



## LIVING OUR VALUES

### A FOUR WEEK SERIES

*The Rev. Canon Phillip Jefferson, St. John's, Ancaster*

#### INTRODUCTION

St. John's Ancaster is an old parish, dating back to the early nineteenth century. So it has strong traditions from the past, which have gradually developed as Ancaster has grown from a farming village to a small town, to today when it finds itself part of the 'New' Hamilton super-city. As the parish has grown, so has the need for awareness of what's happening around us in the world.

Half a century ago, the Anglican Congress was held in Toronto with bishops, clergy and laity from all parts of the Anglican Communion discussing the role of the church in the world. One speaker reminded us all that 'the church which lives to itself will die'. We need to be conscious about what's going on in our families, our community and beyond.

At St. John's we have been having an 'Epiphany Series' for the last several years to address this need to listen to outsiders. It seems to us that it's important in nurturing the faith to have a rhythm between the inner spiritual life and the outer witnessing action, so we try to build different types of programs to reflect both. Christmas often feels like the inner mystery of God in our hearts, whereas Epiphany is the time of opening up and hearing God in the world – magi reading the signs in the sky, the Voice of God heard at the Jordan River, the miracle known in the backroom of Cana. Mary kept all the things of Christmas in her heart, and Jesus declared the coming of God's reign among us. Hearing and witnessing call on the expression of what we believe and what we value.

In 2001 our Epiphany focus was on 'Living Our Values – continuing the Spirit of Christmas'. Four sessions were held at weekly intervals on Wednesday nights from 7.30 to 9.30 p.m. Each time, we invited someone from outside the congregation to be our resource person, and the program was built around that person.

#### ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The purpose of each week was 'to help participants explore challenges and issues as we find our values and make our decisions through the life cycle.' The presenters were to introduce elements of the topic under consideration, enable discussion and respond to our questions.

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#### HOW THE TOPICS WERE CHOSEN

In early autumn, the person responsible for these adult exploration programs gathered half a dozen parishioners together for a planning session. They talked about a range of possibilities for subjects of general interest to them and others, and suggested some people who might be able to serve as 'experts'.

All the ideas were listed on newsprint, and time was then spent in clarifying and discussing the possibilities. No decisions were made at that time, but the leader took the results of the deliberations and shaped them into some possible sessions.

Often two or three concerns could be put together, and new ideas also would emerge.

A week later a second meeting of the planning group was held to consider proposals. Further possibilities were raised, the options were narrowed to four, which seemed most suitable (one for each evening) and the general shape of the program emerged.

We had decided to address the topic of 'Exploring Christian Values'. Here is what our early planning notes looked like:

- Values – what are they? What is 'Christian' about them?
- Passing on patterns for living
- How to sustain relationship with teens
- The absence of role models
- Speakers to talk about families – public health, counselors, psychologists
- The 'Church' factor is essential
- Four hot topics: Telling tots about God; surviving the teen age years; politics and values; seniors at 65 and over
- People need to leave the sessions with something practical!

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Since we are living in an age of considerable complexity, programs such as the above benefit immensely from a competent person to inform us in this type of program. It protects us from the trap of merely having a gripe session at which the most vocal become the most persuasive. At all four sessions we wanted an informative overview of the topic, presented from personal experience and training.

The planning group suggested a number of possible names for resource speakers. Since there was also a clergy staff meeting and a Parish Council meeting between our two planning sessions, suggestions were elicited there also. At our second planning go-round, we made our choices. Several people volunteered to contact the potential speakers and report back.

The four resource persons were lined up right after Christmas, so they all had at least a month in which to prepare. When the flyers and pamphlets were ready, these were sent to them so they could see how their program was going to fit into the total series. The clergy coordinator also talked with each speaker, to ensure they all

#### HOW THE SPECIFIC PROGRAM WAS PLANNED

Once the topics were established, decisions were also made about dates and time. People volunteered to contact the resource persons, arrange the publicity (flyers, posters, bulletin announcements, etc.), book the space in the Parish Hall, set the specific agenda for each session (devotions, presentations, discussions, theological reflection and summary, etc.) and organize the coffee and cookies.

That completed the work of the planners. The staff coordinator was then responsible for general oversight and 'jogging' people when things needed to be done.

The final topics looked like this:

- Session 1: Sharing Our Values with Children
- Session 2: Standing by Teens as They 'Work It Out'
- Session 3: Politics with Social Values and Virtues
- Session 4: Seniors and the Nursing Home – 21st Century Issues

#### THE VALUE OF THE RESOURCE PERSON

knew where to come and at what time. Clarification was also given about our expected agenda:

- Open with coffee/tea, devotions and introductions;
- About ? to ? hour for presentation;
- Allow time for the group to question, share their own stories, and discuss what they have heard;
- Time to explore how scripture and faith can be expressed in the experience of the topic in people's lives;
- Closing with brief devotions, no later than 9:30 p.m.

Speakers were encouraged to bring handouts if



they wished, and we checked about the use of flipchart, etc.

Of the four speakers, two were related to the Diocesan Program Staff, one was the local MPP and the fourth was connected to the Community Care Access Centre. It turned out that all four had excellent theological awareness, and all accepted our invitation with great pleasure.

The parish gave each of the speakers a modest honourarium in appreciation for their time and skill. (St. John's has a budget item for such programs which we could use.)

We had little idea of who would attend each session, with the topics ranging from early childhood through teens, politics and nursing homes. The resource people were informed of that fact beforehand, and several of them changed their approach when they saw to whom they were speaking. Those who attended were much more representative of the older section of the congregation than of the young working parents, and the flexibility of approach was very useful in ensuring that people's needs were addressed.



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2. Through the presentation by the resource person, the clergy person listened for theological themes such as creation, vocation, shepherding, etc., and attempted to identify those underlying themes for the group for discussion.
3. The brief summing up, just before the 'thank you' and closing prayer, attempted to sum up our insights in relation to our own mission and ministry in relation to the topic - how we are challenged as individuals and as a parish.

**THE TASK OF THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION**

Since our goal was to explore the world in relation to the Gospel, we felt it was essential that space on the agenda was needed for reflecting (either biblically or theologically) on the implications of what our speakers were telling us. All our them spoke generously about their own theological background, and the religious values and influences which affected their lives and their work. However, when it came to the specific 'theologizing' on the topic itself, this was chiefly enabled by the clergy co-ordinator for the series. He did this primarily at three points in the program:

1. The opening devotions, usually connected to an Epiphany theme and to biblical references, helped us to set a context for the evening. For example, he might speak of how Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and the people around him as a reflective introduction to the topic of 'Sharing our Values with Children'; or point out how the early church set up special ministries to care for the widows as a context for Seniors and the Nursing Home. This was always kept brief, reflective rather than directive, and followed by

The unfolding of the theological reflection each week did demand some adroitness in spotting useful places and points. Often we were left with general rather than specific connections between scripture and situation, faith and response. It is often difficult for most participants to articulate their faith insights. However, faith nurturing surely demands that we do more than serve as adult educators in a secular style, avoiding the reason for our believing. At this time in our history as a Church, we do depend often on the theologically trained person to enable the links to be made.

**FURTHER IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PARISH**

One result of our program with outside resource people was the picture it presented to the wider community. The awareness of caring in the congregation was given to the visitor. 'I didn't know you were interested in this'; 'a neat group';

'it would be interesting to pursue this subject further'; 'I'd be happy to return sometime' were some of their comments at the end of a session. So the parish conveyed an image of caring for the wider world, which is part of our mission.

The handouts, which were made available to us, were also useful on a continuing basis, as resource materials to share with parish leaders in the church school, youth or older adults.

A further result from our planning was that other topics for exploration were suggested. Some of them were picked up in Lent through an exploration of the New Testament Church. Others would stay on the list to give us a start on next year's Epiphany Series.

There certainly are learning opportunities where we need to discover our own inner resources for leadership. The Epiphany Series at St. John's is identified with the parallel need to bring in 'wise persons' from the east and the west...from all over, to help us explore the world of the new Millennium and hear what the spirit and the world are saying to the church.



### LOOKING FOR NEW IDEAS IN ADULT EDUCATION FOR YOUR PARISH?

Listed below are resources available at Cathedral Place for loan:

*Cracking the Cover: A Beginner's Guide to the Bible.*

by Ross L. Smillie

*Spiritual Life in the Congregation: A Guide for Retreats.*

by Rueben P. Job

*Step by Step Small Group Leaders Training: The People Together Small Group Training Guide.*

by David Stark & Patrick Keifert

*The Light Will Shine: A Study for Advent Leader's Guide & Resource Book* - The KERYGMA Program.

by Carol J. Miller

*Exchange for Leaders of Adults*, Spring 2000

In this issue: "Integrating Justice and Spirituality", "On Loving God" and more.

## Living Our Values



*Roll Away the Stone: Lenten Reflections at the Close of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women.*

By Caryn Douglas and Ted Dodd

*Starting Small Groups and Keeping them Going* - Small Group Series.

by Augsburg Fortress

*Leading Adult Learners: A Handbook for all Christian Groups.*

By Delia Halverson

*The Willow Creek Guide to Leading Life-Changing Small Groups (and the Coaches Handbook).*

By Bill Donahue and the Willow Creek Small Group Team

*Adult Faith Adult Church: A Report on the Recommendations of the National Advisory Committee on Adult Education.*



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Niagara's Committee on Adult Christian Education