

In the Bleak Midwinter

By Christina Rossetti, 1872

In the bleak mid-winter
Frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter
Long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold him,
Nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away
When he comes to reign.
In the bleak mid-winter
A stable place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty,
Jesus Christ.

Angels and archangels
May have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim
Thronged the air;
But his mother only,
In her maiden bliss,
Worshipped the beloved
With a kiss.

What can I give him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd,
I would bring a lamb.
If I were a Wise Man,
I would do my part;
Yet what can I give him:
Give my heart.

"Please, Santa..."

When I was little, Christmas was magic for me, and I'll never forget the thrill when Santa once left muddy footprints on the dining room floor. My father complained about him being so clumsy – which I didn't think was very nice of him to say.

There wasn't much money in the parsonage those days, but I knew if we wrote nice notes to Santa and were very good we'd get what we asked for. One Christmas I wanted a colouring book just like my friend Marilyn got – from an uncle in Newfoundland. So I was careful to tell Santa just where he could get one! When we rushed down Christmas morning the first thing I looked for was my colouring book. One was there – but it was nothing like Marilyn's. I tried not to cry, but Santa had let me down.

Now you good people are, in a sense, our Santa, and your gifts are what keep COC going. Since we are all grown up, we will be very pleased with any gift you can give us. Year after year you have supported us, and we are old enough to know that you will give what you can. Thank you sincerely for your help.

Our gratitude, once again, for your encouragement and your gifts. We know you won't disappoint us. Small donations add up to bigger ones, and whether large or small they will be well used to help COC uphold the cause of orthodoxy in our Church.

Thank you again for your gifts, and may Christmas bring you many, many blessings.



CONCERN

Vol. XIX Number 4

Published by the Community of Concern within the United Church of Canada

December 2008

THE GOSPEL OF CHRISTMAS

By Dr. Allen Churchill

The "gospel" means good news, and Christmas is the best news of all. I want to think with you briefly about Christmas in the light of the language of the New Testament.

What makes Christmas (past and present) wonderful in its *historical truth*. It is a miracle that really happened. Many in our churches, however, believe that the first Christmas was a myth. They say that there were no shepherds or angels, no star or wise men, no baby in a manger who troubled King Herod. But the historicity of Jesus' life, including his birth, is vouched for by the clear evidence of eyewitnesses (Luke 1:1-4; 1 John 1:1-4; 2 Peter 1:12-18).

What makes Christmas wonderful is its *message of salvation*. We live in a sinful and shameful world. It is full of evil thoughts, lewd displays, and questionable behaviour. There is little to elevate the mind or the heart. But the Scriptures testify to the birth of a Saviour, Christ the Lord, who died for us and rose again that we might have eternal life. He offers us new life, to be received by faith, a gift of God's marvellous grace (Mark 10:45; Romans 3:23-26).

What makes Christmas wonderful is its *ultimate meaning* that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). Many do not accept the biblical affirmation that Jesus was and is God incarnate, God in the flesh (John 1:14). This is the only

way of understanding who Jesus is as the One greater than the temple, greater than the prophets, and greater than the wisdom of Israel (Matthew 12:6, 40-42; Luke 11:32-33). The incarnation is the evidence of God's remarkable love for the world.

What makes Christmas wonderful is its *challenge to us* to become ambassadors for Christ, calling us to invite a sin-weary world to be reconciled to God. Evangelism is an essential to the Christian lifestyle. We need to be engaged in the work of social justice, but also in something more. The church universal and local churches can't survive or thrive without evangelism (Acts 4:33).

What makes Christmas wonderful is its explicit offer of *life after death*. Christ rose from the dead. Here is the hope of eternal life. Here is the blessing of new life in Christ, and our ongoing life with Him in the Kingdom of God. Jesus said: "Because I live, you will live also" (John 14:19).

What makes Christmas wonderful is *the full gospel* of the Holy Spirit. From this comes revelation and power. With this nothing will be impossible. Without this nothing will be possible (Luke 1:34-38; 1 Corinthians 12:3).

There continues to be a deep need for renewal in the United Church of Canada. We need to pray that our denomination recognize this.

In the meantime, let us remain faithful.



Meeting the Moderator

by David Dawson

As our readers know, from time to time representatives of COC have met with the current Moderator to discuss what we perceive as important issues in our Church. Unfortunately Moderator David Giuliano has been having a health struggle, and this along with the ongoing process of reducing and reorganizing the General Council office staff contributed to the postponement of our meeting.

So it was that we did not meet until October 16. COC was represented by Wilma Cade, John Trueman, John Wilkie, and David Dawson, while the Moderator was accompanied, at our request, by Nora Sanders, the General Secretary, and by Harry Oussoren.

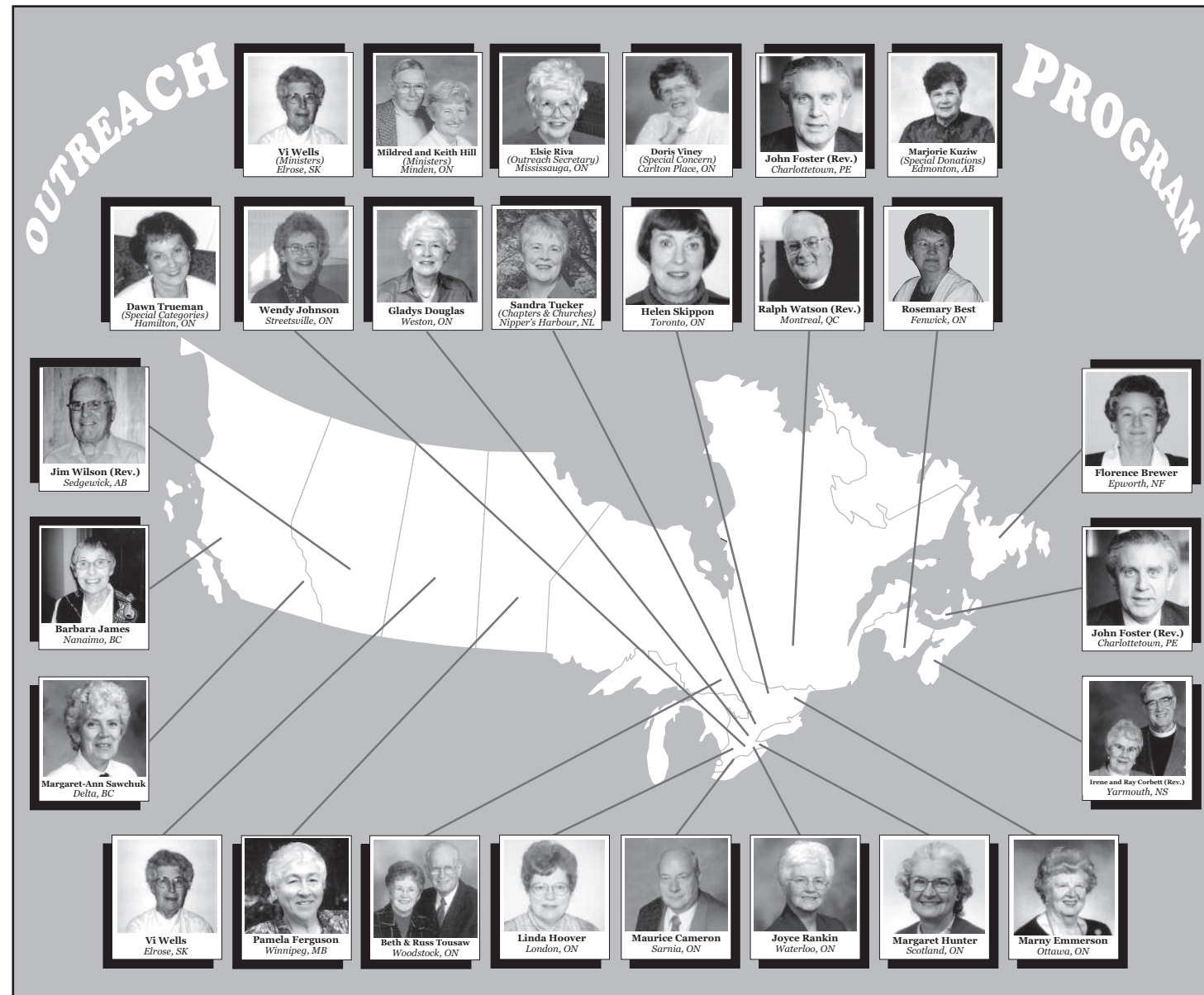
The tone of the meeting was cordial, and the Church officials were generous with their time. There was a strong emphasis on local congregations and how they continue to be the central focus of the Church. But one got the sense of a leadership that sees its role as being in a very narrow context – a striking contrast to the Howie Mills era which had issues and agendas that were to be imposed on General Council. Only time, of course, will make clear just how the current leaders will perceive their role in the government of our Church.

We did, however, detect some less positive signals. There seemed to be little understanding of the fact that the language used in United Church documents and letters is not inclusive of – and indeed is often offensive to – orthodox members. And because of this language the United Church appears to be drifting further and further away from both the historic faith and the unity of Christendom.

As the meeting moved to a close we were determined not to leave without raising the issue of Ted Wigglesworth's legal struggle. It was hardly encouraging to find that the General Secretary had *no knowledge whatsoever of the case*, and so could not update us on the Church's current role in it. We stressed the injustice of the lengthy legal proceedings as Ted's case inches its way through the civil courts.

Over the years our meeting with Moderators may seem to have accomplished little. Nevertheless it is important, and in our best interests, to discuss with the Church leadership our positions on the issues of the day. We have done this once again; and who knows what results such dialogue will produce?

.....
David Dawson is the First Vice-President of COC and a hardy veteran of moderatorial meetings.



Christmas Greetings From Your Correspondents

Here again is your favourite centrefold, now up to date, taken from the impressive Outreach Correspondents Program display which is a centre of interest at every Annual Meeting. To find your own Correspondent(s), just follow the line from your area. And if there's no line? Well, the top row, plus Dawn Trueman and Sandra Tucker at each end of row 2, serve special categories Canada-wide. Each picture caption also tells you where your correspondent comes from.

This remarkable team is led by our beloved and indispensable Outreach Secretary, Elsie Riva. These dedicated people devote hours to writing you, keeping track of you, and praying for you.

- Row 1:** Vi Wells, Mildred and Keith Hill, Elsie Riva, Doris Viney, John Foster (Rev.)*, Marjorie Kuziw
- Row 2:** Dawn Trueman, Wendy Johnson, Gladys Douglas, Sandra Tucker*, Helen Skippon, Ralph Watson (Rev.), Rosemary Best, Sandra Tucker
- Left Row:** Jim Wilson (Rev.) *, Barbara James, Margaret-Ann Sawchuk
- Right Row:** Florence Brewer, John Foster (Rev.), Irene and Ray Corbett (Rev.)
- Bottom Row:** Vi Wells, Pamela Ferguson*, Beth and Russ Tousaw, Linda Hoover, Maurice Cameron, Joyce Rankin, Margaret Hunter, Marny Emmerson

* The asterisks indicate the changes that have occurred since the last picture of the Outreach Program display. These are: for Dorothy Shaver, **John Foster (Rev.)**; for Barbara Leith, **Sandra Tucker**; for Irene Findlay, **Jim Wilson (Rev.)**. Pamela Ferguson is also retiring. Our sincere gratitude to all these dedicated people whose caring outreach has meant so much to so many.

In Love and In Memory

and in gratitude for the lives of these whom you have honoured by memorial gifts

- Alfred Alexander
- Libby Barnes (Mrs. Peter)
- Gordon Dean
- Harry Jansen
- Katherine Kirby
- Bert Mather (Rev. Dr.)
- Isobel McLean (Mrs. J.)
- Lynda Mifflin (Mrs. Clark)
- Robert L. Nagus (Rev.)
- Earl Pattison (Rev.)
- Muriel Pattison (Mrs. Earl)
- Margaret Skinner (Mrs. Dr. Les)
- Maxwell Smith
- Lloyd Stone
- John Wilkie (Rev. Dr.)

*Ten thousand times ten thousand
In sparkling raiment bright,
The armies of the ransomed saints
Throng up the steps of light:
'Tis finished, all is finished,
Their fight with death and sin;
Fling open wide the golden gates,
And let the victors in.*

At this special season when the joy of Christmas is mixed with poignant memories we keep those of you who are bereaved in our prayers.

.....
We are especially grateful to those who included the suggestion of a gift to the Community of Concern in the obituary notice.