



## **God, Olympus, and Beijing: Discerning a Path that is Just and Right**

The other day I came across an internet home page for an open source software product. This homepage, quite unexpectedly, had a graphic showing five sets of handcuffs in the form of the Olympic rings. Below the graphic was the caption “Beijing 2008” and the text above the graphic was “Boycott Beijing 2008”.

I never would have expected to see that graphic where I did, but in the end it was an effective contribution to a growing discussion, with voices speaking in favour and against a boycott of the Beijing Olympics, which are scheduled to take place this summer. We have already witnessed the protests leveled against the Olympic Torch runs in various locations around the globe, brought on by concerns about human rights abuses in China and by the treatment of the country of Tibet by China. Last weekend, former Olympian Elvis Stojko, speaking at a Toronto rally, suggested that he would consider boycotting the Olympics if he was still in competition. His rallying cry was quickly rebuffed by current athlete, rower Adam Van Koeverden, a medal prospect at this summer's games. Van Koeverden suggested that the former skater might have a different attitude if he was still in competition.

This exchange between respected athletes highlighted the difficulty in knowing which side to support. A boycott would leave me feeling extremely sorry for athletes who have worked so hard to make the Olympic team. And yet, I understand the desire to use the world stage provided by the Olympic Games, as a place of protest.

In a way this all reminds me of a heated debate in which I found myself some years ago at a meeting of the General Council of The United Church of Canada. The issue was divestment from companies working inside South Africa, the government of which, at the time supported apartheid. Those in favour of divestment said that our involvement was tacit approval of the regime. The dollars we earned as a church from investment were tainted. Others, quite effectively argued that by maintaining even a small investment in those companies, we could mount an effective campaign against apartheid as shareholders at the annual meetings.

Our response as a Christian community must always consider what God would have us do in such situations. If God is a God who calls us to seek justice, then certainly raising human rights issues is part of what we are to be about as Christians. However, a boycott of the Olympic Games would feel anything but just to an athlete who has trained hard for this moment at the pinnacle of their sporting endeavour. Is it fair and just to make a statement by preventing our athletes from participation? When confronted by the misdeeds of a woman who was about to be punished for them, Jesus had the courage to side with the woman and invite the madding crowd into a time of introspection. “Let the perfect one from among you be the first to throw the stone of condemnation” is a paraphrase of what he said. We are told that the crowd slowly dispersed until it was just Jesus and the woman. Are there parallels between this situation and the cry to boycott Beijing? Perhaps. Certainly China is not the only country to abuse the human rights of the people who live within its borders. Perhaps then, the boycott should be undertaken by countries who have a perfect record of protecting the human rights of its residents. I don't think any would qualify.

Recent events in China have helped me to discern a faithful response. A devastating earthquake in Sichuan province has taken the lives of tens of thousands of people, has left many millions homeless and has

devastated the lives of many, many more. Opportunities to participate in the support effort are springing up all around.

I think God would be most pleased if I lent a figurative hand in support of the Chinese people as they deal with the aftermath of the earthquake tragedy. I think God would also be pleased if I take every opportunity that I can to be in solidarity with those who are struggling against oppression. In other words, I can support the motive of those who would like to protest the human rights abuses. I support the motive behind calling for a boycott, but right now I can't, for the sake of the athletes, support the call to boycott the Olympic Games. In fact, I think by being there, other opportunities to raise the issues will be presented. I have no doubt that the media attention brought on by being there, would be much greater than the resulting lack of interest if our athletes were prevented from attending.

Is this a faithful response? I can certainly hope that it is, but I don't know for sure. What I do know, as in the case of most questions of faith, the journey to determine a position is at least as important as the final choice. Time will tell how it all works out. Perhaps the story will continue in my reflections in August while the Olympics are in progress.

Peter Chynoweth, Minister

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## SAYING GOOD-BYE



Janet and Mark Crowther and family, Colin, Brianne and Lauren are moving to Charlottetown, P.E.I. The Crowther family are relocating so Mark can work in the Charlottetown Headquarters of the R.C.M.P. They will make their home at 3 Picton Beete, Stratford, P.E.I. The Crowther family will live closer to extended family on the east coast of Canada, but they will be greatly missed by their Yellowknife United Church family.

Bruce & Jaime Pankratz Friesen with their children, Ziko, Zam and Hizee are moving with the Mennonite Central Committee to work in the indigenous communities surrounding Olinala, Mexico. Jaime will work with women's groups: sewing, gardening and teaching English as a Second Language. Bruce will work with water advocacy and security. One of the projects MCC is currently working on is the cistern project, which Bruce will be involved in. The Friesen-Pankratz family will be greatly missed in the life and work of Yellowknife United Church. They go to give witness and to share the gifts of God's people.



### Summer Services

On July 6th we will start our joint summer services with the Lutheran congregation in the chapel.

All services in July and August begin at 10:00 am. On September 6th we will return to our own sanctuary with an 11:00 a.m. start time.

Summer services are a wonderful way to get to know our Lutheran neighbours and visitors to our city in a more intimate setting – plan to attend if you can.

The Worship Committee

**Coming in the Fall** – the return of our Talent Auction. Time to start thinking about what special gifts or talent you have that can be auctioned off. Stay tuned for more information in early September.

### **Yellowknife City Spring Clean-up**

The youth of Yellowknife United church with help from about twenty-five members of the congregation cleaned up an area of Yellowknife to beautify our city as well as raise funds to sponsor the cost of the Sunday School curriculum. There was a larger area to clean this year: the area surrounding the hospital, behind Frame Lake clinic and fronting Old Airport Road was the designated area. The clean-up was held over three sessions: May 10<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>. The efforts of the youth in supporting the church school, as well as members of the congregation who helped with the clean-up, was very much appreciated.



**Stewardship**  
Margaret Henderson

2007 was a successful year for Yellowknife United Church for a number of reasons. Financially we finished off the year in the black, which of course means that we brought in more money than we expensed. This was largely due to the strong support given by the congregation who increased their envelope givings 13% over 2006. The 2007 information is given below:

**Yellowknife United Church Offering Analysis 2007**

Range	# of Givers	Yearly Givings	Avg./Week	% of Givers	% of Total Amt.
\$1 to \$10	34	\$7,185	\$4	45%	9%
\$11 to \$20	18	\$13,580	\$14	23%	16%
\$21 to \$30	7	\$9,200	\$25	10%	12%
\$31 to \$40	3	\$5,165	\$33	4%	7%
\$41 to \$50	5	\$11,505	\$44	7%	15%
\$51 to \$60	5	\$14,935	\$57	7%	18%
\$61 to \$200	3	\$19,000	\$122	4%	23%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>\$80,570</b>		<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Here are a few interesting facts:

- Identified givers increased from 67 to 75 (13%) which is the same amount offerings increased. There were thirteen new identified envelope users in 2007 while five families moved away.
- 32 envelope givers increased the amount they gave in 2007 which resulted in increased givings of \$19,154.
- This was slightly offset by 29 envelope givers who decreased the amount they gave by a total of \$6,414.
- 8 envelope givers contributed 41% of the total amount received.
- Our projected budget for offering and M&S for 2007 is \$97,000, which is a 22% increase over 2007. This increase is based on information received on the pledge cards handed in during the Stewardship Campaign in the fall.



## **Funding/Wish List Priorities**

Margaret Henderson

During the Stewardship Campaign in the fall, Kathryn Hofley spoke to the congregation about planned giving. She asked if we had a plan in place in the event a bequest was given to the church. Of course everyone has different things they would like to see happen but there had never a formal plan put into place. At the Board retreat in February, some time was spent by participants discussing the matter and putting forth ideas. Before we proceed further, it is important that we receive your feedback. The list we have developed is shown below. If you have comments or suggestions, please speak to Barb Paquin or Marg Henderson. You can also send comments to Marg at [margh@theedge.ca](mailto:margh@theedge.ca).

### **Immediate Needs:**

- Technology improvements (sound system, e.g. nursery and wireless mike; projection – ability to project on a regular basis)
- Kitchen equipment (e.g. freezer)

### **Future Projects:**

- Manse improvements (Long term plans)
- Window in multipurpose room
- New choir gowns
- Nursery/crying room
- Coat room
- Different railings on balcony (There is no issue with railings rather some would prefer not to look through bars)
- Intern
- Partnerships with other organizations
- Special programming (camps, etc.)
- Travel bursaries to wider church events

### **Endowment Projects:**

- Parish nurse
- NUP – the sequel – long-term co-ed housing for people who live primarily on the street (in partnership with other organizations)
- Paid music leader
- Paid Christian Education leader (staff associate/diaconal)

## Youth Group Seder Supper

Elaine Stewart

On Thursday, March 20 the Youth Group hosted a Seder Supper at the church. The idea emerged when we discussed the story of the "last supper" from which the Christian tradition of communion is derived. The group also learned that the Thursday before Good Friday is called "Maundy Thursday" because that was when Jesus gave his disciples a "new commandment": to be servants of each other and to love "one another as I have loved you". The words "maundy" and "commandment" are related.

But the Seder meal is even much, much older than Christian communion. The Passover meal that was celebrated by Jesus in that upper room came from the time when the Hebrew people were enslaved in Egypt and forced to make bricks for huge monuments. The name "Passover" comes from the last of the ten plagues (remember plagues of frogs, lice, locusts...) visited on the Egyptians when the angel of death passed over the doorways marked (as Moses had told all the Hebrews to do) with lamb's blood. The plague took the first-born sons in all the Egyptian households and finally Pharaoh allowed them to leave, or make their 'exodus', from Egypt.

The youth group prepared the Seder meal with the same dishes as used by contemporary Jewish families. In a Seder meal, all the foods are a symbol of some part of this story. For example, an apple mixture with honey and cinnamon is a reminder of the mortar that was made into bricks by the Hebrew slaves. Bitter horseradish and other herbs represent the bitter lives that the captive Hebrews experienced. Some foods are dipped into salt water, which represents tears of sadness. Hardboiled eggs are reminders that in spite of all the adversity suffered for generations, that the people remained strong (as an egg becomes solid when boiled).

The twenty-five or so guests that joined us for the evening were led through the liturgy of the Seder meal and learned much about the way the way that Seder is traditionally celebrated. There was storytelling, quizzes (can you list all ten plagues?), singing and lots of fun. Thanks to all who came and made it a wonderful evening.

Seamus Daly

Paige Elkin

Martha Hamre

Stuart Hamre

Johanna Stewart

Jordan Drouin

