our attention to the world around us. Maybe the way our brain works is changing too.

The author, Dr. Mari Swingle is a neuropsychologist who, like so many others today, is worried about the impact of our digital world on us and on children and youth. But unlike some of us, Dr. Swingle is a very credible critic. She has a comprehensive knowledge of brain development, she draws upon current scientific research, and she is an experienced counsellor who utilizes electroencephalography as part of her counseling practice.

She questions what is being taken away or replaced when we adopt new technologies. She asks how our behaviour, relationships, and values are being affected. Our brains have sped up, and because digital technology is only a click away any time day or night, there is no opportunity for rest and restoration. Our human brains are in a constant state of arousal with no opportunity for reflection or integration of new knowledge. Swingle is not surprised at the huge rise in anxiety and depressive disorders, especially among young people. During exam weeks at the U of A, therapy dogs are available to assist students suffering from anxiety). The author does not condemn our digital technologies. Instead, she questions whether its use is integrated into, or interferes negatively, in our lives.

The reader, by recognizing when technological integration becomes interference, will be able to take action against negative effects.

I would highly recommend that parents-to-be, and parents of young children, read *i-Minds*. Given that all first-time parents are new to the parenting role, and hence are often unsure of

their actions, this book offers concrete knowledge and practical suggestions about the use of digital technology in the raising of children. Swingle herself believes that no child before the age of six years should be exposed to digital technology. As well, those of us old enough to be described as "digital immigrants" will be reminded of a time when we entertained ourselves, played imaginatively, learned that success required work, and a good night's sleep restored and repaired our tired brains.

Nancy Heule



Canadian Apology Percolates Within Us

It is the tenth anniversary of Stephen Harper's apology to indigenous peoples on behalf of all Canadians.

I see things differently today than I did even one year ago. The truth and reconciliation process elicited dialogue and brought things to light in a new and more tangible way. People at R-W baked and iced hundreds of cupcakes, and knitted and collected prayer shawls for the event. It was a token of acknowledging the pain and isolation that these children must have lived and died with year in and year out. Not only for their lives but for generation after generation of first nation peoples. They were told being Indian was bad and wrong. They were told their existence was unacceptable.

Of course baking cupcakes seems naïve considering what we now know. I visited a school recently, that had a plaque hanging by the gym, with the full text of Stephen Harper's 2007 apology. The apology detailed rather specifically what was done to the people and how it included the churches in its execution of the plan to "remove the Indian from the child."

The United Church has often been at the forefront of social change. We were instrumental in extracting the apology to First Nations people from the Federal government. I hope and pray to be of service to First Nations people in any way I can. It begins with listening and respect. It begins with coming to terms with our own complicity in maintaining the status quo.

We need to be more like them. More sharing. More concerned with the earth's welfare instead of just our own. We need to weave our spirituality and gratitude into every moment of every day.

Maria Adria

Editors note: For more information from the United Church of Canada on this topic, see: <http://www.united-church.ca/social-action/justice-initiatives/reconciliation-and-indigenous-justice>

Ash Wednesday

Wednesday, March 1 at 7:00 pm in the sanctuary

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. Its roots lie in the ancient Jewish festival of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Atonement means "at-one-ment." If we are to be at one with God, with creation, with each other, we must face honestly who we are, make our confession, and open ourselves to the supportive power of God and our faith community in the Lenten struggle for new life. So Ash Wednesday is a day of honest confession, commitment and healing. Please join us for a time of reflection, worship and ritual. During the service we will be burning the palm branches from Palm Sunday last year, turning them into ashes and then the congregation will be invited to receive the sign of the cross with ashes on their hand or forehead. It is a very reflective and meaningful service.

Everyone is welcome.

Link: www.rwuc.org/easter.html

Lent Music Concert Series

Robertson-Wesley is hosting a noon-hour concert series again this Lent, for five Thursdays in March and April. The concerts will run from 12:10-12:50, and admission is by freewill offering for the performers and for the Robertson-Wesley Music Society. Come and enjoy some tranquil, reflective music for the Lenten season.

March 2– Alison Stewart, violin; Kathleen de Caen, cello; Julia Davis, piano

March 9– Judith Richardson, soprano & Tammy-Jo Mortensen, keyboards

March 16– Jeanne Yang, organ

March 23– no concert

March 30– Erik Reinart, organ

April 6– Alison Grant-Preville, flute & Jeanne Yang, keyboards

Link: www.rwuc.org/concerts.html

Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper

It's that time of year again. On **Tuesday, February 28** Robertson-Wesley will be having their annual Pancake Supper. All are Welcome!!

Time: 5:30 to 7:00 pm

Cost: Adults - \$8.00

Children (12 & under) - \$5.00

Family - \$18.00

Get your tickets after the service in Memorial Hall or at the door.



Let us gather to celebrate
Holy Week and Easter

Holy Week Spiritual Practices

Sunday, April 9, 7:00 pm

Meditative Prayerful Practices

Maundy Thursday Service

Thursday, April 13, 7:00 pm

Recalling the Last Supper
Soloists and Special Music

Good Friday Service

Friday, April 14 10:30 am

Choir of Robertson-Wesley

Easter Vigil

Saturday, April 15 7:00 pm

Easter Sunrise Service

Sunday, April 16 7:30 am

Outdoors on the promenade at
100 Avenue and 121 Street

Easter Sunday Service

Sunday, April 16, 10:30 am

Choir of Robertson-Wesley
Pergolesi Brass



A New Life



When asked to write an article for this newsletter I said yes without hesitation, as I am prone to do, thinking to myself “How tough could that be?” Well, it has proven to be difficult. After rolling many ideas through my head, I asked myself a simple question – why did I choose to get baptized at Robertson -Wesley? It’s a simple question, but the answer is complicated and to properly answer it I would have to explain my childhood and early adult years, which is not something I care to do in a newsletter.

Despite the words that follow, I have great respect for my parents. They really did do the best they could under the circumstances. However, the truth is that my formative years were very painful for me and I endured more than a child should. Rather than getting into details, I believe this quote from a Ryan Adams’ song appropriately explains:

“I taught myself how to grow,
Without any love and there was poison in the rain,
I taught myself how to grow,
Until I was crooked on the outside and the inside
broke....”

When I first heard these words they resonated deeply within me, as though I had written them. I love these lyrics because I did teach myself how to grow. As a child, I never properly learned what being loved was or how to accept love when it was given to me. In many ways I learned to live life like the prodigal son, refusing to accept love and God’s grace, thinking only of myself and my needs. In fact, many people have shown me love over the years, but I could never properly accept it because I could never really see it. I had to make my own way through life and that is all there was to it. No one would take care of me. After all, that is what my mother had told me when I was 14. As a consequence, I believed in my subconscious that I was not worthy of being loved. Love was romantic fiction.

However, something odd happened. Under the circumstances, one would expect me to have turned into a monster with a heart of stone, but I did not (which I believe is a minor miracle). Somehow I grew into a person who can show love to others and feel their pain and worries. A generous and kind person. However, there was a problem – a really big problem. I found I could not be kind to myself. In fact, I had grown into my own worst enemy. No matter what I did in life it was never good enough for me. This was very troubling because my successes were many. I graduated from business school at UBC with honours. I had a successful career as a Chartered Accountant. I helped raise two amazing kids who to this day love me to death. Still, I was very confused. To what could I attribute my successes?

To be honest, I didn’t know the answer. Whenever I was asked this question, I chalked it up to being lucky and in the right place at the right time. However, as I would learn later in life, this answer was grossly insufficient. It did not explain my nature and how I intuitively knew right from wrong. My successes were too many and the rewards that followed too great to just be luck. I either had to give myself credit or accept the fact that someone was watching over me. This scared me, but I did start to wonder whether there was indeed a higher power. I decided to start going to church. I began attending Robertson- Wesley but the time was not quite right.

Why did I leave? Well, despite my changing thought patterns, I found I still could not accept being loved. I was a miserable and angry person (angry at myself that is). I gave up on God. This continued over the years, but then something larger than me took over my life. My dad died in 2010 and in 2013 my mom passed away as well. These events shook me to the core and became a catalyst for change. I knew I needed help to move forward. I had to learn to accept love and love myself or I would die young, a miserable, unhappy person. I vowed to myself that this would not happen and I found myself reading about God again. I don’t know why, but I read and read. Ultimately, I decided to return to church.

Upon my return, the experience was entirely different. I truly felt something as I walked into the sanctuary that day. I pondered the stained glass images around me. It was now 2015. I can’t explain in my own words what happened to me or what I felt stir inside me, so I will use another quote. Timothy Keller, in his book *The Prodigal God*, on page 28 writes:

“There is no evil that the Father’s love cannot pardon and cover, there is no sin that is a match for His grace”

For the first time in my life, I felt love. I felt God’s grace that day and I knew I was somewhere I belonged and was accepted. My grief was no match for His grace. I could see clearly now the vibrant, inclusive faith community that is Robertson-Wesley. I intuitively knew this was not luck or being in the right place at the right time. Someone had indeed been watching over me all these years and had led me to this particular church. I knew then what I had to do. I had to start over, but how? Well, as I would later discover, there was a simple answer to that question. The United Church of Canada’s webpage describes baptism as follows:

“Baptism is a symbolic action that signifies the **new life** God gives us as we join the church community” [emphasis added].

Continues on page 7

A New Life continued

So there it was, right in front of me. The opportunity to be granted a new life and finally accept God's grace. My fight was over. I had an opportunity to feel loved and I took it. On March 13, 2016, after membership class and my first ever bible study group, I was baptized at the tender age of 49, right here at Robertson-Wesley. I truly believe there is no other place I could have done this. The support and acceptance I have received since joining this church has been humbling to say the least.

I am very grateful for this caring, loving community. Currently, my family and I are facing another major challenge. Fear and uncertainty abound. But even as I glimpse the fragile future, my faith grows. The resources are here, within these walls, and within myself. One hundred years and counting...

Thanks be to God.

Garth van Herwaarden

I took a walk in the snow

by Sara Campos-Silvius

I took a walk in the snow
Beneath the cold, cold moon.
There was nothing
But the sound of my breath
And the crunch of the snow
beneath my feet.
Emptiness above
Emptiness below
Clarity and emptiness
The moon at full circle.
Giant
Alone
Impersonal
So cold
And beautiful.

United Church Women

The first UCW meeting of 2017 was held on January 10, 2017.

After a lovely lunch followed by business information, Tim Wright and Lyn Bishop of the Sauti Moja Canadian Charity gave a very interesting and informative presentation and slide show (Tim is the founding director). The organization inks donors to community initiatives of indigenous people, such as the Maasai of Kenya and Tanzania.

Examples of assistance are livestock for sustainable livelihoods, education for vulnerable girls, family and community health and early childhood development and education.

More information can be found at www.sautimoja.org

Assisted Dying

Physician or Nurse Clinician assisted dying became legal in Canada in June of 2016. This follows the earlier harm reduction law from 1996 which allows for the withdrawing or withholding of care when appropriate. The 1996 legislation was enacted in Canada during the famous fifteen year American legal battle involving the feeding tube of Terry Schiavo.

Assisted dying and harm reduction laws have been slowly, cautiously and meticulously crafted in order to relieve the suffering or incapacitation of grievously ill Canadians, while vigorously protecting the lives of vulnerable citizens. There is a bevy of legal safeguards to preserve the sanctity of life. In instances where religious or moral ambiguity exists on the part of caregivers or the institution where a patient resides, that patient may be transferred to another facility.

Traditionally, Western medicine has focused on extending life. However, there are many instances where extending and preserving life causes excessive suffering and prolonged agony. Active treatment in western medicine focuses almost exclusively on preserving life. Comfort, dignity and reduced suffering rarely enter the equation.

Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg (Benelux) have had assisted dying legislation in place since 2002. These European countries host the very best and widely available palliative (comfort based) care in the world. While living in the Netherlands 4 years ago I personally asked several physicians about assisted dying. In every instance they said, "It's on the books, but requires a lot of paper work. In reality, it's much easier to simply increase the morphine drip." The fact that it is rarely used does not negate its importance.

Assisted Dying is often an occult topic of gravity and fear for many people. We owe this legal measure of mercy to the bravery of outspoken patients, physicians, nurses and politicians who have had the courage to publically debate this emotionally laden topic. It is a debate which has drawn vitriol, fear, and rage from some corners of society.

In Canada, lawmakers and politicians, and a majority of the public have reached beyond the fear. We have mustered the courage and fortitude to face the problem and make assisted dying legal and available.

Beloved Canadian author of Shoeless Joe, W.P. Kinsella, chose an assisted death from his Vancouver home in September of 2016.

Maria Adria

Editors note: For more information from the United Church of Canada on this topic, see: <http://www.united-church.ca/news/moderator-physician-assisted-dying>

In the next edition, look forward to another article on this topic by Lea Callebaut

Meditation Group: Every Sunday from 10 am to 10:25 am, Room 11



Three Perspectives on Meditation From: A Doctor, a Minister, and a Art Therapist

Hi, I am Teresa and the doctor of the trio. I felt called to lead this meditative practice group and am delighted at how much others have profited already. I am pleased to provide a few thoughts on my own experience.

I became interested in meditation about 7 years ago. I knew "something" was not quite "right" in my life and heard meditation was "good". I knew I should give it a try, but really didn't know why. I joined a meditation group and started my daily meditation practice. I initially started with one minute a day and worked up to my present practice. Personally, I didn't notice anything for 3 months, but being a stubborn person I persisted anyways. After that period of time, I started to notice changes. I felt brighter emotionally and spiritually. Physically, I was more alert and I felt a sharper intuition. Meditating is not a "magic bullet." Progress is usually slow and sometimes undetectable. But I do believe it can be a valuable pathway to our inner selves or "interior castles".

Teresa Elliason

Greetings All, I bring the Minister's perspective and here it is.

The great spiritual mystics through the ages have all known the gifts that come from a regular spiritual practice of meditation. In every spiritual tradition, inner explorers have discovered that the liberated state - that sense of peace and wholeness - is in fact a natural experience, as real as what you are experiencing as you view and read this article. All of us can awaken to clear insight and direction for our lives, including unconditional peace and happiness. Meditation is a spiritual practice in mindfulness. Now, more than ever, people can benefit from meditation practice to counteract the stresses and distractions of modern life. Knowing the benefits of meditation, I was delighted when Teresa organized a weekly opportunity for group meditation each Sunday before worship. We invite you to join us in this age old Christian tradition at 10:00 am each Sunday morning.

Lynn Maki

Hi all, I bring a psychology view and here it is.

Studies show good evidence that meditation is one of the very best ways to reduce stress. Many therapists integrate this practice in their work with clients, as I regularly do. On a recent post from goodtherapy.org I found an article on meditation and mindfulness. Here is an excerpt: "So often, we spend our lives anxiously focused on reliving the past or worried about the future, rather than being truly aware of the beauty of the present moment. Learning to live from a more mindful perspective can be extremely beneficial in decreasing our stress levels, improving our physical and mental health, and helping us to become more appreciative of the simple pleasures in life" (Salazar, 2015). I know as I am working hard to finish my degree, meditation is helping me to stay calm and focused. Joining a meditation or prayer group helps form a regular practice. So I am glad to be a part of the meditation group on Sunday mornings prior to worship. Thanks Teresa for facilitating it! Each of the creative arts can also be a wonderful modality for meditative practice, and a way to focus on what is meaningful, whether it be visual art, photography, poetry, or music.

Laura Foster

Robertson-Wesley United Church

10209-123 Street, Edmonton AB T5N 1N3

Ph: 780-482-1587 Fax: 780-482-1580

Email: mail@rwuc.org Website: www.rwuc.org

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Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.**

Spring Rummage Sale

Saturday, April 29

from 8:30 am to 3 pm



People come from far and wide to look for treasures - books, records, home decor, toys, jewelry, records, fine china and antiques - to name just a few. The funds raised are used for the following year's general revenue to enable Robertson-Wesley to continue to be a vibrant Christian Community. Full details are on our website! www.rwuc.org

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