



COMMON LIFE

NEWSLETTER

Stewardship of Time

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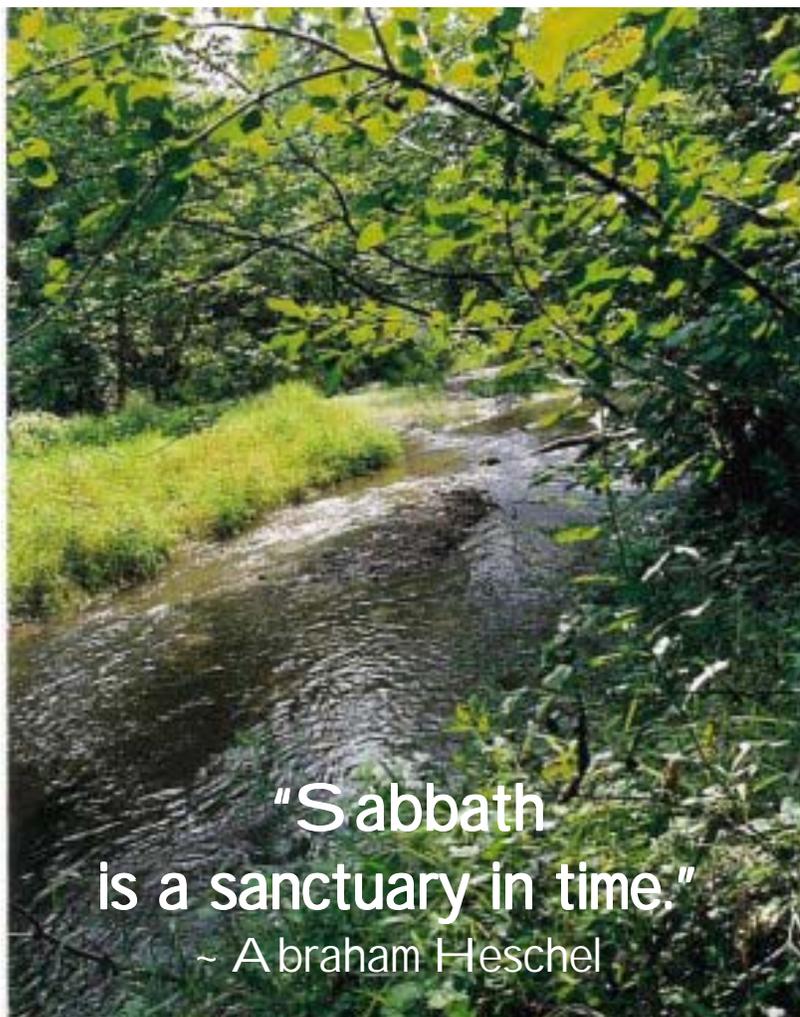
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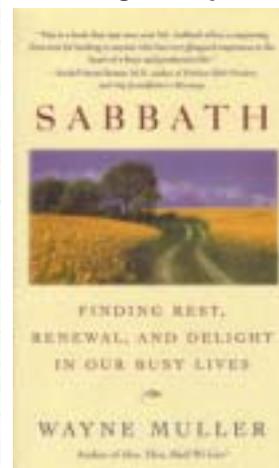
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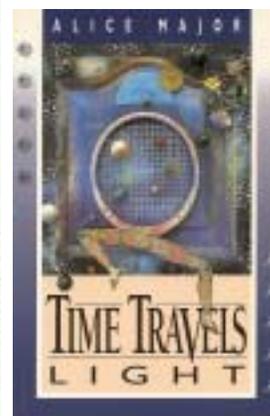
"Sabbath
is a sanctuary in time."

~ Abraham Heschel

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Common Words

Stewardship of time. This phrase immediately brings to mind another – time management – which in turn evokes memories of books outlining ways to fill every moment of each day with constructive activity; and courses promoting methods of organizing life so there is time for family and relaxation; and then the reactionary dropping out of

the rat race of managing time all together.

None of these descriptions address the recommendation in our Common Life's practice of Commitment to Community that we be accountable for our God-given gift of time which enables us to participate in God's healing work.

Time is experienced as a sacred gift in our faith tradition. Time is cherished rather than managed or taken for granted. Time is enjoyed like the colour purple. Each day is precious, interwoven with the golden thread of the Spirit in all we are and do. At the end of each day and of all our days, we give thanks for the time. Our faith story integrates the dimensions of time. The prophets recalled God's ancient dream that "everyone be happy and enjoy themselves and take pleasure in their toil" and challenged the people to build a future that made the dream come true. Jesus proclaimed that this dream of God's reign was here and now as well as in the past and future. He exhorted his followers to be awake to the transforming presence of the eternal at the heart of life here and now – not as pie in the sky when we die.

That eternal presence and dream calls us to action. The story of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25 paints a picture of what we are expected to do – feed the hungry, quench the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, visit the prisoner. We face so many permutations of these needs in this broken world of ours - so much healing activity to which we could give countless hours of time. At the same time, we experience a multitude of temptations to fight only for a place of our own at the table or in the hospital or in the market rather than for God's dream of a place for all.

Wayne Muller's statement that, "the world aches for the generosity of a well-rested people." (pg. 11) leapt out when I looked back through his book, *Sabbath: Restoring the*

Sacred Rhythm of Rest. Many of us may share this longing. But it's not easy to steward our daily allotment of hours so that we are both well rested and generous on the world's behalf. Some of us may be overworked in jobs we hate that barely enable us to make ends meet; some desperately seeking employment; some with no sense of direction in how to use time; some intensely caught up in being successful; some overwhelmed with sickness or sorrow. A community of support such as Common Life can provide an oasis in time – a Sabbath rest – that can offer perspective on our use of time. Together, we can practice God's ultimate goal for all people – enjoyment of each other and creation. We can listen to one another at a deep level, share burdens, rest, and encourage one another to cherish time. Sabbath rest, not time management, might be the appropriate phrase for people of faith to use in response to the term stewardship of time. Sabbath practice with friends or family or community of faith helps us discern our part of God's healing work and renews us to do it.

Muller suggests that the practice of Sabbath – however we do it, as individuals or community – will help us know in a deep way how we must use our time and thus witness to God's way of being rather than society's. "Sabbath time can be a revolutionary challenge to the violence of overwork, mindless accumulation, and the endless multiplication of desires, responsibilities, and accomplishments." (pg. 6) Muller's chapter, *Let It Be*, reproduced in this newsletter reminds us to stop and rest because our work is never finished and to enjoy our humble place at the table in a large world. He quotes Ette Hillesum to point us to an essential use of our time.

Although Peter and Susan Short focussed on spiritual work and energy when they led the Five Oaks CLC Annual Retreat, you will note in the report that their reflections invite us to become aware of "deep time," to spend our time learning "the craft of the master" and undertaking the tasks of spiritual work. Alice Major's poem, *Time/text*, points to the eternal moments amidst the events detailed in our calendars.

Kathy Galloway from the Iona Community visited at least two of our centres this fall. You will see responses to her visits in four places in this newsletter – Pam Byers' article, *Community Stories*, Tim Scorer's comments from Naramata, the Free Spirits report and below in this column. She's obviously made an impact on some of us.

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Editorial

Yvonne Stewart

Newsletter: Reports from groups seem to have become too much of a burden to submit. I'm wondering if there is another way to share our common life. Do you have any suggestions?

What about the future of the newsletter itself? I talked to Kathy Galloway about the role of *The Coracle*, the Iona Community newsletter. She felt it was very important. It provides a place for members to reflect on the disciplines. It helps them feel part of a larger world-wide Iona community. It encourages members who hang in for the long haul of justice and peace-making. The Iona prayer cycle, the bi-annual gatherings of their world-wide membership and their newsletter serve as reminders of the members' and groups' need for one another and in witnessing to this need, counters the self-sufficiency model of much of our culture.

Do we need a newsletter or something else to serve the same purpose? Would a blog or Facebook be better? Or do we need the purpose served at all? Please e-mail me at y.stewart@sympatico.ca if you have any comments or suggestions. Thanks.

This newsletter has been formatted by Debra Brown, Communications Coordinator at Calling Lakes Centre.

How timely to work with these writings and reflections on Time when there seems to be no break in the tasks and responsibilities before me.

How welcome the thought of taking Sabbath ~ to stop and rest because my work is never finished.

I know from experience that taking time "to be" reconnects me to my essence, the Sacred, gratitude for Life and a desire to be present to the Sacred in All.

Now to dig out my planner to schedule "Sabbath" ~ alone time with no agenda and time with my communities of heart.



**So teach us to count our days
that we may gain a wise heart.**

Psalm 90:12

Word from the Common Life Groups



Free Spirits

Group members: Mary Joan Bradley, Michele Braniff, Lilojean Frid, Nancy Hardy, Marion Kirkwood, BJ Klassen, John Klassen, Des McCalmont, Joan McCalmont, Yvonne Stewart

Arts and spirituality came together at our April gathering at Westdale United Church in Hamilton - home church of Mary Joan and Lilojean. Philip Gardner, a life-long member of this congregation and student of theology shared his conviction that beauty is an essential part of worship. He told the fascinating story of the carefully arranged panorama of stained glass windows in the sanctuary and gave us a new perspective on the role they can play in worship and

learning. Des enticed us to consider how God may call to us through media such as books, music, film, art.

Money has been our interest in subsequent times together. In June, we read the chapter, *Liberation from Mammon*, from David Guiliano's book, *Postcards from the Valley*, and discussed the three spiritual lies about money – 1) there is not enough for everyone; 2) money makes us free; 3) human beings are basically selfish creatures. In September, we reviewed Ched Myer's book, *Sabbath Economics* which provided some biblical and controversial material to chew on. In November, we plan to analyze our personal use of money and consider how we as individuals and as members of church and society might in some way witness to Sabbath economics and address the gap between the rich and poor.

Michele Braniff and Yvonne Stewart (as well as Pam Byers) attended the October evening event at Five Oaks, ***Come with Us for the Journey Is Long***, led by Kathy Galloway, former leader of the Iona Community. Singing, storytelling and questions were the key notes in Kathy's presentation. She interwove stories of her life-long struggle for justice for women, oppressed people, races and nations with the songs of the times that inspired her and with the biblical stories of

(Continued on next page)

Word from the Common Life Groups

exile and exodus. She spoke of the firm underpinning of her Iona Community that provided an experience of justice and love, a place of accountability, a story to turn to for hope of survival in times of loss and struggle and spirituality for the long haul. Kathy suggested that people on the long journey to justice live in a time and place between the no longer and the not yet. She invited us to consider the following questions for our journey. Who makes up our community? What is our community of justice and love? What is our story? What are we lamenting? What is our pillar of cloud and pillar of fire? What is manna for us? What feeds us spiritually? What are our temptations that we need to resist? Who are the guardian angels of our community?



Yvonne Stewart, Kathy Galloway and Michele Braniff

Shekhinah Seekers

Group members: *Barbara Bitzer, Pam Byers, Jane Entiknap, Jocelain Hitchcox, Lloyd Smith*

On Monday October 26, we happily welcomed a new member to our small group and to the Common Life Community of Five Oaks. Jocelain Hitchcox lives in Etobicoke (west Toronto) and learned about Common Life through Nancy Hardy. We had planned to talk about the practice of "commitment to community" today but instead spent time living it out by welcoming Jocelain and introducing ourselves to her. We know Jocelain's enthusiasm for the program, her spirituality and her other gifts will enrich our experience as a CLC group. She is already looking forward to meeting more of the Five Oaks Common Life Community at the annual gathering next May. We invite prayers of thanksgiving and welcome to Jocelain as part of your Thursday prayers.



Common Life at Naramata Centre is a two-year program that includes six weekend meetings of the community, typically in February, June and October. This two-year cycle has been offered twice now; once in 2002-2004 and again in 2007-2009. The next intake is planned for October 2010.

There were ten participants in each of the first two cycles and all were lay people. It may be that having the program based on weekends almost automatically rules out order of ministry. On the other hand it makes it entirely accessible to lay people for whom mid-week attendance would be unlikely.

The final weekend in early October just happened to coincide with the end of the Western Women's Conference which is now a regular fixture at Naramata Centre. One of this year's key presenters was Kathy Galloway, the leader of the Iona Community from 2003 to 2009. She was staying on at the Centre for a few days prior to some leadership commitments in Ontario. It was our amazing good fortune that, quite spontaneously, she was able to spend the Saturday morning with us. The timing couldn't have been better because she was able to give the group a wider vision of the common life just as they were completing their specific Naramata-based version of it. Her stories and reflections opened all our eyes to a larger global vision of Common Life as lived out in the Iona Community and the European networks. It was inspiring for everyone and spurred them to a kind of 'second level' vision of Common Life - a deepening in terms of commitment and practice.

The enthusiasm generated by Kathy's presence led to some imagining of what the next stage of the program might be beyond these two years. The group members were ready to commit to a Common Life annual event which would feature the leadership of someone like Kathy Galloway who could help to engage and inspire their participation in the global common life community. The event would be open to anyone from the four United Church centres who had been a participant in Common Life. While recognizing that it would be unlikely for someone to travel from other parts of the country to attend such an event, the group members wanted to stay open to the possible inclusion of people who had been in Common Life in the other Centres and who now lived in BC or Alberta.

I was interested to note how easily Kathy Galloway adopted the term "common life." Even though this is used specifically to identify the programs of the four centres, it clearly has currency in other parts of the world and represents the same spirit and practice as is intended by the United Church's use of that term in relation to this program.



Tim Scorer
*Common Life Facilitator,
Bowen Island, BC
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Article

Let It Be

By Wayne Muller



There is astounding wisdom in the traditional Jewish Sabbath, that it begins precisely at sundown, whether that comes at a wintry 4:30 or late on a summer evening. Sabbath is not dependent upon our readiness to stop. We do not stop when we are finished. We do not stop when we complete our phone calls, finish our

project, get through this stack of messages, or get out this report that is due tomorrow. We stop because it is time to stop.

Sabbath requires surrender. If we only stop when we are finished with all our work, we will never stop – because our work is never completely done. With every accomplishment there arises a new responsibility. Every swept floor invites another sweeping, every child bathed invites another bathing. When all life moves in such cycles, what is ever finished? The sun goes round, the moon goes round, the tides and seasons go round, people are born and die, and when are we finished? If we refuse rest until we are finished, we will never rest until we die. Sabbath dissolves the artificial urgency of our days, because *it liberates us from the need to be finished.*

The old, wise Sabbath says: *Stop now.* As the sun touches the horizon, take the hand off the plough, put down the phone, let the pen rest on the paper, turn off the computer, leave the mop in the bucket and the car in the drive. There is no room for negotiation, no time to be seduced by the urgency of our responsibilities. We stop because there are forces larger than we that take care of the universe, and while our efforts are important, necessary, and useful, they are not (nor are we) indispensable. The galaxy will somehow manage without us for this hour, this day, and so we are

invited – nay, commanded – to relax, and enjoy our relative unimportance, our humble place at the table in a very large world. The deep wisdom embedded in creation will take care of things for a while.

When we breathe, we do not stop inhaling because we have taken in all the oxygen we will ever need, but because *we have all the oxygen we need for this breath.* Then we exhale, release carbon dioxide, and make room for more oxygen. Sabbath, like the breath, allows us to imagine we have done enough work *for this day.* Do not be anxious about tomorrow, Jesus said again and again. Let the work of this day be sufficient.

When our will is bent toward a goal, we enter so deeply into our work that we soon feel this project or task is the only thing that truly matters. And in that moment – if we do our work well – we just focus in that way on the task before us. Yet the instant we put down the pen, close up the toolbox, or turn off the machines, we lift up our eyes and see the horizon, the place where sun and earth seem to touch – *I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help* – and in that moment, we surrender. We feel how large the universe is, and how small our labours. Our work is simply one offering among countless others that have come before and will come again, when all we have planted has been grown, harvested, eaten, and forgotten.

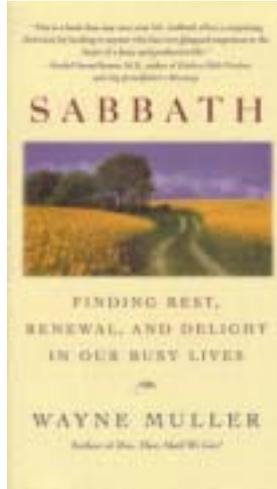
When we stop, we see that the world continues without us; sweet humility and gentle mindfulness bequeath the grace to stop, and see that it is good, there is no need to keep pushing. When we stop, with no chores or agenda, we let our eyes rest, our bodies heal, our activities languish, and taste the fruits of our labour, as the Psalmist invites us: Be still, and know.....

The theology of progress forces us to act before we are ready. We speak before we know what to say. We respond before we feel the truth of what we know. In the process, we inadvertently create suffering, heaping imprecision upon inaccuracy, until we are all buried under a mountain of

Article

misperception. But Sabbath says, be still. Stop. There is no rush to get to the end, because we are never finished. Take time to rest, and eat, and drink, and be refreshed. And in the gentle rhythm of that refreshment, listen to the sound the heart makes as it speaks the quiet truth of what is needed.

Ette Hillesum was a thoughtful young Dutch woman, a victim of the Nazi concentration camps. In the diary she kept in the midst of the Nazi occupation, she describes the tender balance between her daily forebodings and her deeper search for peace:



We have to fight them daily, like fleas, those many small worries about the morrow, for they sap our energies... The things that have to be done must be done, and for the rest we must not allow ourselves to become infested with thousands of petty fears and worries, so many motions of no confidence in God. Ultimately, we have just one moral duty: to reclaim large areas of peace in ourselves, more and more peace, and reflect it towards others. And the more peace there is in us, the more peace there will also be in our troubled world.

From, *Sabbath: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest*, Bantam Books, 1999
Permission sought.

Article

Community Stories

Pam Byers, Shekhinah Seekers



Kathy Galloway

On October 5, I was able to get to Five Oaks for the evening to hear Kathy Galloway share some of her wisdom. She spoke of what kept her going as an activist over the years and, by insinuation, what helped her lead the Iona Community in sustained justice work. She ended by pointing out that we can't be people of faith on our own, that we need community. And to help

sustain that community, we need to keep telling our community story just as the Israelites did during the years they were wandering in the desert.

That made me think about our Common Life Communities. Do we take time to tell the story of our small group to ourselves? Do we know what it is? This newsletter is one important way we share parts of our small groups' ongoing stories within our larger community, but does our larger

community, whether it is one education centre or the four together, have 'a' story that we can regularly remind each other of?

I know the potential for it exists because I've had the opportunity to glance through several large binders at Five Oaks, organized recently by Nancy Hardy of the Free Spirits, which contain many details about Common Life in the United Church, from the beginning days of dreaming, imagining and forming, to some of the activities at the various centres plus all the details of the Five Oaks groups' annual community gatherings. I suspect that there are similar records with folk at the other education centres. As well, each of us holds in our memories more of the details of our United-Church-wide Common Life Community and our regional communities. Somewhere in the details there is a story, or a few stories, that will remind us who we are and why we are a community or even a group of communities.

I wonder, do we know our story and can we remind each other of it? I would love to see possibilities offered in future newsletters.



General News from the Centres

Five Oaks

Common Life Annual Retreat with Peter and Susan Short

May 3 & 4, 2009

Peter and Susan helped participants focus on spiritual work and sources of spiritual energy. This outline shares some of the process and thoughts that might be useful for your own reflections or those of your group.

Sunday Evening

At the beginning and end of this session and all others, Peter and Susan offered the following liturgy outline. Group members were invited to take responsibility for one item on the outline.

Liturgy

Song

Silence

Lighting the flame

Blessing the flame

One sentence prayer

Song – an explanation for selecting the above song and then singing of the last verse



At the end of each session, the liturgy concluded with extinguishing the flame and an invitation to let the light shine from our own lives.

Arrival

Peter led us in a process of arrival. Arrival means being fully present. It is being aware of deep time, timeless moment, the immensity of here and now. If we are open to arrival, then the grace of arrival is given and insight into why we are here.

We can take our cue for being present from our mentors, the trees and the river. They know how to be here. They are doing a good job. The river knows where to be; it always finds the lowest spot.

“The trees and shrubs around you are not lost.”

“The forest knows where you are. You must let it find you.”

Lost by David Wagoner

Sue led us through an awareness examen, reflecting on what we feel gratitude for from our day, where we feel disappointment, where we need encouragement, lifting of the Spirit and resting in God.



Susan and Peter Short

Spiritual Work

Leaders have to make a distinction between the tradition of a community of faith and the culture. The tradition is hopefully rooted in the source of life; the culture focuses on the techniques or the how to's of things. In this time together, we focus on the well, the source of life, not the pump or the technique.

What is spiritual work? It is what everybody does – the server at Tim Horton's, the student, the wounded soldier, the senior in the rocking chair. Spiritual work involves the following tasks.

- **Embracing sorrow** “Joy and sorrow are woven fine.” *Wm. Blake*. Hidden in the sorrow may be a blessing – a presence in the darkness.
- **Reinventing work** After loss, we seek new ways to contribute to the family, the community, the world.
- **Savouring blessedness** Seeing “the universe in a grain of sand,” entering into deep time, a spiritual work against despair.
- **Taking on the mystery** There will always be things left undone. We are leaves on the surface of the river being carried into life. We are not in control.
- **Finding intimacy** How many people are there in our lives with whom we would share our all? Is there someone in our lives who will listen to all with compassion and then gently blow away the chaff?
- **Asking and granting forgiveness** Spiritual work of the highest order
- **Waking up** to the work, to the source of life. The spiritual journey always begins here.

(continued on next page)

General News from the Centres

Monday Morning

Spiritual Energy

Where does our CLC group get its energy?

Why are we disciples? – to learn the craft of the master, to be what it is that Jesus brought to the world, to have the eyes to see the spiritual work that everyone is doing

Whole group questions and reflection:

- Who is doing the work? Us? The Spirit?
The seed of God is in us and if we cultivate it, it becomes God. *Matthew Fox*
The work happens via the flow of inner work and outer work like the mobius strip. *Parker Palmer*
- What voice are we listening to? How do we discern the Spirit? What is the Spirit?
“We’re the ones we’ve been waiting for.” *Jim Wallis*
- How to build intimacy? How do we reach out for it?
How do we receive?

Sources of energy

- We learn/hear a larger view of life from the community – energy-giving
- Paying attention to the Source of energy
- Hope – a state of mind and heart independent of the evidence; a mystery; a gift not a technique; stands over against the evidence; enables people with sorrow, illness, grief to carry on eg. Terry Fox

Depletion of energy

Parker Palmer describes the shadow side of leaders – doing the work without the energy. He calls this functional atheism. Everything relies on them. They have the unexamined conviction that I’m the one who makes everything happen.

Alone reflect on the question: Where does my energy come from?

In pairs, walking together, reflect in turn on these questions: Where are you getting your energy? What receives your time and energy?

In CLC groups, discuss: How does the group find its energy?

Monday Afternoon

Our Way Forward

Hymns of the United Church that inspired hope in times of despair:

VU # 373 *As Comes the Breath of Spring*

– the inaugural hymn of the UCC, written in 1929 and sung throughout the depression



Coffee Break: Barb Bitzer, Michele Braniff, Eleanor Brent, Celia Orth, Des McCalmont

VU # 182 *Stay with Me through the Night*

– written in 1988, by Walter Farquharson in a time of considerable conflict in the UCC.

VU # 436 *Abide with Me*

This is a modern version of the hymn written by Henry Francis Lyte when he was at the end of his ministry and discouraged about it. Relates to the road to Emmaus story.

“The future is a man-eating idol. The future is hope.” *Ivan Illich*

The way forward involves learning how to live this day given the circumstances.

“What we need is here.” *Wild Geese, Wendell Berry* We don’t have what we need to leap over our questions to the future but we do have what we need to take the one step that makes the next step possible. When we know this, we have hope. 

**What gain have the workers from their toil?
I have seen the business that God has given
to everyone to be busy with.
God has made everything suitable for its time;
moreover God has put a sense of past
and future into their minds,
yet they cannot find out what God has done
from the beginning to the end.
I know that there is nothing better for them
than to be happy and enjoy themselves
as long as they live;
moreover, it is God’s gift that all should eat
and drink and take pleasure in all their toil.**

Ecclesiastes 3:9-14

General News from the Centres



Congratulations Mardi!

Our own Mardi Tindal, “a listening leader,” was elected the 40th Moderator of the United Church of Canada at the meeting of General Council in August 2009. Her yet to be finalized focus during her term will be something like -: Caring for Soul, Community and Creation. Perhaps she will submit some of her reflections on this subject and others to our newsletter!

Our education and retreat centres will have a special place in her heart as Mardi cares for the soul and invites others to do so. She will ensure that meetings or events are held in all of our centres over the next three years. Watch for her! Mardi went to Naramata immediately after her election and has already been involved in meetings at Five Oaks.

Don Linkletter, formerly of the Tent Dwellers CLC group, is presently the acting director and a search is now under way for someone to fill in until Mardi returns. Our thoughts are with the Five Oaks staff as they celebrate Mardi’s election and adjust to the necessary changes. Our prayers are with Mardi in this important leadership role.



Annual CLC Retreat May 9 & 10, 2010 Five Oaks

Just a reminder that **Ched Myers** will be with us for this retreat at Five Oaks.

Folks from all four centres are welcome to attend.

More details in the next newsletter.

Something on the Slant

Time/text

Alice Major

Time comes quantized
in little books pocked
with fifteen-minute intervals
that mark my progress
through the day –
meetings, tasks, assignments.

Niggling book of kells,
spelling out the duties
and services
peculiar to each hour.

They stack up in my desk drawer
beside month-end reports –
proof that I existed in July
1990, attended meetings,
ate lunch, wrote a letter. I reorder
from companies called

Daytimer

Time Text

Unless I turn a page and find it
blank
seamless, unrecorded –
a day that has slipped away whole
and entire. For all I know, it was a day
I met with the universe,
illuminated a manuscript
with a single symbol –

Ω *Omega*, or
∞ *Eternity*

From *Time Travels Light*, Rowan Books,
1992

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