

# NEWTONBROOK NEWS

## NEWTONBROOK UNITED CHURCH

Serving God in Faith, Hope and Love by Reaching In, Reaching Up and Reaching Out

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## SUMMER JOTTINGS ON SPIRITUALITY

### REV. ALLAN BAKER

**She began our conversation by saying;** “I am a spiritual person, not a religious one.” When she said that, I wondered how she lived her spirituality.

When people tell me that, “I am a spiritual person” I know that is undeniably true. We know that humans are composed of body, mind AND spirit.

Spirituality, however, is a more nebulous term. Many bookstores have a whole section devoted to this topic. I suspect that the woman who I quoted above has a belief system that is related to the individualism of our time. According to Wikipedia, “*Spirituality is the personal, subjective dimension of religion, particularly that which pertains to [liberation](#) or [salvation](#).*”

In her excellent book, “The Practice of Prayer”, Margaret Guenther takes the Christian journey of faith **beyond** simply being a personal belief system. “*Our spirituality is not what we profess to believe, but how we order our lives. Our stewardship of time, energy, material things, and relationships to our fellow creatures reflects the way we express that ordering of our lives.*” This indicates that spirituality is more than belief, it is practice – how we live our lives. It is also a holistic, not just a human-centred (anthropocentric), approach to life in God’s world. The earth, and other creatures matter, too.

For those who follow the Christian path of spirituality, our faith has an active component. Words and actions must be consistent. As any parent will attest, it is important to be consistent in what we say and what we do. The Letter of James in our Christian scriptures is an inspiration to me. It reads;

*“Does merely talking about faith indicate that a person really has it? For instance, you come upon an old friend dressed in rags and half-starved and say, “Good morning, friend! Be clothed in Christ! Be filled with the Holy Spirit!” and walk off without providing so much as a coat or a cup of soup—where does that get you? Isn’t it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense?” (James 2: 15-17)*

It seems to me that Christian spirituality is summed up in what Paul wrote in his letter to the Galatians:

*“But what happens when we live God’s way? God brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard—things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely.”(Galatians 5:22,23)*

In my first months here in ministry with you at Newtonbrook United Church I have witnessed a profound spirituality of conviction and kindheartedness in this Christian community. It is a spirituality that attempts to live the words of Jesus in Matthew 25, or the mission statement of Jesus that is found in Luke 4.

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Yes, we are all spiritual people. Jesus, though, has offered us a way to engage life in a more profound way through living our faith every day.

May God continue to bless us as we travel the road into an unknown future, not knowing exactly where we're going, but also knowing that God's hand is leading us, and God's love surrounds all of God's creation. We are all spiritual beings.

### MISSION & SERVICE REPORT

Back by Popular Request...

#### Getting to Know Fasting and Feasting

Let us...  
fast from worry,  
and feast on trust in God,  
fast from complaining,  
and feast on appreciation,  
fast from negatives,  
and feast on affirmatives.

Let us...  
fast from emphasis on differences, and feast on the unity of life,  
fast from hostility,  
and feast on tenderness,  
fast from anger,  
and feast on empathy.

Let us...  
fast from judging others, and feast on the image of God within them,  
fast from words that pollute,  
and feast on phrases that heal,  
fast from idle gossip,  
and feast on purposeful silence.

Let us...  
fast from self-concern, and feast  
on compassion for others,  
fast from discontent,  
and feast on gratitude,  
fast from bitterness,  
and feast on forgiveness.

Let us...  
fast from facts that depress,  
and feast on examples that inspire,  
fast from discouragement,  
and feast on hope,  
fast from anxiety,  
and feast on prayer.



What's new at Newtonbrook?

A ripple, a current, a wave? In the sea of changes surrounding us, do we simply go with the flow? Do we sink or swim? Or do we trust the Spirit to put wind in our sail and help us navigate the waves?

Over the past six months, Newtonbrook United Church has been "*SURFING with the SPIRIT*" as our congregation discerns the winds of change, assesses the various waves of opportunity, while casting a wary lookout for shoals which could block our course.

#### ***Why did we embark on this journey?***

In effect, this journey started in May 2006 with the establishment of a long-range Renewal Task Force to consider "all options surrounding the future of NUC including congregational revitalization, redevelopment of property and sale of the church building." Active discussions with 3 neighboring congregations disclosed that they too were facing similar issues, including declining membership and energies while meeting in large, 50-year old buildings in need of major repairs. When the prospect of seeking joint solutions was broached, two of the congregations withdrew. In turn, Newtonbrook chose to re-evaluate our own direction for the future.

#### ***Piloting and charting the course.***

At the congregational meeting of November 25 2007, a Vision Planning steering committee was established and funds set aside to engage an outside consultant. Throughout this journey of discovery, we have been guided in the process by Paul MacLean, Executive Director of POTENTIALS, with whose help we have been jointly discerning what God is calling us to do through a process of Vision Planning over the last 6 months.

Four congregational events were conducted:

- (a) One-to-one discussions were held as part of Morning Worship, sharing personal reflections of what NUC means to us.
- (b) Saints of the Round Table. We were engaged in small group discussions,

discussing our images of ministry and the resources and obstacles we face.

- (c) We studied experiences of the early church as recorded in Acts.
- (d) Through a weekend retreat, we celebrated our past, assessed our current situation, and established some visions for the future.

As a result of this process, our congregation has recognized and articulated a clearer sense of identity – who we are, what is important to us, and what we want to become as a people of God. We continue to place high importance on worship, care of members and outreach as core values. At the same time, we have developed a heightened awareness of changes in and around us. Changing times need vision and strategic planning to address the opportunities and issues facing us. During the congregational weekend event, many excellent ideas were generated. Three key recommendations involving intentional directions were:

1. Establish a Property Options task force to evaluate potential uses of 53 Cummer Ave. and consider/assess alternate locations,
2. Develop a comprehensive communications strategy including print, voice and electronic media to reach the congregation and beyond.
3. Assess uses and effective stewardship of our human energies.

4.

#### ***Next steps***

The Vision Planning steering committee will present a report to a congregational meeting scheduled for May 25<sup>th</sup>, after Morning Worship. You are encouraged to attend this important meeting.

Submitted by Ian Miller, Chair on behalf of Rev Allan Baker, Angela Carley (Vice-Chair), Karen Carlson, Irene Carriere, Jim Dillane, Valerie Ferrier (Secretary), Henry MacLeod, Elizabeth Mistele, Brian Nicholson, Evelyn Robertson, Alice Thompson

## FAITH WORKS

Global Issues wishes to thank all who signed letters for KAIROS to use in their ongoing attempt to get the federal government to examine how domestic and international policies support the fossil fuel industry. 50 letters were mailed to Kairos in April.

A Walk-Through Energy Audit Report and a \$3,000.00 grant from *Greening Sacred Spaces of Faith and the Common Good* have resulted in electrical energy savings for Newtonbrook.

Figures taken from an **Energy Audit Impact Assessment** which Rodger Thompson submitted to *Faith and the Common Good* in January, 2008 showed an electrical savings of \$1200 from 2006 to 2007. In addition to water heating changes from electrical to gas, this was accomplished by: replacement of 3 old energy guzzler appliances in the kitchen with Energy Star Rated appliances (1 fridge and 2 freezers), the gradual replacement of incandescent light bulbs with EFLs (Energy Efficient Florescent light bulbs) and a switch to LED Outdoor Christmas Lights.

We can expect more savings in the next budget report as the EFLs and the LED Outdoor Christmas lights were installed mainly in October, 2007 and December, 2007.

Reminder: although our new energy efficient bulbs are in place, we still need to remind ourselves to **turn off the lights** when we leave a room or bathroom.

There was also a fuel saving of about \$6,000.00 for the new energy efficient heating system installed in August, 2006

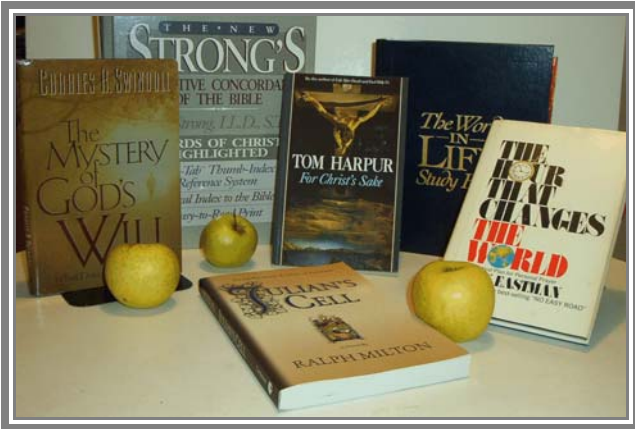
The red box upstairs under the mailboxes is open for congregational use to deposit used/spent EFLs. Because EFL's have some mercury content, Angelo Babaris has offered to pick up worn-out bulbs and deposit them to the correct City Waste Disposal Site. Thank you, Angelo.

The Global Issues Team invites everyone to attend an "Earth Friendly" Congregational Lunch after church on Sunday, June 8, 2008. The challenge is to contribute to the potluck lunch with foods that are vegetarian. Make it locally grown and, of course, organic as much as possible. Let's see how many creative ideas we can get to support our struggling Earth.

The Global Issues Team.

## STATEMENT ON CLIMATE CHANGE

The World Council of Churches, of which we are a part through the United Church of Canada, has published a statement on climate change. Anyone can access this theologically reflective document through their website: [www.oikoumene.org](http://www.oikoumene.org).



## BROWSING

*Telling Her Story* by **Lois Miriam Wilson** is a book for those who want to bring new perspective and approach to biblical stories. The author belongs to the league of strong women in Canadian History, who is the first woman to be elected as the Moderator of the United Church of Canada, 1980-82. She also served as president of World Council of Churches and is on the board of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association. She has received prestigious awards and currently works as Chancellor of Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario. Wilson is the author of "Turning the World Upside Down" and "Like a Mighty River." This book is the outcome of a research theology out of women's struggles under the umbrella of McGeachy Scholarship program.

*Telling Her Story* is the fourth volume in the series following Benjamin Smillie's "Social Ethics: A Biblical Perspective", Alex Sim's "The Plight of the Rural Church", and Mortan Paterson's "Toward a Justice That Heals." The research programs carried out by McGeachy Scholarship continuously help towards the development of the church and community at Large.

*Telling Her Story*, primarily was thought of by the author during her contact with the Russian Grandmothers committed to passing on their Christian faith to their granddaughters. Wilson then put herself in the place of the Russian grandmother and questions her on what would it be like for her to pass on her faith to her grandchildren. Then she argues that would her grandchildren even have faith?

She challenges herself – how can she pass on the faith in a way that reflected her unique perspective on faith and life as a Woman? And how can she take the biblical stories which only highlight male heroes and paint a picture that women and girls could relate to? By raising such questions in backdrop, Wilson confronts the traditional Bible stories and teachings that conflict with women's experience, that women's roles are not highlighted as significant as opposed to the male characters. She gives a few examples: Didn't Prodigal have a mother? What did she feel? Or why is the lost son and lost sheep depicted on the stained glass and not the lost woman searching for lost coin?

By raising such strong stories Wilson dares to make a point that the Bible is written for and by men, its stories filtered through the prism of male experiences, culture, language and interpretation. But she refuses to let this case be the final word; in fact her aim is to uncover the submerged history of women in the biblical records. She also brings forward the prospect that the traditional interpretation is not the only interpretation of the biblical passages. She brings forth anti-patriarchal passages and correctives to sexist's attitudes that are contained within the Bible. In the end her endeavor is to bring a balance in the Bible so that stories, myths and symbols could be related by the future generations.

She supports her arguments by demonstrating her own approach in a lively retelling of the stories of Jesus' anointing by Mary in Bethany and of Miriam's roles in the Israelites crossing of the Red Sea, which she names 'Mary's Surprise' and the 'Waters of Life' respectively.

*Telling Her Story* is a short book and a must read. This book truly portrays how theologians are working so hard to bring new interpretations to the Bible so that all genders, classes and cultures can relate to this complete book. Also Wilson, by carrying out this important research, makes a very important point: Christians all over the world should develop and understand the Bible from their own perspective so that their faith is refreshed every day by what they believe in and not what their ancestors believed in.

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I personally think that innovation, research and interpretations in all religions work as brain teasers for all believers. It is a force that tries not to bring rigidity in our actions but more humbleness and love. That is why the Bible is a complete book and these new interpretations make the text more inclusive and comprehensive. Such inclusiveness links with faith development both at personal and community level.

**Thanks** to authors like Wilson who remind us that Christianity is the religion that emphasizes faith development so that followers can grow their faith with a balanced outlook. Jesus confirms the presence of love and faith development together, otherwise Mary Magdalene would never have become the first priest in biblical history.

A Review By: Eileen Shakir John

### APPRECIATION TO DON VALLEY REFUGEE RESETTLERS FROM THE AZIZ FAMILY

My name is Latifa Aziz, a daughter, a wife, a mother, and a woman. There was a time in my life that my husband and I reached a situation when we lost hope to save our children's lives anymore. We were tired of moving from one place to another and another. My husband and I thought we would lose our lives as I had lost one of my daughters and my brother, but God sent us his angels - the Don Valley Refugee Re-settlers. These 5 angels and their people made a big difference in our life.

They gave us a new and permanent home and everything we needed in our life. Because of these people I have my mother alive with me today. Now I have a home where my family is safe and secure and I see their future brighter day by day. I have no fear now. My children feel free and independent today. My family and I had nothing missing all of this year. These 5 angels gave everything - a home, furniture, clothes, plastic bags full of groceries, and above all the gave us love. We will not forget all the activities and help they have done

for us all this year. My dream came true by the help of God's angels and their people.

I would like to say thank you to these five angels whose names are:

- ◆ Jim Acheson (Northminster)
- ◆ Olive Bayliss (Lansing)
- ◆ Barbara Panturescu (Forest Grove)
- ◆ Michael Stainton (Taiwanese)
- ◆ Elaine Bremer (Oriole-York Mills)

I would like to thank all their people and the Don Valley Refugee Resettlers' donors and all the people who helped us during this year. Thank you to Irene Kagawa (Centennial Japanese) and Jennifer Mountain (Forest Grove) and all the people we don't know their names. You all mean a lot to us. Thank you everyone who donated and supported us through Don Valley Refugee Resettlers. May God spread his wings over the world to help those who really need it.

### UNSUNG HEROES AMONG US

Here at Newtonbrook we are blessed with many people who quietly work away with little recognition. These good souls contribute much to the work and witness of the church. In this and upcoming issues we plan to uphold some of our "unsung heroes".

Norma Manson comes to mind. For many years Norma has prepared Communion elements, ironed the Communion table linen, and tidied up after the services. Norma is retiring from this commitment and for this we sincerely thank her. Norma also regularly plays piano for the Wednesday Drop-Inn and she was instrumental in acquiring the newer piano in the Assembly Hall.

Betty & Bob McQuillan are longtime members at NUC. Betty is our Archivist and a founding member and facilitator of The Reading Group (1967) and the Quilting Group, along with several other voluntary activities. Bob is an expert musician, AV technician and general "fix it guy". Some weeks they seem to be at church almost as much as at home.

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Alice and Rodger Thompson are another committed pair. Each having served on various NUC Boards, at times Chairs; their services have been invaluable. You will often see Alice, the "Ultimate Greeter" on a Sunday morning welcoming new or returning visitors, and seeing that they get connected in some way. Rodger is a less obvious (or observable) but he organizes much of the maintenance around the building.

We plan to uplift more "heroes" in upcoming newsletter editions. If you would like to nominate a hero, please submit your suggestions.

### **MAKE THE CONNECTION: Newtonbrook U.C. > Meals on Wheels**

Over 35 years ago, Meals on Wheels was started from the kitchen of our church and we are still active today with volunteers serving on the Board and committees, in the office and delivering meals. Newtonbrook is responsible for teams of runners and drivers on the first Monday of each month, as well as any fifth Friday or fifth Monday. Special thanks go to long time volunteers Max and Myra Porter, Jack and John Foote and Jean Soper. It is a testimony to great volunteering in that Jack Soper was still very active on the Board and delivering meals until he died and he is very much missed.

At this time we are looking for new volunteers to keep up our commitment to Meals on Wheels. A 2 hour time commitment between 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. once a month is all that is required. Helping seniors to be able to stay at home and to live independently makes this volunteer work very rewarding, and a bonus is working with great people.

Sandra Johnson, N.U.C. Convenor (416-225-4128 to volunteer)

### **Need a Ride? Give a Ride?**

The Care of Members Committee arranges rides for those who would be unable to attend church otherwise. If you would like transportation, we can help.

If you would like to offer to drive once a month or for one month during the year, we would appreciate your help.

Contact Sandra Johnson at 416-225-4128

### **TORONTO PUBLIC LIBRARY ANNOUNCES SUN LIFE FINANCIAL MUSEUM + ARTS PASS**

This is great news!! The Sun Life Museum + Arts Pass provides full admission to families of up to 2 adults and 5 children. Attractions include: Art Gallery of Ontario, Bata Shoe Museum, Black Creek Pioneer Village, City of Toronto Historic Museums, Gardiner Museum, Ontario Science Centre, Royal Ontario Museum and the Textile Museum.

Family museum passes are available for borrowing from the 24 branches of the Toronto Public Library listed below:

Agincourt, Albion, Barbara Frum, Bendale, Bridlewood, Cedarbrae, Centennial, Dawes Road, Flemingdon Park, Humber Summit, Jane/Sheppard, Kennedy/Eglinton, Main, Malvern Branch, Maria A. Shchuka, McGregor Park, Morningside, Mount Dennis, Richview, Steeles, Victoria Village, Weston, Woodview Park, and York Woods

Please contact any of the branches listed above for details. You require a Toronto Public Library card to take part in this Sun Life Financial sponsored program.

**Information sharing on our NUC Website**

We have many lovely photographs of our congregation in action. Our new website is under development and we would like to include some of those photographs (E.g. a group of ladies quilting, children at play) as part of our display to visually show others what we have to offer here at NUC. Names will not be included with the photographs.

Each adult in the household should sign where indicated. One adult should sign for each minor in the household.

Please fill in the information below and drop it off in the collection plate, the office or Carol Crump's mail slot. Alternatively, you may fax it to 416-222-2067, mail it or send the required information by e-mail to [newtonbrookunitedchurch@bellnet.ca](mailto:newtonbrookunitedchurch@bellnet.ca)

- The names of the adults in our household are (please print):

\_\_\_\_\_

- The names of the minor children are (please print):

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

We hereby give permission for photographs of any members of our family to be used on the Newtonbrook United Church website. We understand that names will not be attached to the photographs.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Adult signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Adult signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\*\*\*\*\*

## Youth Trip to British Columbia

Stanley Park, Vancouver's Downtown East Side, the Museum of Anthropology at UBC and Gastown were just a few of the places a group of youth from three Toronto churches recently visited.

Nine youth from Common Ground, including six from Newtonbrook, went to BC for fun, faith and fellowship and returned to Toronto with many stories to tell. The tourist highlights included climbing Shannon Falls (and getting a flat tire in the parking lot!), going to La Casa Gelato (which serves 218 flavours of ice cream), hearing about the repatriation of artifacts to first nations people and visiting Granville Island.

The main focus of the trip, however, was to join with youth from Westminster Presbytery for a retreat at Chehalis Lodge in the Fraser Valley. We learned about challenging empire, both in Jesus' time and today, as we sang, played and worshiped together. There was also time for lots of fun, including climbing the rock wall, the rope course, hiking and cooperative games. Many new (and hopefully lasting) friendships were formed over the course of the weekend.

Thank you to everyone who supported the trip. We will be sharing some of our photos and memories one Sunday in the near future.



