

Centre 507

"Almost like family"

By Rob Bull

Dan Lalonde would like to thank the people of McLeod-Stewarton United Church in Ottawa for all the toothpaste.

Mr. Lalonde is acting manager of Centre 507, an outreach project of the McLeod-Stewarton congregation, Ottawa Presbytery and M&O Conference. The Centre is a drop-in service for people in Ottawa who face issues linked to poverty such as loneliness, unemployment, homelessness or unstable housing as well as those related to psychiatric illness, substance abuse and other health problems.

"A lot of people run short of cash by the middle of the month," Mr. Lalonde explained. "One of the first things to stop spending money



A scene in the daily life of Ottawa's Centre 507, a place to socialize and find solace

on is hygiene supplies. People at McLeod-Stewarton come up with really practical donations like toothpaste and other personal products. Clothing too. It's really, really appreciated."

For 23 years, Centre 507 has operated in a big room upstairs in the church located at 507 Bank Street - hence the name. It is open to anyone who seeks a safe, friendly and supportive environment, Monday to Friday: between 12 noon and 3:30pm, on Monday, Wednesday & Thursday evenings from 5:30 to 9:00pm and on

Sunday afternoons after church from 1:00 to 4:00pm. Every day it welcomes between 80 and 165 people.

"Word of mouth is the greatest source of participants," said volunteer co-ordinator Steve Chenier. Other people are referred to the Centre by other community resources.

In addition, with funding from Ontario's Provincial Homelessness Initiatives program, the Centre sends two experienced workers out into the streets of Ottawa.

Their role is to actively search for obviously disadvantaged persons, people living in absolute poverty or who cannot access the Centre because of illness or other factors. "The Street Outreach Program enriches the scope and level of assistance offered to the people of our community," Mr. Lalonde said.

As well, outreach workers from the Canadian Mental Health Association, the Royal Ottawa (psychiatric) Hospital, the Centretown Community Health Centre and Housing Help visit the drop-in to connect with people in a place where they already feel safe and supported. Centre 507 works with some of these agencies to provide on-site flu shot, tuberculosis testing and foot care clinics.

One of its partners is the City of Ottawa's SITE Program. To reduce the spread of HIV, the program exchanges new needles for used needles and distributes free condoms at the Centre. The program also provides testing for HIV and hepatitis B and C at nearby health facilities.

SITE and the Centre do not encourage drug use. The program reaches out to people who lead difficult lives. By treating drug use as a health issue, public health nurses and other health professionals are able to safely dispose of contaminated needles. They can provide immediate health services and connect people to the help they need. This approach, called "harm reduction," significantly reduces the spread of disease.

Workers on staff offer active listening and counselling, crisis intervention, advocacy support and information on and referrals to government programs and community resources. The Centre also has its own chaplain who comes two times a week.

"We're very open here," Dan said. "There's no single religious train of thought. The United Church isn't forceful or pushy. But some of our people want spiritual guidance. Our chaplain helps the people who come to him with any faith-based question or struggle. People connect with him."

At Centre 507, people have an opportunity to get information and make informed choices. The Centre also raises community awareness and promotes education about the issues that participants face;

And there's more.

As we've seen, the Centre is a place for people to pick up toiletries and clothes. It offers hot food, snacks and coffee. You can get a haircut, have something sewed or use the telephone or fax machine.

"We also have three computer terminals hooked up to the internet thanks to a donation by Rogers," the local internet provider, Mr. Lalonde said. "They are well-used. People check their e-mail, type resumes and look for jobs. It's really useful." People have a chance to socialize at the Centre too, he said. Loneliness is often a significant side-effect of poverty. When a person doesn't have much money, it's hard to budget for entertainment.

So there are card games, film showings, picnics, outings and other special events. A "couple of dozen" volunteers help with these sort of projects, Mr. Lalonde added.

"Basically the staff does anything you have to go to school to be trained to do," he said. "Volunteers do a lot of the other work that gets done. There's a guy who organizes cribbage nights. Some people come in the evenings and do baking. A lot of people in the congregation cook and serve at our special Thanksgiving and Christmas meals. They give us a lot of donations." The relationship with the church is symbiotic, he said. The Centre pays rent to McLeod-Stewarton. It is largely funded by the United Church at various levels "and our people feel very comfortable here," Mr. Lalonde said.

Recently, Daniel Hayword, the student supply minister at McLeod-Stewarton who frequently stops by, led the Centre's memorial service in the church's chapel for Willie Miner who had been coming there for at least 15 years "Willie had his share of issues but he was always helping out," Mr. Lalonde said. "A lot of people here knew him and liked him and miss him. We were like his second family."

Centre 507 is that kind of place for a lot of people.

Information for this article was obtained by Rob Bull and Jim Finlayson from Centre507's website, and from interviews with acting manager Dan Lalonde, former manager Tracy Davidson and volunteer co-ordinator Steve Chenier.

Looking Outward,

a message from the president

By Rick Sheffer

An overriding duty of Conference is "to have oversight of the religious life of the United Church within its jurisdiction and to adopt such measures as may be judged necessary for its promotion." Conference, thus, has a duty and a responsibility to take a wider look at the life and directions of the Church within its bounds and to initiate actions, as appropriate.

Ours is a Conference of much diversity; a full range of rural, urban, and suburban settings, many languages, many cultures, many races, and, yes, our challenges around ministry in French. The significance of this latter in many ways differentiates M&O Conference from other regions in Canada.

Do we wish a ministry and presence for our Church in the next generation in, particularly, the Province of Quebec beyond a relatively few areas of concentration of English-speaking populations?

If we do, this means an outward looking ministry engaged with the communities around us which, in Quebec, are predominantly French-speaking. For many congregations this is a major shift and a major chal-

lenge.

Many resist opening up to the wider French-speaking community for fear that they risk losing their English-speaking Church which they see as one of the last places where their language and heritage lives.

Yet, it is clear that without opening our ministry to the wider community the presence and ministry of our United Church will wither away in many parts of Quebec.

We need to take an honest look at our present policies, practices, and structures towards ministry in French with a view to charting our way forward.

Polls regularly confirm that some 80% of Canadians are searching for spiritual connection and fulfillment.

This searching is, however, generally separate in peoples' minds from "organized religion/church".

We are challenged to reclaim, celebrate, and share widely our spiritual gifts as a Church in Quebec and elsewhere.

With this in mind, M&O Conference in collaboration with UMIF is initiating a dialogue and conversation around the future directions for French ministry engaging the different interests and views. We strongly encourage your participation in an honest appraisal of where we are now and your contributions to a constructive approach for the way forward.

As one immediate tangible step, Conference Executive have agreed to hold back some \$30,000 in Mission Support funding for 2006 for the purpose of seeding new and innovative projects in French ministry in or among congregations and mission units.

So, get your proposals into Conference Mission Support Committee by the deadline this Spring!

The focus for the Annual General Meeting of Conference May 26 -28 will be on sharing, reclaiming and rediscovering our many spiritual gifts with the theme "Gifts of the Spirit/les dons de l'esprit".

Rev. Sharon Moon will be Theme Speaker and we are blessed to be ordaining eight persons that weekend. Mark these dates on your calendars.

Information is available on our website www.montrealandottawaconference.ca or www.synodemontrealottawa.ca . or by calling our Montreal ((514)634-7015) or Ottawa ((613) 224-5318) offices.

You can reach me by email at president@montrealandottawaconference.ca.

I'd like to hear your thoughts.

Thank you.

*Frederick W. (Rick) Sheffer,
President, Montreal and Ottawa
Conference*

Wasn't that a party! Celebrating the United Church's 80th birthday

From coast to coast, United Church members organized some pretty fine festivities last year to mark their church's 80th anniversary.

In Montreal and Ottawa Conference there were celebrations large and small as people took time to remember their roots and reflect on their journey so far. Consider the following.

In **Ottawa Presbytery**, about 1,000 worshippers turned up at Dominion-Chalmers United for an intergenerational event.

Children designed the bulletin. There was a children's choir and an adult choir from three congregations and Rev. Robert Oliphant of Eglinton-St. Georges in Toronto was the guest preacher.

In **Seaway Valley Presbytery**, after the Thanksgiving service, the people of Cassburn United Church near Hawksbury, Ont., planted trees to commemorate two important anniversaries - the 80th anniversary of the United Church of Canada and the 165th anniversary of the congregation.

At Knox-St. Paul's United Church in Cornwall, Ont., the congregation was served a roast beef dinner in the church hall that was specially decorated with mementoes of Canada 80 years ago. In a particularly gracious gesture, the meal was catered by the ladies of the Presbyterian Church. And on Sunday there was a joyful worship service.

*One of the most innovative celebrations anywhere happened on **Montreal Presbytery's** West Island where the congregations of 12 area churches gathered for a Festival of Faith on the theme "Dare to be United!"*

We have two reports; one printed with permission from a community newspaper – the West Island Chronicle – and the other from the Roxboro UC Revelations. The Chronicle story lets us know how others see us. The Revelations reported what it was like to be taking part.

“Daring to be United” Church marks anniversary

By Liane Cerminara
The Chronicle

Sharon Moon was a sculptor for nine years, but after a personal crisis of faith she realized, “I wasn't supposed to be sculpting clay, I'm supposed to be sculpting a community.” She was ordained a United Church minister 20 years ago and has been devoted to developing a congregation synonymous with the United Church of Canada's dedication to inclusiveness ever since.

At Cedar Park United Church in Pointe-Claire and Union United Church in Ste. Anne de Bellevue, this inclusive role can mean welcoming children to preaching and liturgical roles and inviting all to celebrate communion.

The invitation is open regardless of sexual orientation, religious, ethnic or linguistic background and inclusive language is used in the church's liturgies and hymnbook. More controversially, inclusiveness can translate into performing same-sex marriages and ordaining gay and lesbian ministers.

Rev. Vicki Cowan of Union United Church has performed four same-sex marriages in the past year and recognizes the peace of mind this service provides to gay and lesbian couples who often feel marginalized elsewhere in mainstream society. Union United became the first affirming congregation in the province of Quebec in 2002, a designation that indicates gays, lesbians, bisexual and transgendered people are full members of the congregation and are entitled to take part in all sacraments.

Cowan admits the decision to become an affirming congregation may not have been initially comfortable for all parishioners, but “change is normal and we all hate change, so how do we adapt? By talking it through. We talk about what's happening to keep it relevant.” Finding relevance and acceptance is achieved at Union United through mutual support and understanding. Many of the parishioners actively participate in church life because “people are here because they want to be here...there's a sense of community and relatedness,” Cowan says. But the United Church also recognizes its shortcomings. In 1986, it was the first church in Canada to apologize for the role they played

in destroying the cultures and languages of Canada's native peoples through their involvement with residential schools. They continue to work with government to get proper restitution for natives.

Currently the United Church is the second largest Christian church in Canada and the largest Protestant denomination. Founded through the amalgamation of Methodist, Congregationalist and most Presbyterian congregations, as well as the Council of Union Churches, the United Church of Canada now ministers to more than three million people in 3,640 congregations country-wide.

Over the years the church has reached many landmarks, such as ordaining the first female minister in 1936 and raising \$2.3 million over two years to donate towards research and awareness efforts for the HIV/AIDS pandemic. That's why the West Island's 12 United Churches are commemorating the United Church of Canada's 80th anniversary with a Festival of Faith under the title Daring to be United.

Cowan said the festival serves as a reminder that the United Church doesn't "need to apologize for who we are, we've been on the cutting edge," while celebrating the church's achievements and introducing the faith to newcomers. The celebrations help show people what the church can offer those who aren't actively involved in a religion and may be looking for something new.

And Moon added, "At a time when many seem uninvolved with church, we are approaching this celebration as way of reminding ourselves and our neighbours about how vibrant and relevant church can be."

The Festival of Faith Daring to be United

By Bev Baker

As printed in the Roxboro Revelations, the newsletter of Roxboro United Church

When I woke up on the morning of October 2nd, it was an absolutely gorgeous day and I just knew everything would be great. Helen Shepherdson, Dot Bond, Pete Leggatt and I had been working feverishly on our displays and we were ready to show them off. The Pierrefonds Cultural Centre is a wonderful old building and when we got there it was starting to fill up with various exhibits from many associations and sister churches (including Hudson). A separate place, beside the displays, had been set aside for musical performances throughout the day. T-shirts that bore the logo of the weekend activities '*Daring to be United*' were quickly bought and immediately put on. There was a children's activity centre on the bottom floor and the kids could have their picture taken with Jesus. Outside a wonderful labyrinth had been set up under the trees just waiting for someone to walk its path and find some inner peace. And many people walked the halls Saturday, visiting the displays, meeting old friends from other churches, getting a bite to eat, and then sitting to listen to the many musical presentations. The RUC Gospel choir was one of the musical groups.

And I must say it was fun to be singing in front of an outside audience again. It was a great day and everyone I talked to seemed to be having a wonderful time.

On Sunday, there was a worship service at the Pierrefonds Comprehensive High School with all 12 West Island United churches (and Hudson) taking part. All those Churches were closed that Sunday. Our own Christine (Rev. Dr. Christine Johnson, pastor of Roxboro United Church) was instrumental in putting the service together and she did a wonderful job. All the choirs of these churches joined to form a massed chorus and I am told we sounded amazing (It was hard for me to tell as I was one of the singers!) Before the service began there was a Power Point presentation which gave the audience an insight into the various activities of the 12 churches. Worship started with much splendour as the massed choir was escorted in by standard-bearers. The service was in the form of a play scripted from Bible passages but acted using modern examples of life activities. A member from each congregation was selected to give a presentation using a single word that best described their church. Communion was served to all who wanted to participate and hymns were sung with gusto. It was a wonderful feeling to look out from the choir and see all those people worshiping and feeling God's spirit together. It is awesome to see what is possible when everyone joins together and works towards a common goal. It was a weekend to rejoice not only in our oneness with God, but as well, in our many diversities.

Remembering Ken McClymont

By Jim Finlayson,
editor emeritus

In November 2005, Ken McClymont of Ottawa passed away and The Clarion/Le Clairon lost a great supporter.

Ever since I joined The Clarion/Le Clairon some 20 years ago, Ken was always there as a member of the Editorial Board, contributor, article finder, raconteur and counselor. He lived his faith and The Clarion/Le Clairon was part of his life.

No matter what the weather or circumstances, Ken would turn up for editorial meetings at the Lachine office of M & O Conference ready to help.

If we were feeling down about a lack of articles, Ken would say "Well, what about ... "and he would not only mention one of the many United Church or other activities in which he actively participated, but would volunteer to contact someone who could provide an article.

If an item needed editing, Ken could always come up with a way of making it more readable and interesting. And if we had too many articles, Ken was there with wise counsel as to what to select or how we could trim to get all the articles in and not miss the essential stories they told.

Sometimes editorial meetings would be too serious and business-like. When that happened, Ken had what seemed like a never-ending fund of stories to break the tension so that we could resume the job with new energy and vision.

We will miss Ken at The Clarion/Le Clairon. But we know that he is still with us in spirit and we trust that the qualities that he brought to the Editorial Board will remain with us. Rest in peace, Ken. We will remember you with affection and gratitude.

Nouveau partenariat pour la Mission communautaire de Montréal et Saint James United Church avec l'unité des Ministères en français

Par Paula Kline

Directrice de la Mission communautaire de Montréal

Avec une expérience considérable acquise dans son pays d'origine, Haïti, et à Paris, en France, Junie Hyacinthe exerce la profession de médecin.

En 2002, elle a commencé à desservir une paroisse locale de l'Église méthodiste à Port-au-Prince et, dès lors, son ministère de guérison a pris une direction nouvelle et différente.

Elle a fait ses études théologiques et a poursuivi sa formation pour le leadership à Hawaï, au Nicaragua, en Jamaïque et à Amsterdam.

Enfin, Junie est arrivé à Montréal où elle fera un stage à l'Église unie St. James et à la Mission communautaire de Montréal (*Montréal City Mission*).

L'automne dernier, dans le cadre du Programme de stage des partenaires mondiaux de l'É.U.C., Pierre Goldberger de l'unité des Ministères en français a contacté le pasteur Arlen Bonnar de la paroisse St. James et Paula Kline de la Mission communautaire de Montréal.

Il voulait examiner la possibilité d'un stage conjoint pour Junie dans le contexte de ces deux ministères de l'Église Unie.

Cette formule semblait être le lieu idéal pour lui permettre d'explorer à la fois la spiritualité et le travail de justice sociale de l'Église Unie du Canada dans un contexte de diversité culturelle.

Il y a un an, la Mission communautaire de Montréal s'est installée dans l'édifice historique de la paroisse *St. James United Church* au centre-ville.

St. James entre dans une période de renouvellement. Sa communauté est en train de grandir et l'église s'ouvre littéralement de plus en plus sur la ville.

C'est ainsi qu'un formidable partenariat basé sur de nouveaux modèles de collaboration entre mission et paroisse a débuté.

À titre d'exemples, notons deux des multiples projets conjoints entre St. James et MCM qui sont en train de se développer : une cuisine collective associant des femmes immigrantes et des paroissiens âgés de St. James, de même qu'une chorale d'enfants d'origines ethniques diverses et d'arrière-plans religieux différents impliquant des enfants de la paroisse.

À ce contexte, Junie apporte la contribution de ses multiples talents : ses aptitudes de longue date dans le domaine professionnel de la santé, son engagement pour les droits des femmes, son expérience de diversité culturelle et sa foi chrétienne indéniable. Nous sommes content d'avoir Junie parmi nous.

The United Church of Canada Foundation *“Planting now for the future of the church”*

Roger Snelling of Beaconsfield United Church on Montreal's West Island looked back on his first year as chairman of the United Church of Canada Foundation and said “We're almost ready to go.”

“The last two years were spent setting up the mechanisms,” Mr. Snelling explained. “A very successful Founders Campaign raised the money needed for the Foundation's operations.”

The Founders Campaign exceeded its goal by nearly 70%, he said. “And, even before we had begun a formal campaign, early contributors gave \$155,371 to the everlasting support of the United Church through the Foundation's endowment funds. Now we're working on a pilot project in southwestern Ontario looking for donations of about \$100,000 over a five-year period,” he said. “The idea is to build up the capital.”

The Foundation describes itself as providing “a harvest for the future of the United Church. It is a pathway for faithful stewards who choose to devote some of their resources to the next generations of the church.” It is an arm's-length, federally incorporated, registered charity. It raises endowment funds that will support The United Church, its congregations, theological colleges, camps and seniors' homes, and its partners in God's mission.

Endowment funds are like a savings account where the principal is invested forever. The income goes to United Church projects and those of its partners. Contributing to the Foundation is a way to support personal stewardship concerns throughout your life, and even beyond it. The Foundation's literature says that “since the United Church creed leads us to say, ‘We believe in God, who works in us and others,’ we can also help extend your stewardship to registered charities beyond the United Church that support God's mission of healing, social justice, community building and education.”

“Now we have an option for people and congregations with from \$100,000 to \$500,000 to invest,” Mr. Snelling said. “You can invest your money through us and get a favorable management rate of one per cent as opposed to the standard commercial rate of two per cent or more.”

It can also help congregations, Presbyteries, Conferences and other United Church institutions manage their own endowment resources efficiently. and assist individuals to develop a strategic, long-term approach to charity. It values stewardship, generosity and accountability and promises to invest in socially responsible ways.

For more information, call the Foundation at its toll-free number: 1-866-340-UCCF (8223).

Darfur Dinner raises \$1700.

Cowansville, QC -- Helen Downie, a member of Cowansville Area Pastoral Charge, and some friends from Champlain College hosted a spaghetti supper at Emmanuel United Church in Cowansville in January and raised more than \$1700 for Amnesty International's relief efforts in the Darfur province of Sudan.

More than 140 people came to the event, which was organized by the young people, with the support of volunteers from the church and the community. Helen Downie, Brooke Verville, Julien Morrency-Laflamme and Melissa Embriano spoke passionately about the situation in the Sudan and encouraged participants to make a difference by writing letters, speaking about the situation to others and by donating money to relief work.

The students of Heroes' Memorial Elementary School in Cowansville made flags to decorate the church hall and distributed bracelets of braided wool and beads that they had made as they worked on the Darfur project in class.

The pastoral charge sees itself as a church family which is in partnership with the community at large.

It was pleased to support this work which brought together church members, elementary school classes, peace workers and young people who are committed to make a difference in the world, and in Darfur.

Last month was Black History month. The Clarion took the opportunity to celebrate one major contribution of the Black community to the spiritual life of our church. We asked Mr. Kim Sherwood, founder and director of the award-winning Peoples Gospel Choir of Montreal (which has performed twice for the Governor General) to tell us what Gospel music means to him.

The Gospel Legacy

By Kim Sherwood

As long as I can remember, ever since I was a little boy, I've always been in church and music has always played an important role in my life. I am a lover of all types of music, but Gospel has touched my heart.

Let me tell you a little story. When I was about 17 years old, I found a vinyl record just lying in the street. It was in perfect condition. The artist was James Cleveland. I rushed home to play it and was overwhelmed.

I had never heard anyone sing with a voice so powerful and with such emotion. As I played the record over and over, I slowly began to understand the meaning and became attached as well to the word of God.

Up to this point, I had never known that God could be worshipped with such passion. But gospel music has deep and strong Christian roots.

More than 300 years ago, this music in its original form – the so-called Negro spiritual— was sung by the slaves to uplift them during hard times.

Their music gave them strength, hope and joy. It was full of vitality and spoke about freedom, about the promised land and their longing for a better life. As I traveled and performed Gospel music myself, the songs touched my heart with the same pain and joy that touched those slaves 300 years ago. I began to understand the importance and significance of this music and its relation to God. And I realize that many people, from all walks of life, turn to Gospel music as an outlet to heal, to calm themselves, to build their hopes and dreams and place them in the hands of our great God.

This music now stands today as a very strong and wonderful spiritual channel of energy that embraces every single believer. Gospel music has found its way to the mainstream. It is satisfying to see so many people with their different religious backgrounds accepting this music in their respective churches, knowing that it was once forbidden in formal religious gatherings. And you can hear it on the radio, see it on television and experience it on the internet. It is all around us.

I respect and enjoy all types of music and I believe that as Christians we should be open to all the different styles of music that we hear in worship. How else can we move forward in our journey with God? But I am a living witness to how powerful God's message is in gospel music and how it can heal and comfort your mind, body and soul.

Check out the website of The Peoples Gospel Choir at www3.sympatico.ca/katba/gospel/biography/htm

More poets wanted!

We need new texts for this year's Conference Annual General Meeting. And again, Don Patriquin will set submitted texts to music!

This year's theme AGM is "Gifts of the Spirit - Dons de l'esprit." We want to celebrate the diversity and abundance of the gifts the Spirit pours out. As we recognize and use these gifts, we nourish and sustain Christ's ministry through the church. As we come alive in using our spiritual gifts, they multiply in the life of the world.

Hymn texts should be short rather than long, three to five verses. For more information, Contact Donald at (450) 297-2779 or email him at donaldpatriquin@hotmail.com or except in March. Texts should be sent directly to Donald preferably by email to the same address by Tuesday, April 4, 2006, or to Donald Patriquin, P.O. Box 72, Eastman QC, J0E

The Clarion/Le Clairon - a magazine that tells our story and shares our faith, so as to further God's purpose in the Montreal and Ottawa Conference. Next Deadline: March 10th, 2006 for the May 2006 Observer.

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