

Into the Fields



Newsletter of Canadian Catholic Campus Ministry and
Canadian Catholic Students' Association Winter 1999



Photo taken from Archdiocese of Halifax webpage

The Swissair Disaster

Reflections of a Military Reserve Chaplain

Capt. John O'Donnell

"There is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. 8:39b)

Hanging on one of the walls in my office is a photograph of the lighthouse at Peggy's Cove, standing in defiance of yet another raging Atlantic storm. The sky is a dark dusky blue, and the waves crashing down on the rocks at the foot of the famous sentinel are enormous—half as high as the lighthouse itself. A childhood friend of mine, John Chiasson, captured the moment on film a couple of years ago. He gave me the photograph earlier this year, inscribing on it his initials in the lower right-hand corner: "J.C."

This past Easter I placed a palm-leaf cross in the lower right-hand corner of the frame, beside John's initials. A number of people who have visited my office since then have commented on the juxtaposition of the initials and the cross, both of which are situated just off the coast of Peggy's Cove over the dark blue ocean.

On September 2, 1998, at approximately 10:30pm, Swissair Flight 111 plunged into the ocean just off the coast of Peggy's Cove, taking with it 229 people who were on their way from New York to Geneva. Understandably, the photograph in my office has now taken on a radically

Swissair... page 12

Dead Man Walking: The journey

"I am going to tell you some stories," said Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ, in her smoky-textured Louisiana drawl. So began the 16th annual Devlin Lecture, delivered on September 23 as part of the St. Jerome's Centre for the Catholic Experience 1998-99 program. A total of nearly 1,000 people, a record for a SJCEE event, packed Siegfried Hall during the two lectures.

One listener later described the talk as "a spiritual body slam." Prejean, a recent Nobel Peace Prize nominee, is best known as a dynamic opponent of capital punishment. Her best-selling book, *Dead Man Walking*, was made into an acclaimed motion picture starring Susan Sarandon and Sean Penn.

Prejean's journey began in 1982 when she agreed to write to a death row inmate in Louisiana State Penitentiary. At that point she knew nothing of Patrick Sonnier. "I only knew that anybody on death row in Louisiana was likely to be poor." Later she began visiting him, and later still agreed to be his spiritual advisor.

As Prejean spoke, vivid images brought the story to life. The sound of Sonnier's shackles scraping across the

Prejean... page 2

Sudan in the CCSA

Rick Benson

A chance meeting in a hallway at the Central Region CCSA Conference (January 16, Assumption University, Windsor, ON) opened my eyes and brought home the experience of Catholic students in the Sudan. We were in between sessions just getting ready for the Saturday evening liturgy and I happened to stop and talk with one of the student participants. In James Redfield's popular book *The Celestine Prophecy*, he writes about coincidence being serendipitous, that there are no chance meetings. All these meetings have a meaning for each of us. I would like to believe that we can take that "insight" to mean that the Spirit of God sets the background for many meetings that will help us continue in our journey toward an understanding of God. It is in this understanding that I met Edward

Sudan... page 4

Into the Fields: an introduction

Rick Benson

Greetings to students, campus ministers and chaplains! This is our first go at combining our former newsletters, *The Connection* and *Update*. We hope you will be pleased with *Into the Fields*. We can thank Jarrett Morrison, the co-editor of this newsletter, for the thought-provoking title. It is indeed fitting that we embark upon this new communication at the same time that we set our sights on the horizon of the Jubilee Year! We are all by virtue of our baptism, called to be labourers. Our "fields" may be in residence, campus, home, work, classroom or wherever we are called to witness our faith. With this year comes the setting of new directions, new goals and new challenges! I have been in the position of National Coordinator of the CCCM and National Chaplain of the CCSA for a little over six months now. It has been a tremendous experience!

The CCCM has been in existence for many years. We can trace our history back to the first Catholic Colleges in Canada...St. Mike's 1852, St. F.X. 1853 and St. Jerome's 1865. The National Coordinator position has been in existence since 1949... 50 years! The CCSA has just experienced 10 years of existence. But like the CCCM, its roots go back many years to the Newman Society at the University of Toronto 1933 and even further to the first student groups at Catholic universities. All these milestones call for a renewal, a reflection on where we have been and where are we going. Are we meeting the needs of our constituents? The "signs of the times" are different this year than they were last year and from the year before... how are we interpreting them? What kinds of resources are we willing to commit to our two national associations? These are some of the many questions that as the National Coordinator and National Chaplain I am asking you to help answer. I cannot do it alone! Through prayer, God will reveal to us all the direction and the work we need to do. We are a community who has a unique interaction within higher education. Let us continue to support one another's efforts as we continue our ministry on campus!

Special greetings to chaplains

As a former university chaplain, it is with great pleasure that I greet you one and all—now as your liaison Bishop with the CCCB. I trust that each one of you continues to find renewed life and challenges in the most important task that is yours, as university/college chaplains. Your presence on campuses throughout the country is to me a sign of hope for the campus communities. May your presence then, be one that allows all whom you encounter to discover the truth of Christ in you.

Blessed Lent to you and the students you will touch during this time.

+Raymond Roussin, SM
Coadjutor Bishop of Victoria

...Prejean (from page 1)

cement floor as he approached the visitor's cubicle. The yellow October sunlight falling across the pictures of two murdered teenagers as Prejean read the dossier on the crime for the first time, and was filled with outrage—and then guilt, because she was "comforting the enemy."

And finally, Sonnier's last walk, with Prejean beside him. This was the turning point in her life. "When you walk with a person to his execution, it distills everything for you. Are you for life or for death? Are you for love or for hate?"

They had moved Sonnier to the Death House three days before. A psychiatrist looked in on him and offered Valium. On the last day an electrician came to check the apparatus, and the strap-down team practiced their drill one more time. "There is a protocol for death," says Prejean. "It's not easy to kill a human being."

Sonnier drank coffee and restricted himself to brief naps, to avoid nightmares. At 10 p.m. a guard came to shave his head for the electrodes. When they led him out into the corridor, shorn and shackled, "he looked like a little bird without feathers."

Prejean held his arm as they walked to the death chamber. When the final moment came and she was asked to leave the room, she told him to look at her face through the glass. "I will be the face of Christ for you." They fastened him down in the chair and sent the charge through his body. 1900 volts...cool down...500 volts...1900 volts. He watched her face as he died.

Since that night in 1984 Prejean has walked with two other men to their deaths. Out of the first experience came her conviction that state execution is murder: that no matter how horrible the crime, the criminals are human beings, and when we kill them, we are just as guilty of murder as they are. She has travelled all over the United States and the world, campaigning against the death penalty, and acting as an advocate for victims' families.

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Touched by Openness: An Experience of Liturgical Dance

Leah Daly

The day of January 12 was characterized by emotions ranging from excitement and anxiety to awe and gratitude. When Fr. Bill nonchalantly asked Jessica Martin, Michie Bourque and myself to dance at the installation of Bishop Faber MacDonald for the Diocese of Saint John, we had no idea what kind of experience we were about to have.

Organizers of the installation envisioned a celebration including the human diversity which is truly representative of our diocese. This is one reason that we as young people and university students were asked to dance during this special liturgy. As the event drew near, we travelled to Saint John to meet with Doreen, the diocesan coordinator of liturgy, for some guidance on the role of our dance within the celebration of the Mass. Just before the Gospel Acclamation we were to call the people to prayer through a dance of awakening, gathering and invitation to listen and hear the



Michie Bourque, Leah Daly, Jessica Martin and Bishop Faber MacDonald

Good News of Jesus Christ. Then we would dance in an expression of reverence and enthusiasm as the community sang "Alleluia!" At this point, I was getting really excited but alas, the nerves set in. I began to realize the magnitude of the event at which over 1000 people were expected, including government officials, reams of priests and bishops, and none other than Natalie McMaster (fiddler extraordinaire). The cathedral is huge in comparison to what I am used to and the space is magnificent.

On the day of the installation my nerves were working full force and I was overwhelmed by shaking that I just could not control. My mind was plagued by self-doubt and insecurities about my own abilities but my most paralyzing fear was that we would receive a negative reaction and that the meaning and power of the prayer would be lost. We held hands in a circle of prayer and mutual support before the service began. We prayed for the power of God's Spirit for our dance and especially for an openness from the gathered faithful. It was eons before the organ began the

Dance... page 10

Out of the Cold: Showing the homeless that we care

Michael Lee-Poy

As the weather grows colder and snow banks tower at the side of the streets, the issue of the homeless has suddenly become the new hot topic of the media. This issue, however, is neither new, nor hot. At the University of Toronto, St. Michael's College is the only college, faculty or program currently offering a service to help the homeless and destitute of Toronto.

The St. Michael's College Out of the Cold Drop-In Centre was established eight years ago through the initiative of two SMC students in collaboration with the Chaplains of SMC. The program was initiated in response to the increasing number of homeless people in the downtown area, and a realization for the need of a response by the St. Michael's community. From this initiative grew a Drop-In Centre totally reliant on student volunteers, on other members of the College and on the surrounding community. Since its beginning, the numbers of people using the program ranged from 30 to 60; however the numbers surged last year to 150.

Out of the Cold offers a warm meal, coffee, tea, juice and a shelter from the cold. Volunteers help prepare and serve food. Besides nourishment and shelter, however, the program also offers an open, welcoming atmosphere. Many volunteers sit down with their newly found friends to talk and more importantly, to listen. Food and shelter are almost secondary. Listening to their fellow neighbours, being attentive, and letting them know they are not alone is vitally important.

Volunteers generously offer whatever time they have available, from one hour to all day. Many come for different reasons, but they all volunteer to express their concern and willingness to take action against homelessness. Their time and affection are an affirmation of their willingness to be held accountable for the welfare of fellow neighbours and their initiative to be part of the solution even if the solution is not immediately forthcoming.

Out of the Cold also hosts events in an effort to raise awareness about homelessness in Toronto in addition to attending and participating in advocacy and coalition demonstrations. For example, in early November, Out of the Cold in conjunction with SMC Chaplaincy hosted a forum with Gerard Kennedy MPP (founder of the Daily Bread Food Bank) to encourage open dialogue and increased awareness among the SMC and surrounding communities. The forum, "Putting a face to the poor in Toronto," was open to everyone, and was well attended by people from various backgrounds and communities.

Out of the Cold is organized by the SMC Chaplains, Sr. Joan Atkinson, CSJ, and Fr. Michael Dodds, CSsR in conjunction with three student Coordinators: Karen Long, Emily Mulvihill and Michael Lee-Poy. Freshly made soup is

Out of the Cold... page 15

...Sudan in the CCSA (from page 1)

Maku, a refugee student from the Sudan, now attending the University of Windsor and a member of the Assumption University Campus Ministry community.

Edward appears to look much like many students on our campuses across the country—baseball cap, jeans, t-shirt—you know basic student style. What is behind this basic style is a man who has lived a life many of us only read about in Catholic newspapers or hear on CBC radio. Edward was the Chair of the Comboni Secondary School, Young Catholic Student Association (YCS). Their motto “See, Judge, Act” is a belief in recognizing an injustice, judge it according to the gospel and church teachings, and act according to the wisdom gained from these discussions. It was this involvement that has gotten Edward in serious trouble with the government policies of Islamization of the Sudan. Most of Edward’s fellow students have ended up in jail and have suffered persecution. Wilson Kimu was an undergraduate student and chair of the St. Augustine Society at Juba University from 1991-96.



Edward Maku and Rick Benson

Edward states that some members of the church learned that the government had planned to assassinate him so they smuggled him out of the country before his graduation.

“It was a time to carry my cross” reflects Edward on his experience as a Catholic student in the Sudan. “The Catholic Church is an obstacle to the Islamic government of the Sudan.” Men like Bishop Paride Taban are in exile. Catholic Churches are being burned and properties are being confiscated. As a young Catholic student and seminarian, Edward experienced this first hand. He had some “troubles” with the security forces and had to seek refuge in the Cathedral in Khartoum. It was at this time that he met Fr. Hillary Boma (See *The Catholic Register*, 11 Jan 1999, p.15). “I worked in a parish doing pastoral work with Fr. Hillary for nine months. It was at this time that we became good friends.” These men, Edward goes on to say, are the voice of the Sudanese church. They often speak for the Bishops and stand up against the government. “He never betrays his faith. He has been imprisoned for speaking about the gospel.”

I look into Edward’s eyes and they gleam from one who has experienced persecution, one who has lived out a faith that calls forth a very different response than we in Canada have experienced. This guy is not your everyday baseball hat, T-shirt and jeans student you see walking across campus.

Persecution for being a Catholic in the Sudan is one aspect of the complex problems in the Sudan. The Dinka

community has been in the news recently because of its sale of human lives. Other areas of the Sudan such as Bahr el Ghazal, Upper Nile and Kordofan all have active slave trading. Edward emphasizes that the problem is extremely complex. He cannot say if the involvement of Christian organizations that buy back slaves is helping or prolonging the slave trade. Slavery has been in existence for centuries. “There are other communities like Nuba that have been enslaved for centuries but no one raise their voice.” There are two hundred tribes in the Sudan, this diversity adds to the ongoing strife. Slavery, tribalism, economic, political and religious inequality are all causes of the civil war that continue today in the Sudan.

One might become depressed or exhausted with the enormity of the difficulties that this young man has faced. “**It is my hope that I may be a voice of my dear friends.**” Our conversation in the hallway and our follow-up emails has provided the CCSA and the CCCM with a challenge. Here is a member of our group. “How can we help?” I asked. Amnesty International has taken up the cause to write for the release of Fr. Hillary Boma. One can involve themselves in this

effort in their local Amnesty chapter. Edward also provides us with the following address to write letters of support for the many priests, catechists and students who have been imprisoned by the Sudanese government. For support and information write to:

Fr. V. Dellagiocoma, Rector
St. Paul’s Seminary (Philosophy Section)
P.O. Box 1466
Khartoum, Sudan

Edward asks that we not forget the many students who are in refugee camps in Uganda and Kenya. He has been sponsored for one year by World University Services Canada (WUSC), Windsor local Committee. He is responsible for the continuation of his education. “I have been in the camp. I have experienced how to live a hopeless life. These students who are the future leaders are being left.” The challenge for us: can we also organize with our local WUSC chapter and sponsor more students from the Sudan to come to study in Canada? Edward’s mother, brother, sister and fiancée are in the camps. Many of his friends are in exile, but the Young Catholic Students Association continues in an underground movement in the Sudan. It is no longer easy to read a story about this troubled African country without feeling connected. It’s not just those people over there, but it’s us here. Edward is one of us. The universal Catholic Church just got a little more connected! What will be our response to that connection?

International Update

Lisa Kireef

Hi everyone! I hope you are all doing well at your campuses and jobs across the country. Here is an update from organizations around the world. The issue on the top of our IMCS agenda has been the International conference which will be in Strasbourg, France from August 1-15, 1999. It is expected to gather student representatives from around the world. The topic of exploration during the weeks there will be "Students, ethics, and spirituality to rebuild utopia." Representatives from the Quebec movements, MECQ and JEC are planning to attend and as much as the CCSA would like to send a representative, financial constraints make this impossible. However, we're looking forward to a report from the contacts and the ideas that come from this conference!

These International meetings take place every four years with the first one being held in Yamoussoukro, Ivory Coast. The coordination meeting that was held in Jounieh, Lebanon in July of 1998 was meant to build a foundation for the meeting in France. Some of the aims of the conference are to rediscover and feed fundamental motivations for our movement's action, through the revision of our role in the society, in the Church and in the student world; to sketch possibilities for action for the IMCS international coordination and to celebrate the signs of God's presence in the student world. If you have any reports of student action, questions or concerns which you would like forwarded to the North American representatives, please send them to me. These conferences are meant to represent you and link you to other Catholics worldwide.

God bless your season of Lent and Happy Easter!

Global Connection '99

Dialogue On Development in Cuernavaca Mexico

Rick Benson

This is just short note to say that 22 students, staff and campus ministers have signed on and our group is in the process of becoming a "virtual community." We have 6 people from Newfoundland, 6 from New Brunswick, 6 from Ontario, 1 from Manitoba, and 3 from Saskatchewan. Now how is my addition on that?

Aaron Knox, Ann Kinnie, Christina Campbell, David Shulist SJ, Erin Knuttila, Andre Magnan, Jennifer Flavin, Jocelyne Vigier, Lana Lawlor, Laurence Beaupertuis, Michie Bourque, Nancy Barker, Rob McBride, Sara Brockman, Sherry May, Ward Strueby, Joan Atkinson CSJ, Michael Lee-Poy, Claus Kebnger, Caroline Bonner, Brian Milliman and Rick Benson will have started our on-line introductions by the time you read this article. We hope that through regular email interaction we will get to know each other before we arrive in Mexico City on May 3. We will have had some time to discuss our thoughts and concerns, expectations and goals of why we are willing to commit to such an experience. This virtual discussion group will help make this Global Connection group one that will have a sense of each other before we arrive to share ten days. The days will be fully packed with education, discussion, experience with the poor, understanding of where we are as Catholic Christians, where our Church is and how the faith of the Mexican people is lived out.

Please keep us in your prayers as we prepare for this experience. We will be sure to let you know in the next *Into the Fields* how the labourers have grown and learned from their Global 99.

"What does spirituality mean to you?"

This was the title of a display set up in UBC's Student Union Building. Students were encouraged to jot down their thoughts on this question. Some wrote creative, positive responses, while others swore, or cursed religion. Why the negative response? Why the anger?

At a recent UBC Newman Club meeting, we discussed this response, and explored the implications of the word "spirituality." Many people perceive spirituality to be closely linked to institutionalized religion. These people may distrust religion, seeing it as a patriarchal institution that tells people how to live their lives. Because they fear or dislike religion, they shy away from the whole idea of spirituality, refusing to acknowledge that they too might be spiritual.

In fact, all people are spiritual, but in different ways. Many levels and types of spirituality exist. At its most basic, spirituality can simply be the appreciation of beauty, e.g., admiring a sunset. Even humour can be spiritual, for

Jillian MacDonald

humour is the ability to step outside of ourselves, to see the world in a different way, and maybe even to laugh at ourselves and our mistakes. When we consciously realize that we are spiritual beings, we take spirituality one step further. This may include realizing that there is more to life than everyday mindless errands, or taking some quiet time to meditate or think... Another level of spirituality is when we acknowledge an "other" in all of this: God. A fourth level is when we also include Christ in this picture, praying with him or to him, and trying to be more like him. The Church helps us to see how we can include Christ in our modern world, and grow spiritually.

Spirituality is the lens through which we view the world. It is not just a "Sunday" mentality, but should permeate our vision. Spirituality is holistic, and involves all parts of our lives. Anyone who acknowledges and appreciates the best part of him or herself and the world can be called spiritual.



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Extending our reach

A new web-based course will explore religion and ecology

"You hear a lot about threats to Christianity these days," says David Seljak. "But in the 21st century the greatest threat to the church will be that most of it will be under water. Or there simply won't be any people left."

Seljak, an assistant professor of religious studies at St. Jerome's University, is the director of Religion and Ecology, the first co-operative Internet course to be offered for credit by the Canadian Catholic Colleges and Universities (CCCU). The course is a collaboration among St. Jerome's University, St. Thomas More College and King's College in London, ON. Under the technical direction of Steve Furino, associate professor of mathematics, the course is steadily taking shape and should be ready for its scheduled start this September.

Religion and Ecology will be the first of many web courses to be available to CCCU members. A course on medical ethics and one on native studies are next on the agenda. Web-based teaching allows Catholic institutions to pool resources and augment their programs without having to hire new instructors.

Collaborating with partners across the country is not easy, Furino says. Most of the technical meetings are conducted through telephone or computer conferencing. But the main problem is momentum. "It's hard to keep people in 3 or 4 institutions moving along a single track."

Seljak, who has taught a class called *The Sacred Earth* for two years, says the new course fills a gap. Not many Catholic colleges offer courses on environmental ethics. And it's a natural choice for Catholic institutions, "given the nature of the crisis." He uses the title of a work by environmentalist Paul Hawken—*The God of Life and the Death of Birth*—to sum up the crisis. Many scientists say we are threatened with a massive dying-off of species, as air, earth, and water become more toxic. Some predict that our world will eventually become so hostile to life that animals, including humans, will no longer be able to give birth.

Although the course will build partly on the work of secular scientists, Seljak emphasizes that at bottom, the issues are theological. "Theology is about life and death, or it's about nothing. To worship the God of life is to stand against death in all its manifestations: poverty, racism, imperialism, and environmental degradation."

The course defines the ecological crisis as a crisis of spirituality, explores the values of the dominant political and economic structures that led to the crisis, and looks at the role of world religions in the debate. There is an emphasis on how people and societies can change their behaviour. Asked whether effective change is possible, Seljak says he's not optimistic about the short-term, but he is hopeful. "That's the lesson of the crucifixion, to hold onto hope even in the darkest times. I expect we will have to go through a real crisis before we change our ways. But redemption is always possi-

ble. Life always has the final word."

As course director, Seljak will call on the expertise of historians, philosophers, biologists, environmental scientists, and environmental activists to supplement his own sociological approach. "Each will bring a different perspective to the course." They may appear as guest lecturers or in short video clips within Seljak's lectures. But nobody is sure, yet, exactly how this first course will look. "It's a test case," Furino says. "There will be a fair amount of learning on our part." Furino is testing several different delivery methods. "Live streaming" allows a speaker to interact with students across the country in "real time" through the computer at a fraction of the cost of bringing the speaker in person to any given institution. CD-ROMs are another option. Desktop-to-desktop video-conferencing might suit graduate seminars. Because the cost of the technologies has come down from thousands of dollars to hundreds in recent years, all are feasible.

Both Furino and Seljak emphasize the need to retain the immediate, face-to-face give-and-take that is such a large part of the excitement of the live classroom and so easy to lose in distance learning. They hope to schedule discussion groups live and on-line. "When the technology works," Furino says, "it means we'll be doing things we couldn't even dream of doing 25 years ago. For students, it means new ways of learning they couldn't have anticipated."

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A life of passion

Michael MacLean

“Living a life of passion means being fully integrated: in our personality, sexuality, work and play.” These and other great insights were a part of the talks given at the Newman Annual Retreat, co-sponsored by Newman Centre and the St. Thomas More Campus Ministry from Saskatoon. U of S students, STM faculty and Campus Ministers all made the road trip out to Muenster, SK to St. Peter’s Abbey where this year’s retreat was held Jan 29-31.

Fr. Kevin Storey, csb led the retreat that looked at living a passionate life. Talks looked at the historical Jesus, the role Jesus plays in our life today, our own sexuality, relationships and intimacy—with God, with others and with ourselves. Fr. Kevin was a great facilitator, and was extremely well-received by staff and students alike. His ever-present smile and candid presentations set everyone at ease. A highlight for the students was to have Fr. Kevin join them in a rousing game of floor hockey. Other highlights included Friday’s opening events, Saturday’s reconciliation service and variety night, and joining the Benedictine monks for Sunday morning mass.

Newman Centre is the campus-wide Catholic club for students at the University of Saskatchewan, and its offices are located in St. Thomas More College, the affiliated Catholic college on campus at the U of S. STM was founded by the Basilian fathers in 1936, and continues in the Basilian tradition. We were happy to welcome Fr. Kevin, the vocations director for the Basilians, to our retreat. We wish Fr. Kevin well in all his work and travels, and definitely encourage other campuses to seek out this personable, friendly young priest as a retreat facilitator.

Aspiring in Winnipeg

Rejean Boulet

Fourteen of us from Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface went on retreat Jan 15-17. The theme was “Our Dreams and Aspirations.” It was a journey of finding one’s self. Not only did it help each of us to be strong, but it gave us courage to grow and fall into God’s gentle love. One of us put it this way: “It gave me confidence to grow in His love. It made me feel better. I felt God’s love blessing me.” Each of us heard God speaking to us in a very special way. We may not have known immediately what God’s call was for us, but we felt stronger to seek His will and the Kingdom of Heaven.

God has already shown me where to live out my dream of serving Him and giving my life: one week after the retreat I received the great news that I will be working at L’Arche here in Winnipeg. God bless you all, every one!

SNOW DOESN’T BURY T

Snow. Snow is beautiful. Okay so it can also be an annoyance or even a stresser, but it can also be seen as a blessing. The planning team at Assumption University knew that things may happen along the way where adjustments would need to be made, but when the phone calls began from universities who were snowed-in and unable to attend, disappointment was an understatement. Cancellation of the entire conference was considered for a fleeting moment before the realization that such an action would require even more work. So, despite the abundance of snow, on Jan 15, 52 participants arrived at Academie Ste. Cecile in Windsor for the CCSA Central Region Conference. They came from Western, McMaster, St. Jerome’s, Waterloo, Toronto, and, of course, Windsor. Those that could not attend were in our prayers throughout that night and the following two days. They were never forgotten.

Once everyone was settled-in and we had gotten to know each other through games led by Crystal Brennan, we had the privilege of listening to our keynote speaker, Fr. Moe Charbonneau of St. Ursula Parish in Chatham. He delivered uplifting words about how each of us is a very good creation of God and he helped us see that even though God’s call is not always easy to hear or to listen to, as long as one is open to it, we’ll get it eventually! During his talk, he mentioned St. Theresa of Lisieux and she became an ongoing topic for the weekend. Fr. Moe also gave us prayer partners with a particular gift to pray for. For many people, both the prayer and the partner were complete ironies, yet absolutely wonderful gifts. After night prayer, many people sat in the chapel as Fr. Moe led us in song until 2am. Of course, it may have been even later (sight becomes quite blurry at that time!).

Saturday was an overwhelming and very busy day. After breakfast, prayer and yet another playing of the song “Caravan of Love,” participants had the opportunity to attend various workshops covering topics of Prayer, Scripture, Vocation, Relationships and Sexuality, Social Justice



RETREATS

THE “CARAVAN OF LOVE”

Toni Avon

and Campus Outreach. The presenters were amazing and spoke straight from and straight to the heart.

Before the real fun began, it was time to celebrate and thank our God with Eucharist at Assumption University. We were grateful to have Bishop Sherlock as our main celebrant with Fr. Moe and Fr. Dennis Noelke as concelebrants. The music for the celebration was led by the choir from St. Gregory Church in St. Clair Beach with supplemental voices of

conference participants who wanted to lend their vocal talents; it was wonderful. Bishop Sherlock told us he had been at a conference like this one, on the University of Windsor campus, thirty-five years ago when he was national Chaplain.

After having our hearts and souls nourished by the Word of God and the Eucharist, it was time to fill our physical hunger. Needless to say, the meal provided was fabulous. Once the meal was complete, we were graced with the presence and talent of young

teenagers from Detroit, Michigan. They provided their interpretation of the life and death of Jesus as it would be today in Detroit in a presentation entitled *Jesus in the Hood*.

Then it was time to dance, let go and have fun dancing, laughing and enjoying our time together. The end came early and the Caravan of Love returned to Ste. Cecile’s where people spent time sharing stories, knowing that the next day we would all have to return to the place from where we came, but somehow a little different, a little better. Sunday morning we awoke to a very loud wake-up call for which Joe da Silva was later given a “blessing.” We had our business meeting, commissioning prayer, and lunch and then it was time to go our separate ways.

Throughout the weekend, memories formed that will forever be a part of the lives of participants. Sometimes it was a special moment for two people and sometimes it was for the entire group. Whatever the memory, hold it close to your heart, keep it with you, cherish it, let it remind you of the “little ways” that you can spread God’s message of love to others. You are very good!!!



Sweet Silence

Darren Berg

The Silent Retreat was a sweet blessing. I bypassed an opportunity for a weekend of sightseeing in Quebec in favour of the retreat. Life gets too busy, so an opportunity to relax and focus on God seemed sweeter than maple syrup.

Although I am not a member of the Roman Catholic Church, I was invited by a friend to attend the retreat. It was held Jan 22-24, at Camp Cadecasu near Bragg Creek. The “vow of silence” began Friday night and continued to Sunday noon. The only speaking was in the context of the meditations and discussions lead by Fr. Remi and Fr. Tom.

It was my first experience of a silent retreat with a group. It was very relaxing. In a sense it was odd to be interacting with a group of thirty people for a weekend, yet without conversation. This experience allowed a new sense of connection with the Body of Christ. I was aware of the presence of others. However in the absence of any physical interaction, our connection through the Spirit, as we focussed on God, seemed more obvious.

Unexpectedly, my sense of connection with and appreciation of creation was strengthened at the retreat. We were treated to musical slide shows by a member of the U of Calgary Catholic Community that touched my heart. That was complemented by the beauty of the Bragg Creek area, and God reminding me of my connection to nature. Nature was nurture.

The guided sessions were interesting and inspiring. I appreciated the honest and gentle style of the priests. While reflecting on the sessions, I still had the freedom to spend plenty of time exploring many issues with God through

Sweet Silence... page 10

“Launch into the Deep”

“Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch” Matt 5:4

Fr. David Shulist, SJ

By the sound our name as a community, MUNCC (“monk”), one would think that we have turned to quiet solitude and cassocks at Memorial University. To the contrary, most of our lives are marked by activity: studying, teaching, socializing, playing sport, playing for the symphony, volunteering, and for some, raising families. In part due to such busyness, some of us took seriously our contemplative sides and went off to pray, reflect, enter into spiritual conversation with a director, with a desire to be renewed, affirmed and strengthened in our personal and communal sense of being followers of Christ.

For the first time MUN Catholic Community had a privately directed prayer retreat, Jan 22-24, called *page 10*

(from page 9) “Launch into the Deep.” Everyone who came was invited into the depth of their relationship with God.

Unlike other retreats we’ve had, this was marked by silence. The group gathered Friday evening, opening with a prayer and offering our symbols of water and light (a candle was specifically made for the retreat), following with input on Ignatian prayer, the importance of silence, how to pray with one’s experience and Scripture, and the role of the spiritual director. Then all were launched into silence and into the depths of their hearts with the hope that they would meet God somewhere, sometime and somehow.

Each retreatant met with their director four times over the weekend. Some input was given late Saturday morning on “a discerning heart” and then early Sunday morning on “maintaining a discerning stance in life.” Each of these input sessions were about 15 min long and were optional.

Saturday evening we had an hour prayer service. We came together before a large wooden cross that was draped with a white cloth and surrounded by vigil candles. We had scripture readings, hymns, and a common prayer of examen (in silence), ending with a closing hymn. Retreatants stayed on praying long into the evening in the candle lit room.

All meals were in silence which for many retreatants was the first time they had ever eaten in such a placid setting. The group took seriously the call to silence and prayer.

The retreat took place at the Pastoral Centre, close to campus for students to get to without much cost and far enough that it was a weekend away, and also in good walking distance to some great trails and views of the ocean. If you’re looking for a place to retreat from the rest of Canada, come to Newfoundland, we guarantee some great natural beauty.

Fr. Philip Shano, SJ (Guelph Centre of Spirituality) and Sr. Marie Ryan, pvbm (Lantern—a Christian life centre operated by the Presentation Sisters) joined me as spiritual directors. I was also sometimes in the kitchen doing dishes, preparing a meal, only to be completed by Br. Jim McSheffrey, SJ and Tim Turner, two generous friends who did that essential behind-the-scene labour of love for us all.

When the retreat was in its early stages of planning, others expressed doubt as to whether a silent retreat would be attractive for university students and professors. Such concern did not sway the initial intention of launching something so new within our community. The retreatants, single students, married, mothers, grandmothers, couples, and professors, expressed certainty about the value of the retreat. One wrote: *It was my first retreat and so I came to it with some uncertainty, but I found it to be a very good experience. I especially liked the silence - and after all, I liked being with others in silence, even though the prospect of spending a weekend with ‘strangers’ had been initially one of my concerns. In fact, I was quite impressed by the other retreatants, especially by the young students who seemed to me to be very sincere and mature. It felt good to be part of such a faith community for a short time.* A retreat of this type lends itself to have a mixed group. We opened it up to some non-university persons.

A unique experience of community in prayer was had by all. All left grateful, retreatants, directors, and support people alike, hoping that another such launch could happen and even more depth could be reached.

...Sweet Silence (from page 9)

prayer and journal writing. The issues I brought to the retreat and the sessions intertwined with one another, as God took me a few steps further along the Journey.

Most significant were the reflection on repentance and the opportunity for reconciliation. I was able to renew my sense of failure and dependence on God’s empowering presence. There was time to seriously reflect on areas of my life that God was calling me to address. My running ceased, and I could trust my life anew to His life-changing love.

For most of the retreat, I could participate seamlessly as a non-Roman Catholic. There were some exceptions. I remained silent through some of the songs and prayers to Mary. That was minor. The big issue, once again, was being barred from participation in the Eucharist. It was painful to grow over the weekend in my faith in Christ, and my connection through that faith with the Body of Christ, and then be denied the most intimate expression of that faith. However it is a pain that drives me to prayer, both for the unity of the Church and for my own understanding.

I thank God for the refreshment, challenges, and changes that came through the retreat. It was spiritual candy.

...Dance (from page 3)

song “Awake, Awake and greet the new morn” and suddenly all my nerves were calm. As we circled the cathedral the faces I saw were alive and full of joy. Energy built and focused as we moved together to where the proclamation of the Word would take place. The force and power of the Acclamation was amazing. The experience of the dance was, in itself, powerful and my heart was joyful in a way that I cannot express. The most incredible impact of the experience was yet to come.

As the Missioning hymn subsided we began to receive the response of the community and I was truly humbled by what they had seen and felt. Laypeople and priests, old and young—so many expressed their experience of the prayerfulness, sincerity and emotion of the dance. A priest who was a self-proclaimed hater of liturgical dance told us that he had been completely turned around. Many priests asked “Could you come teach our young people to do liturgical dance?” Older women waved their arms gracefully as they excitedly expressed their appreciation. Even the Bishop exclaimed his joy of having it as part of this special day for him and he told us that it had fit so well into the Mass. Although I’m sure there were some who could have done without the dance, the overwhelming acceptance is something I will never forget.

I feel truly blessed to have been a part of this spectacular celebration of faith and community and to have seen such openness to an authentic and profound experience of prayer.

Questions on eve of 2000

Rob Borland

At a recent retreat, a group of students from different backgrounds gathered around the fireplace and provided insight in response to a single yet important question: Where is the Church heading in the new millennium?

The response I received was astounding.

A major concern was the increasing split between conservative and liberal Catholics. The two movements are particularly strong and although rooted in the same faith, they stand fundamentally apart. Just as the movement towards "catechistic" Catholicism has been gaining a strong following, the movement towards a more liberalized Church has also gained momentum.

Will this be the greatest challenge the Church will face? By some degrees it might be, because of the central focus around change: making the Church more accommodating to its followers. Although, in doing this, we as Catholics may run the risk of a watered-down Church if we go too far (or in the wrong direction) on certain changes.

An issue that comes to mind is the dwindling number of North Americans entering the priesthood. The shortage of domestic priests poses an interesting challenge to the Church. In my local diocese of London, the bishop has responded by "clustering" churches together—partnering up three churches which eventually may be served by two or even one priest.

Thus lay people will be intergral to the individual parish, but some may argue that it is best to have a priest in the parish. The parish priest provides an essential unifying function to the faith community, but with a lack of young men interested in devoting themselves to a life of celibacy and service to the Church, we may need to seek other options.

Of course, often cited controversial solutions include allowing married men to be ordained and allowing single women to be ordained as priests. Since this article's main goal is to promote an exchange of ideas and not to prove a theological thesis, I will offer a couple points to ponder:

- Why was Jesus born a man? Considering His times, could He have been as effective in His message if He was a woman?
- Has the Church gone too far in the feminization of Christ?
- Why should a human being be denied the opportunity to be a priest solely on the basis of her gender?

The list could continue. However, it was pointed out to me that there may not actually be a shortage of priests. With the large number of African priests being ordained, the shortage in North America could be met by foreign priests. This cultural difference may in fact be the greatest challenge affecting the Church; as the Church becomes more universal (more catholic, n'est pas?) cultural barriers must be broken, opening up a faith community based on acceptance.

In an evolving world with an increased focus on reconciliation, the relationship between Christian denominations must be addressed, but the concerted efforts of all Christians is necessary. Of course, the prospect of a single

Atlantic Rep. on the move

Brad Sears

Hi, my name is Brad Sears. I'm 20yrs old and was born in St. John's, NF. This summer past was my first CCSA National Conference. At that time I became Atlantic Rep on the National Coordinating Committee of the CCSA. I'm in 3rd year of a BBA, 2½ of which I spent at Memorial University of Newfoundland, but this term I've moved to UNB.

I have many interests including Soccer and Politics. I also have concerns for us as young Catholic students, one of which is the lack of support from our Arcdioceses for the youth of our country. Many bishops and priests say that the youth are indeed a very important part of the church, but that's where it ends. They need to make their actions louder than words. I will share my other concerns and ideas with you in the weeks to come, through email and our listserve.

If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me.

As I leave the MUN Catholic Community, I want to offer some words of encouragement. Being a Newfoundlander today is hard enough. We are faced with hard economic times, and there always seems to be something bad hiding behind every bend in the road of life, but yet we as a people find some way to survive and succeed. But being a young Catholic student in Newfoundland is harder yet. We're constantly faced with a population that doesn't care for religion, a government that doesn't care for religion in school, an aging and thinning Church-going population, and the reminders of the horrible past of sexual abuse in our Church.

These seem like mighty obstacles in our way of being true loving Catholics, but I offer these words of advice to you, "Be Not Afraid." We are all in the same boat together. Yes I know it's hard, but dig down deep and find the strength to carry on, and if you find your faith weakening, remember God will always be there for you. We as students and young Catholics will always be there for you. You will never have to face anything alone as long as you believe in God. Know that everybody goes through tough times, and try to keep the loving community we created at MUN.

I would also like to thank to our chaplain Fr. David Shulist, and the executive of MUNCC, Lana, Dina, Glenn, Dawn, Nancy, and Brian. I wish all of you the best of luck and know that MUNCC is in good hands. Take Care and remember that wherever my life's journey will take me, you and MUNCC will always be home and the place where I started. God Bless and Take Care!

unified Church is a utopian pipedream because a tremendous theological gap exists between many individual Christians nevermind organized sects. And is it truly desirable to have everyone believe in the same interpretation of the Bible and the Christian experience? Are not the strongest Christians

...Swissair *(from page 1)*

different meaning, not only for me as one of the chaplains who responded to this disaster, but for all who have visited my office since that tragic event.

On the morning of Thursday, Sept 3, I received a call from Brigade Chaplain, Major Gary Thorne, to report to Peggy's Cove. As I hung up the phone, I remember literally shaking at the prospect of getting involved. Yes, I had a counseling background and, yes, I had received some training in Critical Incident Stress Debriefing procedures. But was I really prepared to deal with such an incomprehensible tragedy? "O God," I remember praying as I got off the phone, "if you are calling me to be your instrument, then give me your help. I can't do this without you!"

Before heading out to Peggy's Cove I stopped by my Unit, the 33 (Halifax) Service Battalion, on Windsor Street in Halifax. By now a significant number of the soldiers there were already on their way out to St. Margaret's Bay to participate in the recovery operation. Lieutenant-Colonel Ian MacLeod, our Commanding Officer, was confident that his soldiers were ready to perform the difficult tasks that would be required of them in the days to come. Nonetheless, he urged me to keep an eye on them.

As I drove out to Peggy's Cove, I remember thinking how unreal the whole situation seemed. I had made the "mistake" of turning on the television at about 11pm on Wednesday evening, just to catch the day's headlines before heading off to bed. Instead of mindlessly absorbing the usual array of tragic stories from around the world, I discovered that the world was in fact absorbing a tragedy that had taken place in my own back yard. "When I finally get out to Peggy's Cove," I remember thinking, "the reality of everything will begin to sink in."

Reality, of course, was nowhere to be seen at Peggy's Cove. It was kept safely at bay by three successive police checkpoints, an army of media vans and trailers, and numerous low-flying helicopters. As I drove past the trucks and satellite dishes, I was amazed to see that all the major American television networks were already on site. I felt like an actor stepping onto the set of a Hollywood movie.

By now the grim details of the crash were beginning to emerge. Fishermen who, the night before, had jumped into their boats in the hope of retrieving survivors, were now starting to return to shore with news of total devastation. Reporters, who earlier had been waiting eagerly on the rocks to relay the latest stories to the world, seemed reluctant to approach the few fishermen who were actually able to speak about their experiences. What had begun as Operation Rescue had all too quickly become Operation Recovery.

I spent most of my time on Friday, Sept 4, seeking out soldiers from my own Unit who had been deployed as drivers, cooks, supply technicians and security personnel both at Peggy's Cove and at Blandford on the other side of St. Margaret's Bay. I also spent some time with a number of

the platoons that had been enlisted to comb the surrounding beaches for the debris and human remains which were just beginning to wash ashore.

Sometime late Friday afternoon I was told that families of the victims were beginning to arrive in Halifax, and that they were going to be briefed later on in the evening at the Lord Nelson Hotel. I was also informed that there was a need for chaplains to be present at this gathering. So I drove back to Halifax, arriving just before the proceedings got underway. Present at the gathering were several hundred family members, along with their "care givers" (ie., airline employees who had been assigned to take care of the physical needs of each family), a dozen chaplains, several mental health workers, and various officials including representatives of the RCMP and Transport Canada, the President of Swissair, and Nova Scotia's Chief Medical Examiner, Dr. John Butt. The briefing was closed to the media and lasted about an hour and fifteen minutes.

Out of respect for the families, I do not feel that I can reveal many of the details of the briefing itself. Even if I could, it would not be possible for me to express the depth of the pain and anguish that was experienced by those who were in attendance that evening. Many of the families had come expecting at least to be able to take home the body of their loved one (or loved ones, as was the case for many). They had come still clinging to the hope that things surely couldn't be quite as bad as they had imagined. They had come with questions, seeking answers that would help to make things just a little better. Yet the answers that they were given, again and again, served only to advance their worst nightmares. When Dr. Butt finally got up to explain why it would not be possible for anyone to visit the morgue, a dark emotional cloud settled over the room and remained there for the rest of the evening.

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"The Father is a merciful God, who always gives us comfort. He comforts us when we are in trouble, so that we can share that same comfort with others in trouble."

(2 Cor. 1:3b- 4)

The following day, I drove out to Peggy's Cove early to prepare for the families who were scheduled to arrive midmorning. At approximately 10am they stepped out of their buses onto the flat rocks of the famous coastal village. They had come to see the place--to be near the place--where the lives of their loved ones had been cut short so tragically. Spirits all-but-crushed, clutching flowers and teddy bears they walked somberly into the large, green tent to be briefed by the Red Cross and the RCMP.

The RCMP had organized the site to allow families to grieve in relative privacy and peace--away from the glare of media spotlights. The famous rock head, upon which the lighthouse stands, was cordoned off with wooden barriers, and security personnel were stationed every twenty feet or so in a huge ring that encircled the rocks. Clearly, those responsible for the safety and security of the grieving fami-

lies were not taking any chances with the infamously unpredictable waves at Peggy's Cove.

By the end of the briefing, the families were anxious to head down to the water where they would be given an opportunity to view the crash site, and to remember their loved ones in some special way. As they left the briefing tent with the chaplains, they first had to walk past an army of cameras and reporters. So overwhelming was the crush of media outside the tent that the first group of family members had to be coaxed out with assurances that the media would not publish any pictures of them without their expressed consent.

Among the first group of family members that I accompanied out onto the rocks was a young man who had lost his fiancée on Flight 111. Clearly distraught, he walked as if in a trance to the edge of the security barrier. Once there, he insisted calmly but firmly that he be allowed through so that he could throw his flowers into the water himself. After some discussion, the RCMP reluctantly agreed that he could be accompanied down to the water by a chaplain and two firefighters equipped with life jackets. And so, the rituals of remembrance began to unfold.

Most of the families who came to Peggy's Cove on Saturday were allowed past the main barrier, accompanied by chaplains and firefighters. Once down at the water's edge, they would say prayers or stand silently, then throw their flowers and other mementos into the rolling sea. Like the young man, many of them expressed a profound need to "connect" with their loved ones. Indeed, many of them told me that, if they had their choice, they would have been in boats out at the crash site itself. Barring that, their preference would have been to put their hands and feet into the water where the land juts furthest out into the ocean. A distant third option was to stand on the rocks and to throw their flowers and other mementos into the water themselves. So it is understandable that they were disappointed, initially, at the prospect of having to remain behind a wooden barrier, and having to pass their flowers over to some stranger.

On the other side of the whole issue was the RCMP whose primary focus was the safety and security of the families visiting Peggy's Cove. They took a risk in allowing the first group of families to pass beyond the main barrier, but I believe it was a well-measured risk in light of the fact that the waves were relatively small that day.

The following day was altogether different. The winds were from the southeast, and the waves were looking more and more like the normal surf at Peggy's Cove—big, beautiful and majestic, but deceptively dangerous. Once again, as families began to arrive, they pleaded to pass beyond the main barrier, and to approach the water themselves. Once again, they looked to the chaplains to advance their cause, and to convince the RCMP to bend the rules a little. But the waves were simply too threatening, so we couldn't in conscience argue their case. Instead, we suggested that the

barrier be reshaped somehow to allow families to mark their grief in a more personal way. We were convinced that we could create a smaller, private area a little closer to the water without compromising people's safety and security.

Once the barrier was reshaped, chaplains began accompanying families, one at a time, down to the private space which had been set up for them about sixty feet from the pounding waves. Because of the large numbers of families, and because it was only possible to accompany one family at a time beyond the main barrier, we had to be extremely efficient in our use of time. We also had to be sensitive to the varieties of religious experience of those who were grieving. As I accompanied each family to the private space, I would usually begin by asking them where they were from. I would then ask them who it was that they had lost on Flight 111. Finally, I would ask them whether their loved one belonged to a particular faith community and, if so, whether they wanted me to offer prayers for them and their loved one at this time.

Upon reaching the private space, we would spend a moment in silence looking out toward the crash site five miles offshore. Then I would invite the family to give me their flowers or other mementos, and to recall the name or names of their loved ones. I would pass the flowers on to a Military Police soldier stationed on the other side of the barrier, making sure that he or she also knew the names of those for whom the flowers were intended. The MP, in turn, would pass the flowers and recite the names to a firefighter wearing a life jacket. That firefighter would then walk further down the rocks, passing on the flowers and reciting the names to yet another firefighter who would, finally, walk over to a firefighter who was secured to a twenty-foot tether. With the waves crashing around him, the tethered firefighter would walk out to the edge of the rocks, pause briefly, then throw the flowers and other mementos into the surf. He would then remove his headgear, as would each of the other firefighters and MPs in the line. Depending on the wishes of the family, I would then offer a prayer, read a passage of scripture, or pray with them in silence for their loved one.

One would think that in today's secularized world, spirituality and religion might prove to be potential barriers to the pastoral care of some grieving family members. However, in the days that I spent accompanying families to the water's edge at Peggy's Cove, I did not encounter a single person who was not, in some way, open to my presence as a chaplain. Indeed, as they marked their most private moments of remembrance on the rocks of Peggy's Cove, most of the families seemed genuinely grateful for the presence and spiritual support of the chaplains.

Also noteworthy, from my perspective, was the selflessness and professionalism of the firefighters, the police, the soldiers, the Red Cross personnel and the other chaplains with whom I had the privilege of working during those difficult days. The kind of cooperation which they

routinely demonstrated out on the rocks of Peggy's Cove is, in my opinion, a big part of the reason why people all around the world were so impressed with Nova Scotia's response to this incredible tragedy. Even the families themselves seemed overwhelmed by the degree of care and cooperation that their grief elicited. I remember that toward the latter part of Sunday afternoon, as things were beginning to slow down, a woman came out of the briefing tent and approached each of the firefighters and police officers who were standing along the barrier. As she worked her way down toward those of us who were standing at the furthest reaches of the barrier, I saw that she was taking the time to say something to each person along the way. She would then hug them and move on. Finally, she came down to where I was standing, walked up to me and said, "On behalf of the Mann Family I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart." She took my hand, embraced me, said "Thank you" again, then moved on to a Halifax Regional Police officer who was standing beside me.

I was so moved by her gesture that it didn't even occur to me, at the time, that she was a member of the family of Dr. Jonathan Mann, the well-known AIDS researcher who had perished along with his wife on Flight 111. I would guess that there were about 100 people out on the rocks at that time, so it took her a solid hour to make her way around the barrier. But she was determined to express her gratitude to each person individually.

By Tuesday, Sept 8, the flow of families into Peggy's Cove had begun to subside, so I started spending more time with the soldiers out at Blandford and on the beaches around St. Margaret's Bay. Later that week, I visited Shearwater on a number of occasions, and spent time with soldiers and others who had been given the exceptionally difficult task of working in the morgue. I also spent time in the hangar that had been set up for collecting pieces of the plane, and in the tent that had been set up for the identification of the personal effects of those who died on Flight 111. Perhaps sometime in the future, I'll find the words and the courage to write about those experiences. But for now, I think I've told enough of the story.

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"Hope returns when I remember this one thing: the Lord's unfailing love and mercy still continue, fresh as the morning, as sure as the sunrise. The Lord is all I have, and so I put my hope in him." (Lamentations 3:21-24)

The distance of time has made it a little easier for me to reflect back, in an organized way, on how I approached my responsibilities as a military chaplain during this tragedy. At the time, however, I remember struggling a lot to maintain my focus through the wildest possible range of human emotions--from unimaginable sorrows to indescribable joys, from heart-wrenching anxieties to moments of profound peace, from the depths of despair to the heights of hope. As a chaplain, I walked a tightrope between being empathic enough to relate to people as a caring human being, yet

objective enough to function effectively as a counselor. Many times, however, it was simply not possible to stay on that tightrope. When a man approaches you with five roses, unable to speak, and you are told that the roses are for his wife and his four children--you fall off the tightrope. When a woman appears, carrying a teddy bear, and tells you that it is for her little boy--you lose your objectivity. When four young people stand before you, grieving for the loss of their parents, you know that there are no magic words that you can offer to make things better again. And yet, in the midst of such pain and sorrow, the presence of God was oftentimes overwhelming.

Where was God in the midst of this terrible tragedy? From where I was standing, I could see Him quietly accompanying people every step of the way. I saw Him amongst the fishermen, the sailors, the soldiers, the pilots and their crews, the police, the firefighters, the paramedics, and others, inspiring them to work together to achieve miracles in the recovery effort. I saw Him accompanying the families of the recovery workers, enabling them to sacrifice their time and plans for the greater good. I saw Him amongst the clergy, the counselors and other care givers, empowering them to be ministers of healing to those who were suffering. I saw Him accompanying those who live along the shores of St. Margaret's Bay and beyond, inspiring them to open up their hearts and their homes in support of the recovery operation. I saw Him amongst the men and women working in the morgue, and amongst the investigators in the other hangars at Shearwater, giving them the strength they needed to carry on. And, of course, I saw Him with the families, the relatives and friends of those who died.

A wise prophet once said that it is a terrible thing to be caught in the hands of the living God. Before the night of September 2, 1998 I thought I actually knew more or less what that meant. But I was wrong. It is a terrible thing--an awesome, painful, tragic, beautiful, desperate, dark, grace-filled thing--to be caught in the hands of the living God.

In the time that I spent out at Peggy's Cove, I witnessed many instances during which God's grace was able to transform people's suffering. However, one instance in particular stands out for me, and so I'd like to conclude this reflection with the story of one family that I had the privilege of accompanying down to the water's edge.

They were the family of a student from the United States who had left for France on Flight 111 to attend the school from which his mother had graduated several years earlier. As we walked down from the main barrier to the water's edge, accompanied by two firefighters, one of the teenaged daughters said, "We should pray." The rest of the family agreed, and so I offered to lead them in prayer.

Taking out my Bible, I thumbed through the pages and found Psalm 77. I read it in its entirety, then offered a prayer for the young man, his family and the other victims. Other family members then jumped in with prayers of their own, and when we were finished the mother reached into

her purse and handed out copies of the hymn “Nearer My God to Thee.” They sang all five verses in four-part harmony, then broke spontaneously into “Amazing Grace.”

Eventually, I began to worry that we were holding up the many other families who were waiting to be accompanied down from the main barrier. However, when I looked up I saw that everyone else on the rocks above us—the firefighters, the police, the Red Cross volunteers, the other family members and chaplains—everyone else was transfixed on the singing family. Many were openly crying at the sight of such grace in the midst of such sorrow.

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A Postscript

I want to remind readers that even though the Swissair tragedy is no longer in the media spotlight, many people are still involved—and will continue to be involved for some time to come—in the recovery operation and investigation. The main focus of the Operation today has shifted to Shearwater where people like Dr. John Butt and Vic Gerden have been working hard since Day One.

Finally, I should mention that I have continued to meet regularly with soldiers from the 33 (Halifax) Service Battalion who have been struggling with the lasting effects of this disaster. At the present time, it looks as if none of them will likely suffer any serious long-term negative effects as a result of their involvement in this tragedy. But others involved in the recovery operation and investigation may not be so fortunate. Please pray for them.

John O'Donnell is Director of Administration with the RC Archdiocese of Halifax and administers the chaplaincies at Dalhousie and St. Mary's universities. He is also a part-time Army Reserve Chaplain with the 33 (Halifax) Service Battalion and the 30 MP Platoon. He lives in Dartmouth, NS, with his wife, Nancy, and their two daughters, Bridget and Kathryn. He was a Campus Minister at Atlantic School of Theology and has attended national CCSA and CCCM conferences in the past.

...Out of the Cold (from page 3)

supplied by the kitchens of Loretto College, St. Joseph's College and St. Michael's College while the bread is generously donated by Silverstein's Bakery. Funding is provided mainly by SMC Chaplaincy with additional support from the SMC Student Union.

The Out of the Cold Program opened in November, and operates on Tuesdays from 10am-3pm in the parish hall of St. Basil's Church at the corner of Bay and St. Joseph's Street. It continues through the winter months, ending in March, and is staffed by student volunteers and the extended community. New volunteers are always welcome. If you are interested in being part of Out of the Cold or would like more information on the program, please contact Sr. Joan Atkinson at j.atkinson@utoronto.ca, Fr. Michael Dodds at m.dodds@utoronto.ca or Michael Lee-Poy at mike.lee.poy@utoronto.ca.

...Questions (from page 11)

those who question and investigate their faith? This does not suggest that a closer relationship cannot be fostered that will bring all Christians to some common understandings, but rather places emphasis on reconciliation over consolidation.

Thus even the role of the Church also needs to be examined. Should the Church go back 2000 years and focus primarily on the spiritual needs of its Christian followers? Or should it maintain a strong political role, providing a social conscience not only for Catholics but people of all faiths?

What about social justice? Where does social justice in labour, economics, health, human life come into play? Just who will define social justice and what is socially just? Should the Church maintain such rigid policies on birth control, abortion, and homosexuality, or are these doctrines intrinsically important to Catholic faith?

Once again these are questions. Questions that we the future of the Church need to examine. We may find our convictions differ; we may find our convictions changing; or we may find them to be reaffirmed. What is necessary is our talking. Discussion—the simple exchange of words and ideas—will shape our actions and inevitably lead us into the direction that the Church and contemporary Christianity will be headed in the new millennium.

Ta Da!

Explore what could be the most powerful and challenging experience of our life.

COVENANT HOUSE



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Covenant House is a nonprofit agency providing food, shelter, clothing, medical attention and counseling to youth.

Faith Community volunteers make a 13 month commitment to work with the youth at **Covenant House**, pray communally and privately, and share a simple modest life.

For an information package and details of our next orientation, contact either: Michele Landis in Toronto at (416) 598-4898 (landis@covenanthouse.on.ca) or Nancy Brown in Vancouver at (604) 685-7474 (brown@covenanthousebc.org)

Into the Fields

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