

Befriending our Muslim Neighbours

By Tim Hegedus

Dr. Tim Hegedus teaches New Testament and Early Christianity at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary.

How do we respond when we meet people of other faiths? The fact is that all too often we react with defensiveness and fear. Yet we Christians believe that God accepts everyone in love and that we are to practice that love with one another. Christian love is not an attitude of judgment or manipulation or superiority, but real love that respects others no matter the differences between us. How can we practice Christian love in our dealings with people of other faiths? What are some practical ways for us to do this?

A particular case in point is Islam. According to the 2001 census there are almost 600,000 Muslims in Canada; since the previous census in 1991 the population of Muslims in Canada increased by 129 %.¹ Christianity and Islam have had a long history of relating to one another, and the relationship has not always been easy. Prejudice, suspicion and even violence have occurred between us, and in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 tensions were

exacerbated with the result that all too often Muslims have been stereotyped and treated with prejudice.

So the present moment is a great opportunity for Christians to resist the stereotypes and get to know our Muslim neighbours. Dr Roland Miller, former Dean of Luther College in Regina and a Lutheran expert in Muslim-Christian relations, asks: 'Are we Christian enough to do this? Can we embody our faith in Christ through showing hospitality and love to our Muslim neighbours?' Dr Miller's question is indeed timely and compelling.

Like Christians, Muslims practice monotheism (worship of one God). Muslims refer to God as *Allah*, the Arabic word for God, which is actually related to one of the Hebrew words for God in the Bible (*Elohim*). The word *Islam* itself means "submission." Muslims are those who submit themselves to God as revealed in the Islamic scriptures, the Qur'an, to the prophet Mohammed (570-632 CE). The principal practices of Islam are the so-called "five pillars":

- 1) declaration of faith according to the words "There is no god but Allah and Mohammed is the Prophet (Messenger) of Allah" (*Shahada*);
- 2) prayer which is performed five times a day (*Salat*);
- 3) giving alms (charity) (*Zakat*);
- 4) fasting in the daytime during the holy month of Ramadan (*Sawm*);
- 5) the pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hajj*).

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Inside this edition

We are thrilled to welcome Dr. Tim Hegedus to our pages this month. Tim is a professor at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary and is interested in formulating a positive theological approach to other religions.

Also inside are two articles that discuss both some of the positive things going on at Mount Zion and a frank discussion about the church's deficit.

Council & Committees send clear message

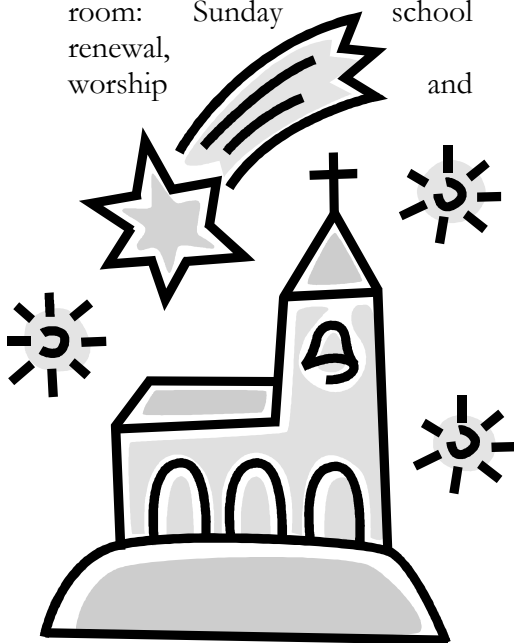
by Jim Widdecombe

Mount Zion needs to “flaunt” what it does best! That’s what Congregational President David Heldman concluded from what he heard at an October meeting of members of Church Council and its committees.

During the evening (Oct. 5) 29 Council and committee members shared what their responsibilities and roles are – and the work they do on Mount Zion’s behalf. Every Committee got a hearing, either through its Chair or through its Council liaison member.

Dave said “I think it was a bit of an eye-opener for people to learn just how many great things are going on in this congregation.”

The “great things” referred to included almost everything represented by the people in the room: Sunday school renewal, worship and



music initiatives, youth program and confirmation plans, Open Sesame and other community service and outreach efforts (from food bank and House of Friendship to SHOW), adult learning opportunities, communication (*Mountaineer* newsletter, website), mutual ministry, staff support, property and finance matters.

Dave said he felt a real sense of excitement in the room, and he encouraged everyone to “share the excitement about what’s going on here.” He maintains that spreading the word and showing what we do as a congregation are the keys to attracting new members, and to ensuring Mount Zion’s continuing success.

The “d” word also entered the discussion that night, but only in passing or at the end, when the president asked for suggestions to deal with the deficit. Those suggestions ranged from more stewardship education and promotion (of time, talent and treasure), to undertaking every member visitations, to reviewing and updating charges made for community use of church facilities. But the suggestions *did not* include any references to cutting programs or budgets.

That positive feedback “was the most encouraging thing for me (and Council) to hear,” said Dave. “Sure we’ve got to work at the deficit, but we know we can’t get rid of it this year. And

we can’t let it get in the way of what we need to do.”

In keeping with that thinking, Council has arranged for a secured line of credit than can be drawn on if required. Council will also continue to emphasize careful budgeting, and will welcome suggestions from committees and members of the congregation about how the deficit – and finances in general - can be handled most effectively.

Dave acknowledged the deficit is certainly an ongoing topic on Council’s agenda, but said it’s not about to become the only one. What’s more important is recognizing “we’re all involved in a mutual ministry here at Mount Zion and we need to get on with our job.”

He said he got the clear message that Mount Zion shouldn’t change that. If anything, the congregation should “flaunt it” by keeping on pushing and working at being “a

welcoming, caring community, called by Christ, and enabled by the Spirit, to share God’s love by living our faith.”

Financial limitations must be addressed

Another side to the coin:

- by *Jim Widdecombe*

As the accompanying article in this *Mountaineer* issue illustrates, there is much going on and a great deal to be positive about at Mount Zion. But as Congregational President David Heldman also noted, the church's deficit and weakened financial situation are also very real, and require deliberate and ongoing attention.

He said Church Council will be looking very closely at the 2011 budget proposal and has already instructed the congregational committees to scrutinize programs, costs and services carefully and realistically, as they prepare their budgets. Council will also consider various action scenarios.

The current deficit is very real (more than \$40,000), and members are working at whittling it down. Overall giving in 2010 is up from 2009. But, unfortunately, it's also true that membership numbers are down. Which means members who left took their talents and financial support with them, leaving Mount Zion with reduced resources to provide the level of programs and services the congregation has approved, and expects. (See the next issue of *The Mountaineer* for more detail on Mount Zion's financial situation.)

For Dave Heldman the challenges are clear and so are the solutions, but he doesn't suggest that makes them easy.

He says the congregation has many volunteers who do many great things in their ministry but "we've got to spread the word" and attract more people of all ages. Mount Zion needs more people who will give of their time and talents. And yes, more people are needed who will give generously of their treasures. The President maintains "If we get out there and show the good we do, we'll attract members, and the rest will take care of itself."

How to do that will get the attention in the immediate months ahead. (Possibilities such as greater stewardship outreach and every member visitations were among the topics mentioned at the recent meeting of Council and Committee members.)

At the same time, current Mount Zion members can expect to be asked to increase their activity in the church, and their financial support of its ministry.

As Dave repeatedly says, we can't make things like the deficit "just disappear" but we can get more serious about how we tackle it – and everything else we do as a congregation.

Feedback? Questions? Suggestions? Contact these Church Council members: Dave Heldman, *Chair*; Kirk Swanson, *Vice-Chair*; Julie Jozu, *Secretary*; Adam Ramer, *Helga Juergensen*,

Betty Schelter, Loa Zilles, Marg Tupling, Adrian Marshall, David Murison.

You can also leave a message for them on Mount Zion's website: www.mzjc.ca (Go to the Contact Us tab.)

In addition to Church Council, congregational committees introduced or acknowledged at the informal October 5 meeting hosted by Council included: Property, Learning, Service, Open Sesame, Worship & Music, Mutual Ministry, Health Council (in process of reforming), Staff Support (new committee in formation), Finance. Stewardship (in process of reforming), Communication (informal)

Additional sub-committees, informal committees, or working groups at Mount Zion include:

Choir, Altar Guild, Prayer Vine, Friendly Visitors, Usbers, Quilters, Funeral Committee, Ad Hoc Technical Committee, Women of Mount Zion, Men's Breakfast Group, Community Garden, 45 Plus Club, Shuffleboard Group.

If you'd like to know more about any committee or group, or explore new or different ways in which your own talents could contribute to Mount Zion's ministry, please talk to Dave Heldman – or to any Council or committee member- to Pastor Krister Ulmanis or to Parish Nurse Betty Behm. To find out who is involved with what committees or groups, call the Church Office at (519) 886-5820.

Around Mount Zion

Women of Mount Zion Book Study



This year we will be reading Man Booker Prize nominee, *The Gift of Rain* by Tan Twan Eng. Books are available for sale in the narthex. We will be discussing the book November 16, 7:00 p.m.

Gloryland Chorus benefit concert & Silent Auction for SHOW



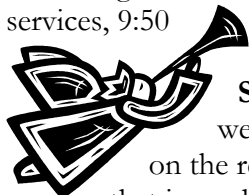
Mark your calendars for a concert by the Gloryland Chorus and a Silent Auction of unique crafted items all here at Mount Zion on the afternoon of **Sunday, November 21.**

A free will offering will be donated to SHOW (Supportive Housing of Waterloo)

Silent Auction 2:00 p.m.
Concert 3:00 p.m.
(Auction payment is cash or cheque)

Adult Ed

Beginning Sunday November 28, and continuing through the Sundays of Advent, Jackie Nunns will be leading an adult learning group between the services, 9:50 to 10:30 am. The theme is



"Great Expectations:

Studies in Isaiah". Each week we will be studying and reflecting

on the reading from the book of Isaiah that is used in worship on that day. For more information, call Jackie at 519-885-6821. Everyone is welcome!

Good News for Open Sesame

Our prayers have been answered! We now have a teacher for Monday mornings. On October 13th we interviewed and hired Nikki Proctor. Nikki had seen our ad in The Record and remembered working at Open Sesame as a support worker for one of our Special Needs children in the 1990's. She had also worked with another child at Little Mountain Co-op Nursery School, and therefore already knew Kathleen Cote, our Supervising Teacher.

We feel very fortunate to have hired someone who is already familiar with our head-start preschool.
Carol Ziegler

SCRABBLE

Benefit

Sunday, November 14, 2010,
2:00 p.m.

Parkminster United Church
275 Erb St. E., Waterloo

Help to raise \$25,000 for the Stephen Lewis Foundation Grandmothers Campaign to help African grandmothers, "the Unsung Heroes of Africa" who are raising millions of grandchildren orphaned by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Register to play, sponsor, or donate
omassikoma@bell.net
Penny at 519-7442984

The Mountaineer

Mount Zion Lutheran Church

29 Westmount Road, South Waterloo, On N2L 2K4
Phone/Fax (519) 886-5820 e-mail: mtzion@mzlc.ca
www.mzlc.ca

Pastors: Rev Tanya Ramer., Rev. Krister Ulmanis
Editorial Committee: Dennis Eaton, Karen Gastmeier, Jim Widdecombe, Tim Ehrlich, Gerry Roeder, Dave Heldman

***Deadline for December issue,
December 15, 2010***

Please send your comments, ideas and updates to
gastmeier@rogers.com

Advent Youth Roast Beef Dinner

Friday November 26, 2010

Doors open: 5:00 p.m.

Dinner: 6:00 p.m.

Mt Zion Church Auditorium

Free Will Offering



Contact Rob Zilles
robert@printessential.ca
or 519-741-1349 for
tickets

***Proceeds to go towards
Mt Zion Youth Ministry***



“Advent and Christmas Lessons in the German Language”

Tuesday, Dec. 14th, 2010

7:30 pm

Mount Zion Lutheran Church

29 Westmount Road, South
Waterloo, Ontario

ThanksgivingFest Wrap Up

Thanks to everyone who either baked a pie, peeled potatoes or played a tune all in an effort to celebrate *ThanksgivingFest*.

It was because of the efforts of many that made the evening such a success. After expenses, \$1,756 was raised and will be used to whittle away our deficit.

Thanks also goes to our community partners, **Pillars Meats** who donated the sausage and **Brick Brewing** who supplied their golden elixir.

Pastor Tanya and Emma Update

Miss Emma Ramer made her first appearance at ThanksgivingFest a few weeks ago. We were all thrilled to meet her.

Since that time she has attended several services with Mom, Dad and big brother William.

Befriending our Muslim Neighbours

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Muslims and Christians relate to each other in many positive ways in Canada and around the world. Our national church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, is a member of the National Muslim Christian Liaison Committee, which is the primary forum for Muslim-Christian dialogue in Canada.

In October 2007 a group of 138 international Muslim leaders and scholars issued a statement called “A Common Word Between Us and You” addressed to the major Christian churches around the world. The introduction to “A Common Word” states:

Muslims and Christians together make up well over half of the world's population. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world. The future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians. The basis for this peace and understanding already exists. It is part of the very foundational principles of both faiths: love of the One God, and love of the neighbour. These principles are found over and over again in the sacred texts of Islam and Christianity. ... [they are] the common ground between Islam and Christianity.²

The statement invites Christians to join with Muslims in obedience to the two commandments to love God and to love our neighbour. What a beautiful invitation for us to embrace! The publication of “A Common Word” was an historic event in the history of Muslim-Christian relations, and it has been warmly welcomed by many Christian leaders including Bishop Mark Hanson, Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

In fact, Christians and Muslims (and Jews) share a remarkably close relationship. We each claim descent from the same spiritual ancestors, Abraham and Sarah, who first received God's promise that all the people of the earth would be blessed through them (Genesis 12.3). Jews are children of Abraham

and Sarah through Isaac; Christians believe we are included in that same lineage through Jesus Christ; Muslims claim their relationship with Abraham through Hagar and their son Ishmael. So we are all members of the Abrahamic family. Without denying the very real differences between us, surely our common ancestry from Abraham provides the ground for close and positive relations between Christians and Muslims today. Even if much of our history has been dysfunctional, we still belong to the same family! Yes, unfortunately there is much potential for conflict between the Christian, Jewish and Muslim branches of this family, in the Middle East as well as other areas of the world. But we can take action – specific and positive action – locally, here in our own Canadian context. We can take the opportunity to build relationships with our Abrahamic cousins who live around us, in our cities and towns and communities and neighbourhoods.

In the aftermath of 9/11 many Muslims are experiencing increased prejudice and stereotyping. It is completely unfair and inaccurate to lump all Muslims together: just as there are enormous differences between various kinds of Christians so there are vast differences within the Muslim communities around the world. Muslims can be conservative or liberal, traditional or progressive, strict or flexible in their interpretation of their faith. The stereotype of the “Muslim terrorist” that is portrayed in the media so often is simply untrue: the vast majority of Muslims are peaceful, faithful, ordinary human beings like you and me. It is as unfair to describe all Muslims as “terrorists” based on the actions of a fringe group like Al Qaeda as it is to say that all Christians are white supremacists because there are some crazy neo-Nazi groups that claim to be “Christian”. We have to understand each other as we really are, not according to the worst prejudices that are simply made worse by the media; this too is part of what it means for us as Christians to love our neighbour.

There are many ways for us to get to know our Muslim neighbours, learn about their faith and about the issues that are important to them. We can visit a local mosque, learn about what our Muslim neighbours believe; most likely, this will also include being invited for dinner! (I have met many Muslims who are generous with their hospitality.) There are also a great many issues of significance facing both Muslims and Christians today: consumerism, materialism and secularism; prejudice and misunderstanding; the problem of fundamentalism; the role of the family in Canadian society; human rights and social justice issues; and finding opportunities to work together for the common good. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada has a **Meeting our Muslim Neighbours** program to encourage such activities. For more information, talk to your pastor or contact the national ELCIC office.

An ancient tradition says that Abraham, Hagar and Sarah kept their tent open facing all four directions of the world so that travellers could be seen and welcomed no matter which direction they came from³. According to the book of Genesis, on one occasion Abraham was sitting at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day when he saw three travellers coming towards him. He rushed out to welcome them, offering them refreshment and rest in his tent. The Bible says that in these visitors God appeared to Abraham (Gen 18.1-8). Can we practice similar hospitality to Muslims who live alongside us here in Canada? Can we open the “tent” of our church to welcome people that we have too often in the past relegated to the status of “other”? Can we practice the kind of hospitality that opens us to the possibility that we will encounter God in our Muslim neighbours? It seems to me that this is our opportunity.

In John 20.19-29 the risen Jesus repeatedly greets his disciples with the words “Peace be with you.” It is that peace which we share with one another at every Sunday Eucharist. Interestingly, the same greeting is used in Islam: Muslims too greet one another with the words “Salaam aleikum,” “Peace

be with you.” Befriending our Muslim neighbours can be a step on the journey to a common peace that promises hope for us all.

Notes:

1. <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/highlight/Religion/Page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo=PR&View=1a&Code=01&Table=1&StartRec=1&Sort=2&B1=Canada&B2=1> (accessed 22 October 2010).

2. See <http://www.acommonword.com> (accessed 22 October 2010).

3. See Joan Chittister, Saadi Shakur Chisti and Arthur Waskow, *The Tent of Abraham: Stories of Hope and Peace for Jews, Christians and Muslims* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006).

Recommended Further Reading:

Esposito, John. *What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam* (Oxford, 2002).

Hussain, Amir. *Oil and Water* (Kelowna, 2006).

Miller, Roland E. *Muslim Friends: An Introduction to Islam* (St Louis, 1995).

We appreciate your feedback and comments.
Please send them to gastmeier@rogers.com

Whatever Happened to H1N1?

by Betty Behm, Parish Nurse

This time last year, people were frantically pursuing the H1N1 vaccination. I remember driving down Franklin Avenue at 3:30 one afternoon and barely being able to navigate through all the cars and buses. You see, a clinic was being held in my local community centre - at the same time as school was ending. And people had come from as far away as Toronto to receive the vaccine.

So was all the hype and concern really necessary? Let's begin answering that by looking at what we know a year later. First, some statistics: **In total, Canada reported 25,828 confirmed cases resulting in 427 deaths due to H1N1.** (Check out this website if you would like more detail: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/fluwatch/09-10/index-eng.php>)

It's likely that the high alert and diligent responses prevented H1N1 from becoming the full blown life threatening disease it may have become in Canada. Knowledge gained through this, and from past experience, such as with the SARS pandemic, can only serve to instill in Canadians the need to be prepared and proactive in times of crises.

Loss of life through complacency or negligence is not acceptable. Making small changes early on, such as the response in our churches, I'm sure helped deter the spread of influenza. Prompt response gave people healthful alternatives to such things as sharing the peace and dipping the bread at communion. Diligent use of hand sanitizers was also beneficial. Overall, those actions and results make me conclude the responses we took to last year's H1N1 crisis were very appropriate. They also make me want to say "Well done!"

Where are we with H1N1 today? On August 10, 2010 Dr. Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) announced that the H1N1 influenza event has moved into the **post-pandemic period.**

In this period, it can be expected the influenza disease activity will return to levels normally seen for seasonal influenza. It is also expected that the pandemic virus will behave as a seasonal *influenza A* virus. At this stage, it is important to maintain surveillance and update pandemic preparedness and response plans accordingly. An

intensive phase of recovery and evaluation may be required.

In Asia, significant influenza virus circulation continues to be reported in India and Thailand, and to a lesser extent in China. In India, as of mid-September 2010, at least 17 states and territories reported new cases, with the highest numbers reported in the Delhi, Maharashtra, and Karnataka areas. However, overall influenza activity appears to be stable or declining, suggesting that the national epidemic has passed its peak.

The global influenza program will continue to monitor influenza activity worldwide on a weekly basis, and every two weeks a WHO influenza update will be published.

When we gather in worship, let us be mindful of others who continue to suffer disease and death as a result of climate, lack of access to vaccines, poor hygiene, lack of good drinking water and good nutrition – all things we take for granted in Canada.

As this flu season approaches, be sure to get your flu shot early. Check with your doctor's office and public health for clinic dates, and continue to be diligent in washing your hands to prevent the spread of disease. It's all worth the effort!

NEEDED: A Few Good Men and Women

to sit on Mount Zion's Health Council. Minimum, but enthusiastic, commitment is required monthly. Also needed are members who would be available for short-term commitment for specific health related events.

Especially needed is someone to chair this committee and work closely with the parish nurse to promote health in Mount Zion's congregation.

Please give this careful consideration and contact Pr. Krister or Betty Behm if you are interested in congregational health and supporting the Parish Nursing Ministry