

Cuts to justice ministries "unacceptable!"

*Editor's note: This summer, several people involved in the Church's social justice ministry told The Clarion of their dismay about recent cuts in social justice ministries at Church House in Toronto. While the reason for the cuts was explained on the Church's national website, by press time there had been no public discussion within the Church of the decision's negative impact. In the interests of balance and dialogue, I decided that The Clarion should help make Reverend Jay's views known within the Church. Many agree with his cry from the heart. **Rob Bull***

By Rev. Bill Jay

Montreal -- A small group of people - the General Council Executive of the United Church of Canada -- met in Toronto at Church House at the end of June and agreed on behalf of all of us to drastically reduce spending by the national Church on social justice issues. Social justice has been downgraded from a top priority of the Church to a mere concern and we have been told that resistance to this decision is futile. This is unacceptable!

With little or no consultation of anyone in the Church with experience in social justice issues, they agreed to eliminate five national Church program coordinators working on issues such as race relations, human rights and economic and ecological justice, to reduce overall national church funding for Mission Support (including perhaps funding for such church agencies as St. Columba House and the Montreal City Mission here in M&O Conference) by nearly \$2 million within two years, to eliminate staff positions supporting rural and urban ministries, to cancel the award-winning Spirit Connection television program and to close the Berkely Studios. This will cause serious damage to the prophetic ministry of the national Church.

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The Pentecost window at St. James United Church in Montreal. The upper part is 19th century while the lower is 21st century. Unveiled last September, the window was designed by Ali Atogul, a Moslem artist working from a studio in Old Montreal. His design is based on the Jewish sacred text about Moses and the burning bush. It is one of the many things visitors learn when they visit a major Montreal tourist attraction.

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Not one of the six-figure salaries at Church House was touched in any way but 11 administrative support staff earning much less lost their jobs. And while two key national Church communications agencies were chopped, money was found for a new staff position in communications at Church House.

Some information relating to this bizarre decision has been posted on the national Church website. But it doesn't begin to explain why these decisions were made in our name. And my own repeated attempts and those of hundreds of others across the country to question the decision have been brushed off or ignored.

We know there are great demands on the Church as our society and the world around us change. And we know that plans are underway for a campaign to raise \$200 million for the national church.

But in a statement on the Church website, Nora Sanders, General Secretary of the General Council, said, "The total money raised in congregations for all purposes has been increasing by about two per cent per year; the amount raised annually for the work of the denomination through the Mission and Service Fund has remained virtually constant at \$30 million for over 20 years.

"Because about \$18 million of this work is subject to cost-of-living adjustments, the real capacity to do the work of the general council has been decreasing by about \$500,000 each year."

"Although the United Church of Canada Reserve has been used during the last five years to partially offset these inflationary pressures," Sanders said, "the Finance Committee has recommended limiting the use of this strategy, since it is not sustainable in the long term."

She does not mention the plan to raise \$200 million.

Sometimes there is a difference between common corporate-model business practices and Christian ethics.

But she does say that staffing for programs such as the controversial Emerging Spirit program is funded from other sources and will not be affected.

Neither will funding for the church's response to residential schools, the Healing Fund, and Pension and Group Insurance plans.

It just doesn't make sense. In fact it is totally unacceptable. Sometimes there is a difference between common corporate-model business practices and Christian ethics.

I would like to offer some evidence from my personal experiences on the "front lines."

Centre 507 Drop-In Centre at McLeod-Stewarton United Church in Ottawa was initiated by, housed, and supported 'hands-on' by the McLeod-Stewarton congregation. Mission and Service dollars currently support approximately 10% of the Centre's budget. This invaluable street-related ministry touches the lives of hundreds of people six days a week throughout the year, meeting their basic survival needs as well as playing significant advocacy roles on their behalf.

While serving as minister of McLeod-Stewarton for nine years, I had many conversations with public officials who applauded the United Church's readiness to "walk the talk". To progressively reduce mission support dollars to such ministries is unacceptable.

To abandon partnership funding and cut national Church staff and volunteer official participation in coalitions and networks, both ecumenical and in civil society, is also unacceptable.

The Canadian Health Coalition is the most acknowledged research/information/advocacy health care network in this country. It provides incredible leadership and resources in the ongoing struggle to preserve and enhance this country's most-treasured social program, Medicare.

The United Church has main-

tained a seat on the Coalition board since its founding and I have represented our Church there for more than 12 years.

Our Church commitment has been my volunteer time and travel expenses to attend board meetings in Ottawa and an annual sustaining contribution of \$1,000 towards the Coalition's \$186,000 budget. It makes no sense to cut this amount.

Jim Marshall is a national staff person whose mandate includes health-care and whose position was eliminated in June. Jim developed United Church health-care workshop resources used in every Conference. He and I conferred some years ago about how the United Church might best engage the wider church in this issue that deeply touches every one of us. This led to the Ecumenical Health-Care Network which is directly linked to the Justice and Peace Commission of the Canadian Council of Churches. Jim, who is currently the Network's co-chair, played a key role in recruiting other national churches. The Network has produced many resources for congregational use across the country.

This kind of coalition-building is effective. Just look at the Final Report of the Romanow Commission's Report on the Future of Medicare in Canada, entitled "Building on Values". The centrepiece of the Network's brief to the Commission was the concept of a "health-care covenant" with

which to frame the shaping of future health-care policy in Canada.

Medicare is how we pursue "the common good" by sharing in the care of one another through a universal, progressively tax-funded public health-care system. This, of course, is clearly rooted in the Gospel call found in the story of the Good Samaritan!

Everybody brings something to the pot-luck supper of life when we meet to change the world.

Mr. Romanow adopted the concept as a key factor in his report and publicly and frequently credited the Network for the idea.

It is unacceptable to cut funding for this kind of work. In fact, we must spend more!

Other churches have significant national offices in Ottawa. We need our own lobbying and research office there to work for social justice in the nation's capital.

A "bottom line" in all of this is that all these cuts will have a dramatic impact on United Church life and witness. For decades this witness has been a major selling point for ministers in pastoral charges like myself, in promoting donations to the Church.

I can foresee a number of people simply redirecting their givings to their favourite local charities which carry out "hands-on", "walk-the-talk" work, or to national coalitions which partner the broader community in systemically challenging and addressing the major issues which face our society.

These terribly wrong decisions must be reversed and any plans to build on them must be stopped immediately. There must be serious, open and transparent consultations with a broadly representative group of people involved in social justice in the Church. Then we can proceed with practical steps such as budget planning and fund-raising. And in future, the General Council Executive must speak openly to the wider church before implementing decisions that significantly alter the historic identity of the United Church and damage to our ability to advocate, teach and promote a broad understanding of justice in the world and within our congregations.

Christ showed us that the Spirit speaks surprisingly from the margins. And out here on the margins, we all know that everybody brings something to the pot-luck supper of life when we meet to change the world. That's what gives everybody their credibility. What will the national Church bring to the table if these positions and this funding are eliminated?

The President's Message

By Anna Barr, President of Montreal and Ottawa Conference

Spencerville-Roebuck UC, Ont. -- Learning that I would have a chance to pass on a few words to you through The Clarion, I've been both eager and apprehensive. As I reflect on my church involvement to date, that pretty much describes my frame of mind at each step . . . "eager and apprehensive".

In addressing the court at my installation service May 27th, I quoted from a prayer by Joyce Rupp . . . "Faithful Guide, you sit at the gate of my life, inviting me to eagerly enter the newness stretching before me. . . . Embrace me with your serenity and tender mercy. I give you my love as I walk into this new beginning."

I know very well my limitations. I'm no theologian, no scholar, no writer, no orator. I can't imagine what I could say that would be of interest.

However, I have been guided into this new role in the church and, as I "step into this newness stretching before me", I feel just like a child standing on tiptoe eagerly anticipating what's coming next, and do want to express that.

Not so long ago, I sat on the sidelines – watching, observing, taking it all in and feeling quite comfortable with that level of involvement. Circumstances changed and I felt pulled into church life.

From the caring, supportive people I've known forever in my own congregation, to those people who have come into my life through the wider church – enlightening me, challenging me, encouraging me – doors have opened that I would never have been able to sense before, let alone walk through.

This has been a remarkable journey. As I come across each new challenge, I, of course, hesitate. Close friends and colleagues give me the required nudge and, eventually, I step out in faith. Each new step brings me lessons and growth; frustration and tears; and a sense of accomplishment.

I frequently refer back to a verse from a hymn . . . "Will you love the 'you' you hide if I but call your name? Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same? Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around, through My sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?"

As a lay person, I bring a contemplative, quiet faith; a naivete; a passion for church work. I'm not afraid to take a stand and can become quite determined if I set my mind to something. My eagerness is often hidden but my apprehension usually isn't.

I stand on tip-toe as I look ahead to the next two years in our Conference. I trust that we will be guided in our deliberations and our actions and that we will be what we are called to be.

"Bring to our troubled minds, uncertain and afraid, the quiet of a steadfast faith, calm of a call obeyed."

Blessings,

"Esprit de liberté", un souffle nouveau pour l'Église Unie !

Bien que présente au Québec depuis sa création en 1925, l'Église Unie reste largement méconnue par la population francophone ou alors, elle est considérée comme une Église uniquement anglophone. Cela, malgré l'existence dans notre Synode d'un consistoire francophone (le Consistoire Laurentien).

Mais les temps changent, et depuis quelques mois, plusieurs démarches et initiatives ont vu le jour visant à modifier cet état de fait et permettre un développement des ministères en français sur tout le territoire du Synode M&O.

Cet automne plusieurs événements importants auront lieu : tout d'abord, le lancement de la campagne "Esprit de liberté" (Emerging Spirit) en français.

Cette campagne vise à rejoindre les personnes qui ont pris une distance vis-à-vis des Églises (en particulier les 30-45 ans) par une série d'annonces qui paraîtront dans plusieurs magazines francophones.

Ces annonces vont les inviter à aller visiter le site internet "Café-échange" (sur le modèle du WonderCafé) pour discuter et donner le goût de découvrir l'Église Unie et ce qu'elle propose.

Mais pour que cette campagne puisse avoir un réel impact parmi la population francophone, il est indispensable que les paroisses et lieux de ministères de l'Église Unie dans l'ensemble du territoire du Synode se préparent à accueillir ces nouvelles personnes.

Ce n'est pas le Consistoire Laurentien et ses sept paroisses tout seul qui est concerné, mais les cinq consistoires ! L'enjeu primordial de cette campagne, c'est donc l'accueil. Et c'est pourquoi, une rencontre de formation à l'art de l'accueil aura lieu les 28 et 29 septembre à Beaconsfield et qui sera donnée en français et en anglais.

Les temps n'ont sans doute jamais été aussi favorables.

Nous sommes tous probablement persuadé d'être des personnes ou des communautés très accueillantes, mais est-ce réellement le cas ? Les ateliers prévus pour cette rencontre devraient aider à développer et améliorer la qualité de notre accueil.

Il reste que le défi va se trouver particulièrement du côté des paroisses anglophones prêtes à accueillir de nouveaux paroissiens et paroissiennes francophones. Ce n'est pas si simple et la bonne volonté seule ne suffira pas.

Le Consistoire Laurentien pourra certainement apporter son appui et son expertise dans cette démarche. Il a longtemps porté seul la responsabilité du ministère en français dans l'Église Unie, sans avoir toujours eu, malheureusement, les moyens de pouvoir développer pleinement sa mission.

Il sera nécessaire de travailler ensemble et de développer les occasions de collaboration entre les consistoires et lieux de ministères avec le soutien de l'UMiF (Unité pour les Ministères en Français) et du Synode.

La rencontre qui aura lieu à Granby plus tard dans l'automne devrait permettre de concrétiser ce travail commun et de fortifier notre vision commune du ministère en français. Tous ces événements à venir présentent une véritable opportunité de mieux faire connaître l'Église Unie auprès des francophones en recherche de communautés ouvertes et accueillantes.

Les temps n'ont sans doute jamais été aussi favorables. Que le souffle de l'Esprit nous inspire et nous stimule dans notre ministère commun !

**Pasteur Thierry Delay,
président du Consistoire
Laurentien**

Celebrating 100 years of Worship at Wyman Memorial 1907 - 2007

Hudson, QC -- Wyman Memorial United Church is celebrating 100 years of worship in its current building.

Hudson Methodist Church was built in 1872. In 1905 young Reverend Daniel Wyman, newly arrived and energetic, led the drive for a larger church. The doors opened in December 1907 but by then Reverend Wyman had died of blood poisoning. The new building was named in his honour.

Today's church is essentially the one that Reverend Wyman dreamed of 100 years ago.

Throughout the year, many special events have been planned. It all comes together at Thanksgiving with the Wyman Homecoming Weekend, the theme of which is the people of Wyman - past and present.

We want to reach all current and former Wyman members so as many people as possible can enjoy the experience, either in person or through our newsletters.

PLEASE help us contact past members to let them know of our plans. You can reach us at wyman.hudson@sympatico.ca, by calling 450 458-4912. Our website is <http://www.wyman-hudson.ca/>

Stewart House Remembered

Almonte, Ont. -- On April 28 2007, a celebration of 40 years of ministry by Stewart House Learning Centre was held at Almonte United Church. Stewart House supporters, including former and current corporation members and staff, were on hand to reminisce over pictures and stories from the past.

Although the Pakenham property donated by the Stewart family was sold in 2002, the learning centre operated out of the United Church Regional Centre in Nepean until 2006 when the decision was made by the United Church of Canada to no longer provide financial support to Stewart House as an accredited learning centre.

The assets from the sale of the property will be distributed to the four courts of the church which provided financial support over the many years of ministry - Bay of Quinte Conference, Montreal & Ottawa Conference, Renfrew Presbytery and Ottawa Presbytery.

The Board of Directors hopes that these funds will be used to support programs, events or activities in the area of lay education and/or youth work which enable transformation, growth and development, thus keeping the vision of the Stewart alive into the future.

A Vision For Seaway Valley

**By Bob Christy,
chair of Presbytery**

Riceville-Pendleton UC, Ont -- Seaway Valley Presbytery is a family of 29 pastoral charges located in Eastern Ontario, along the St. Lawrence River from the Ontario-Quebec border to just east of Brockville and north to a line running through Kemptville, Winchester and Vankleek Hill.

Eighteen months ago, it started a visioning and transformation process to discern how best to deliver the Christian message of the United Church in this geographic area.

At an open Presbytery meeting in February 2006, about 170 United Church folks came to hear how a consultant was going to look at the way Seaway Valley currently carries out its ministry.

In February 2007, well more than 200 people attended a second open Presbytery meeting to hear the consultant's report and to create a Visioning and Transformation Committee.

This committee will lead the Presbytery through future stages of the process.

Stay tuned and pray for us as we continue our journey.

The Green Church Project in Montreal.

Montreal — The Mission and Outreach Committee of Montreal Presbytery has agreed to provide churches and ministry sites with guidelines, tools and reflective material on the environment. Saint Columba House and Montreal City Mission, two Montreal-based United Church community ministries, have put together material that we hope will help you contribute to **The Green Church Project** in a number of ways. You can:

Send us your stories: Have you done an environmental or energy assessment? How did it go? What problems did you encounter? Do you have another assessment tool to propose? Did you set goals and/or have you met them? Your experience will inform and inspire the efforts of others.

Send us your reflections: Have you written or would you wish to write a theological reflection on the church and environmental issues? Could your reflections help inspire others to raise these issues within their churches?

Involve your youth: Do you have ideas as to how your youth group could participate in this initiative? Do you have projects or initiatives in which youth of your church/ministry are involved?

For more information about the **Green Church Project**, the resources it makes available and more ideas about how you can participate, see the Montreal Presbytery website at <http://www.montrealpresbytery.ca/> or contact [Patricia Murphy](mailto:murphy@saintcolumbahouse.org) either at murphy@saintcolumbahouse.org or at Saint Columba House, 2365 Grand Trunk Street, Montreal, Quebec. H3K 1M8. Tel: (514) 932-6202

Saint James UC in Montreal welcomes 82,000 visitors!

Between June, 2006, and June, 2007, 82,000 people came through the open doors of St. James United Church in downtown Montreal. For most of them, it was their first contact with the United Church of Canada.

A dedicated and occasionally boisterous team of volunteers greets people in a variety of languages and answers questions about the church from people of many different faith backgrounds and tells them about St. James and the United Church.

Volunteers find their reward in listening. Many visitors wish to share their own story, often about how St. James or the United Church touched their lives. Sometimes visitors talk about their own spiritual journeys. Sometimes they challenge the volunteers' beliefs.

St. James has regarding outreach partnerships with organizations like the Montreal City Mission and the St. James Drop-In Centre. Thanks to a government approach made to the Drop-In Centre, for example, St. James and its partners will host a series of concerts, exhibitions and other activities as part of a Quebec-sponsored display of community celebrations of creativity on the last weekend of September, September 28th to 30th. This means that even more visitors will know about the church.

Saint James spends little on advertising. The key invitation is on a yellow sandwich board placed outside in the fine new church square every day that reads "Church Open / Eglise Ouverte." It seems to be working. Visits through in July 2007 were up more than 25 per cent over the same month in 2006 and visitors' contributions were up 60 per cent for the same period.

Some thoughts on prayer

from Knowlton-Creek UC Pastoral Charge,
Quebec-Sherbrooke Presbytery.

The apostle Paul once wrote that we are to "pray without ceasing." One must wonder what Paul actually had in mind when he wrote this statement. It's hard to know for sure, but prayer has a lot to do with being mindful of God's presence in our lives.

Prayer and meditation can take many different forms. There are spoken prayers and silent prayers. There are prayers of confession and prayers of intercession. There are prayers of thanksgiving and prayers of petition. There are long prayers and short prayers. There are prayers we say alone and prayers we say with others. Almost everyone prays in one form or another. In fact surveys show that people believe in prayer more than they do in God.

Prayer and meditation are central to any life that is lived in faith and becomes an important part of our relationship with God. . . . Our prayers help to foster within us a hopefulness in God's steadfast presence and providence.

Continuing Education Week at UTC: October 31 - November 4, 2007 featuring Mary Jo Leddy and Tom Long

MARY JO LEDDY, "LIVING GRATEFULLY IN THE MIDST OF EMPIRE": Dates: October 31, 2007 1 p.m. - November 2, noon. Cost: \$125.00 *Mary Jo Leddy, Ph. D (Toronto) is a Canadian writer, speaker, theologian and social activist who is widely recognized for her work with refugees. She is with the Toronto School of Theology.*

TOM LONG "HUNGERING FOR JUSTICE: Preaching Matthew in an Age of Conflict." Dates: Nov. 2, noon - Nov. 4, noon. Cost: \$125.00 *The Gospel of Matthew aims at nothing less than creating an alternative community of faith and justice in a time of cultural confusion and ethnic conflict.*

For more information, contact the United Theological College, 3521 University St, Montreal, QC, H3A 2A9, Tel: 514-849-2042, Toll Free: 1-888-849-2042, email: admin@utc.ca

The Healing Pathway ministry at Ste-Geneviève UC resumes this month. For information or to make an appointment for treatment, call Donna Olinik at (514) 626-4796 or email her at sguc@stegennys.org.

The Clarion/Le Clairon is inserted three times a year in The United Church Observer to tell our story and share our faith so as to further God's purpose in the Montreal and Ottawa Conference.

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The next meeting of the Editorial Board is on December 11th in Montreal.

The Clarion is also available on the M&O Conference website at <http://www.montrealandottawa-conference.ca>