



Rocky Mountain Regional Council  
Serving God's People in the  
Rocky Mountain Region

# News and Views

November 2010

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## Letter from ECC Rocky Mountain Region Vicar Rev. Len Schreiner

### An Evolving Church

A clear, distinct voice rose in our midst, reaching into my very core. The setting was a patched together liturgical community, gathered for Eucharist in Good Shepherd Episcopal Church in Crestone, Colorado, in 2004. After the Gospel reading, I offered my thoughts, and then invited open sharing from the group. "*Christ is the template for a new humanity,*" the voice of Barbara Marx Hubbard sounded. I could never forget those words. I had only met Barbara the day before, when she gently said, "I want to come to Mass in the little chapel." We were deeply moved to have a world-renowned futurist and spiritual evolutionary wake us up with her radical insight.

In her book, *The Revelation*, she made another poignant statement that helped me transcend my identity as a "former Roman Catholic priest," and become an ECC priest. "Do not abandon the church," she heard Christ say to her. "*Expand my church, evolve my church, transform my church into a new vehicle for the resurrection of the Whole Body.*"

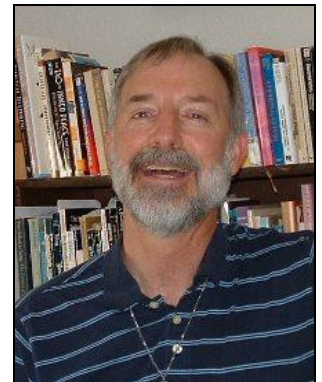
At the 2010 ECC Synod, I saw glimpses of this evolving church. Present at the Synod were women and men, both gay and straight, single and married, divorced and dispensed, Anglican and Catholic, once-Protestant and once-Roman Catholic, members of religious orders – Benedictines, Franciscans, and others – Celtic and eclectic practitioners, classically-trained theologians and pastorally progressive lay ministers, pastors, chaplains, unruffled thinkers, bishops, laity and clergy – the priesthood of believers – parents, grandparents, twenty-somethings to fifty and seventy-somethings, none lesser or greater than the other. The Whole Body.

Are we finally taking to heart Paul's words, "the head cannot say to the feet, I do not need you?" A silent, but vibrant **Yes** was welling up in my heart. Visualize what happened, if you can. An Anglican rite bishop, who is also a gay man in a committed union, presided at a high church Anglican Mass on Thursday, Oct. 28, with the amazing mix of church characters I've described, present, open and willing to eat and drink at the same table. It was on the same day, shrouded in the Jewish *tallit* (prayer shawl) that the Rev. Janine Stock, an ECC pastor of the American Catholic Church, led morning prayer with Jewish and Christian translations from Ps. 95, the Benedictus, and the Canticle of earth's praise (Dan. 3), including the Disciple's Prayer (Tefilat Hatalmidem) / Lord's Prayer. The call for earth and heaven to unite sprang alive in me during the contemplative chanting and exuberant Celtic noontime prayer service. Certainly not excluded, was the Roman rite liturgy, with typical ecumenical flavors and touches from Bishop Peter.

"Evolve my Church" the Lord had said to Barbara, "Do not abandon it!" Could it be as she said, a rebirthing of "humans with an innate tendency to evolve Christ-capacities, those proto-mutants on planet Earth," whom the Spirit may be using to express in new forms transcending earlier times, the *mysticis corporis*, the whole mystical body of the Christ?

In my exuberance and joyousness, I felt the ego's temptation to draw a comparison to others, or declare how unique or superior this church is becoming. But again Paul's words about the Spirit's actions rose to remind me: *It is the Spirit who gives apostles, prophets and pastors, in roles for the faithful to build up the body of Christ, until we become that perfect humanity who is Christ come to full stature.*" (Eph. 4:11-13) Bow down, deeply, lay prostrate, in humility and awe!

~ Rev. Len Schreiner, Vicar, Rocky Mountain Region





### Post-Synod Homily

offered by Rev. Sheila Dierks, Light of Christ

I had a dream the night before Synod began. It included a makeshift altar in a hastily assembled small chapel. The featured characters were a cowboy on a horse as part of the assembly, and a full grown male gorilla who drank the communion wine just as the altar was being set up. I was, in the dream, standing next to Peter, my husband, and I remarked to him that "the ECC is still a little rough around the edges."

Homey and still a bit prophetic.

The beginning of our time together reminded me of a couple of verses from Revelation 7: "Who are these people, and where have they come from?" an elder asked. The response was, "These are the ones who have survived the great period of trial."

And so we are. This is a revolution not led by the brave young. This is a group of men, women, married, partnered, employed or not, brave enough to let the past faith community commitments, which have been places of forced obedience and insincere compliance, slip away.

It is a mature generation dreaming young dreams.

I saw women creating new ministries that use the internet as the main path to shared community.

I saw the many who answer the invitation to an old/new faith journey. They pray the Divine enmeshed in the earth we inhabit, in the seasons, its stars, its growth and its time of quiet. A faith that returns faith life to the daily kitchens, gardens, dawn and sunset.

I saw the HOP vote on bishops and many of our number abstained because we could not affirm candidates whose vital information and beliefs in the distinctives had not been fully supplied.

I saw the struggles between those of us who love community more and those of us who love rules and structure more.

I experienced great liturgy lived out in an *all are welcome* way, while also hearing the voices of some who are not always sure they are completely accepted as they are.

And I sat with women, especially, who had, as I heard from Revelation, survived the great trial and come home to the church of our hopes, the family of God worked out in Oshkosh and Reading and Louisville.

The constitution got tweaked, and the budget approved, but, most important, bonds were formed, renewed, encouraged. Names developed faces, dreams were affirmed and visits planned.

The Harvey Wallbanger was declared the drink of the Synod. We moved toward constitutional guides on the behavior of bishops, and passed a modest budget, and ate rubber chicken while hearing the stories of GLBT youth outreach in Florida and the community trials of moving a piano.

New ideas emerged as the result of cross fertilization of communities.

There weren't any gorillas at the altar or cowboys and their horses, but I still find us working it all out out-loud, trying our best to make Jesus fit in all the pieces, and all the people with him. A little rough around the edges, yes indeed, and I am still glad of it.



### Samhain's Presence and the Synod of 2010

by Rev. Scott Jenkins, Church of the Holy Family

Samhain is the name given to the beginning of the Celtic New Year. It is here that the days are growing shorter, the nights are the prevailing back drop, darkness is the dress of the beginning. During this time of year our attention is drawn to what we cannot see with the naked eye. The leaves are falling and will eventually enrich the soil. The snow will moisten the earth at a deep level. Here, in this time and place is not only an invitation to new beginnings but the empowerment for these beginnings as well.

The ECC Synod was laced with strong Celtic ties this year. Teri Thompson, Sharon Taylor, Michael Seager and Eileen Knoff presented a well-attended workshop on Celtic/Christian Spirituality. During the evening we were blessed to sing the songs of Stefan Waligur. The music, though new to most, was easy to learn and stirred our souls in the process. The following day Michael Seager and Stefan led us in a deeply powerful and lively Celtic prayer service. It was truly inspiring.

The New Year is upon us. The possibilities of tomorrow are already breaking in on today. Watch for what we do not see. Dream with the Spirit and the road will rise to meet you!

Holy Family invites you to our Celtic Mass on the first Saturday of each month at 5 p.m.

### **Status of the House of Laity Legislation\*** provided by Wayne Parent, Light of Christ

New leadership elected for the House of Laity: Sarah Ball, Chair and Carla Altepeter, Co-Chair

House of Laity Bylaws – adopted

Finance Committee Operating Procedures – adopted

2011/2012 Budget – adopted

*Canon 68: Order of Business at Synods* – adopted

*Subcanon 2.4: Amendment to form the House of Laity Finance Committee* - adopted

*Canon 56: Exercising clergy faculties through a locally incorporated ECC organization* - adopted

*Bylaw Subcanon 3: Election process of a Presiding Bishop* – adopted

*Subcanon 67.9: Model of governance for a region/diocese* - adopted

*Subcanon 67.4: Removing the sentence about the Leadership Council having the authority to refuse a request to form a new region/diocese* – Failed

*Canon 16: ECC Distinctives*

*Resolution Ethical code of conduct & termination of faculties for bishops work to be done in 2011* – adopted

\* Passed by the House of Laity, not by the House of Pastors

### **Local Community Happenings**

#### **Update from St. Augustine's**

It has been a very busy and productive fall at St. Augustine's. Our Parish Council is living up to its new commitment to increase the involvement of all parishioners. New committees have been created, with an emphasis on action, and new

fellowship/social gatherings are receiving lots of support. Our regular dinners are attracting a hungry following, and the Sunday morning breakfast club after Mass threatens to take over the restaurant!

The sterling example of our parish passion has been the Concert and Fundraiser, entitled, "For the love of St. A's," which was held on November 5<sup>th</sup>. An ecumenical partner church offered the use of their spacious sanctuary, with its lovely grand piano and marvelous acoustics.

The concert, with its songs-of-love theme, was presented by Maestro Obadiah Ariss, pianist; Whitney Ariss, soprano; and Michael Nicosia, flutist and tenor. Their selections were powerful and pleasing, and we were brought to our feet repeatedly. The concert was a successful fundraiser as well, and our efforts on fundraising continue through the month of November. Pray for us!

Fr. David Kenney and Fr. Stan Manickam attended the Synod as Delegates to the House of Pastors. They both found the gathering productive, powerful, deeply spiritual, and an invaluable opportunity to renew friendships and make new acquaintances from across the Communion.

Sadly, both of our Lay Delegates, Sharon Tindell and Jay Gillon, had unforeseen and unmanageable emergencies develop at the very last moment, and could not attend. They were both crestfallen, as they had diligently prepared for Synod. We were unable to replace them on short notice, and simply trusted that with the Holy Spirit, all would be just fine. St. A's is revisiting the roles of the Pastor and Associate Pastor, exploring the possibility of changes or enhancements in light of parish growth. The other Regional parishes have provided quite helpful input on their organizational models. We'll keep you posted.



### **Church of the Beloved**

#### **Gifts of Life among Us**

On November 6, Keely Aparicio-Acevedo was baptized during our liturgy. Her older sister, Kyra, was baptized in our community in October 2007, the first child in our community. It is so exciting to nourish the new life in Christ among us, as now we embrace her sibling.

On November 13, we will welcome five youngsters to the Sacrament of Eucharist, totaling six First Communions in the last three months, grades K-3. It may be interesting to note that four of the six children have regularly received Communion since joining our community and now have gained sufficient understanding of the "holy bread" to formally celebrate this sacrament of initiation. It is equally significant to them as a rite as for those who have waited to receive until the big day. The parents and grandparents shared the sacramental preparation of the children, taking turns preparing the lessons for the group, while some lessons were engaged at home. It is heart-warming to hear the children tell the story of Jesus' Last Supper and what it means for us.

On November 20, more than a dozen adults from our community will join in a Habitat for Humanity volunteer project, giving of their hands and hearts for our sisters and brothers in need of housing.

We are grateful for the gifts of life within our vibrant community. Thanks be to God!

## Light of Christ

### BoulderPride Celebrates!



From Left, Mark Stenson and Fr. Don Richard

Light of Christ led in building a link between the ECC and the Boulder-area LGBTQ communities and its allies by hosting a booth at the PrideFest on Pearl Street Mall on September 11. With the use of Fr. Don Rickard's tent, the water, soft drink and chair supplies from Peter Dierks, and Mary Lu and Mark Stenson, the community gathered on a beautiful day to tell the world that All Are Welcome.

Tim Shead designed and made available great tee shirts featuring the ECC logo and the message, "All are welcome and that includes you."

Among other communities, Fr Frank Quintana, representing Holy Family, came to share his story.

The Stensons supplied fish pins with the rainbow on them. Mary Lu Stenson said, "The banner said ECC and I realized that no one knew what that meant! When people asked, and we said Catholic, then that started the conversation!"

The booth was at the far end of the event space. Mary Lu commented, "We didn't have too many people stop and inquire, but I feel just the fact that we were present was a positive. I do think we need to emphasize we are Catholic (but not Roman) in our signage. I do feel that stating we are Catholic is the essential word that will get others asking questions."

### Interfaith Learning and Prayer

On September 22nd, 19 members of Light of Christ traveled to Denver to visit the Colorado Muslim Society. We were warmly welcomed by their Imam Karim Abu Zaid. After enjoying tea and doughnuts (clearly cultural cross-pollination operative here), we enjoyed a 45-minute presentation on the basics of Islamic faith.

Afterward, Karim opened up an extended question and answer period that lasted for about another 45 minutes. It was both enlightening and honest. Finally, we were able to go into the prayer area of the mosque as we observed their midday prayer and, for those who desired, we were gifted with copies of the Koran.

### Light of Christ supports Peace in the Park, Inc.

Members of Light of Christ reached out to their neighbor to the north--Loveland, Colorado--in September by participating in Loveland's Fourth Annual Peace in the Park Festival. Light of Christ was one of five faith communities represented at the Festival held at Foote Lagoon/Civic Center in Loveland.

The Peace in the Park Festival is a celebration of the local movement for peace and justice. The event showcases organizations that work for a better world.

In addition to the faith communities, 20 other organizations hosted information tables, including the Peace Corps, Colorado Immigrants' Rights Coalition and Alternatives to Violence. Another table provided lesson plans for teachers (pre-K-12) on topics such as conflict resolution, human rights, and building community, along with information for post-secondary education students on peace and justice studies, international relations and other human services fields.

Students offered information about the School District's traditional Kindness Awards held in all Loveland middle schools honoring students for their attitude and behavior of kindness. Ferguson Alternative High School offered free face painting, and Reflections for Youth Residential Treatment Program presented an interactive peace activity.

The Festival offered live music, dancing, parachute games and a large array of colorful goods for sale by nonprofit humanitarian groups.

Light of Christ members contributed new and used jewelry to the popular Peace Boutique jewelry sale. Proceeds from this sale raise funds that help with expenses needed to put on the Peace in the Park Festival.



Shoppers at the Peace Boutique

## Church of the Holy Family

### Holy Family offers Advent Day of Reflection

ADVENT – THE SACRAMENT OF SPACIOUSNESS

You are invited to enter into a deeper experience of spaciousness of heart and mind so that there is more room to welcome anew the Divine Spirit's creative action in your life. The format for this experience will include modest input, reflection on scripture and other sacred writings, music, meditation and/or guided visualization, time for personal prayer and reflection, group ritual and prayer, and sharing.

Claudia Temple will facilitate the Advent Day of Reflection. As a trained spiritual director and retreat facilitator with over 30 years of experience in the spirituality field, Claudia has provided spiritual support to adolescents, young adults, and adults of diverse religious, non-religious, and cultural backgrounds.

**When:** December 4; 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**Where:** Church of the Holy Family  
16738 E. Iliff Avenue, Aurora

**Fee:** \$20 (includes lunch)  
Register by email or by calling the office  
**by Wednesday, 12/1**  
[holyfamilyaurora@churchofholyfamily.org](mailto:holyfamilyaurora@churchofholyfamily.org)  
303-369-9000

### Holy Family offers presentation and dialogue

THE NEW PHYSICS: SCIENCE AND SPIRITUALITY

Atoms are not particles of “matter,” they are “spirit-matter” and they point to freedom as an essential quality of the universe. Discover fundamental patterns in physical reality, and explore how atoms come together to form complex figures such as snowflakes, and ultimately ourselves. Wholeness patterns shape our being and our aspirations, and are part of nature's healing process. The fact that we are here at all means that we must rethink the roots of physical being to include “inwardness” and, ultimately, spirituality.

This presentation is offered by John L. Hitchcock. John has taught college courses in mythology, astronomy and physics, and has authored four books in the field of science and spirituality. He is a Jungian psychotherapist and spiritual director, and resides in Longmont.

**When:** December 11; 9 a.m. to 12 Noon

**Where:** Church of the Holy Family  
16738 E. Iliff Avenue, Aurora

**Fee:** \$10 (refreshments served)  
Register by email or by calling the office  
[holyfamilyaurora@churchofholyfamily.org](mailto:holyfamilyaurora@churchofholyfamily.org)  
303-369-9000

### Church of the Holy Family prepares for sabbatical/renewal season

Last summer, Holy Family initiated steps toward planning for a two-month sabbatical for Fr. Scott Jenkins along with a paralleled time of renewal for Holy Family in 2011. This dual experience is being tagged Soul Friends on a Journey.

After 27 years as an ordained minister and 12 years as pastor of Holy Family, Fr. Scott is more than ready for a period of rest, prayer and reflection. Following an initial period of rest, his sabbatical will include time for a deeper exploration of his Celtic roots along with being open to discovering additional ways to blend Celtic spirituality with our ecumenical Catholic faith for the mission of Holy Family.

While Fr. Scott is away during the summer of 2011, the renewal planning team identified multiple events and activities that will serve as community renewal opportunities. At the conclusion of the sabbatical/renewal season, Fr. Scott and the Holy Family community will come together to share the fruits of each of our experiences.

As plans are finalized for this sabbatical/renewal season, watch for updates on the journey in *News and Views*, the Rocky Mountain Regional Council's newsletter.

## Rocky Mountain Region Event

### Advent Day of Recollection



An Advent Day of Recollection is being sponsored at Light of Christ Ecumenical Catholic Community in Longmont on Saturday, December 4.

Beginning at 9:00 a.m. with fellowship and light fare, the morning will include Advent reflection, quiet time and music. Eucharist will conclude the day by 1:00 pm.

*"Birthing and Embodying the Living Christ,"* a morning reflection with Rev. Len Schreiner, Vicar, Rocky Mountain Region. Len will explore the nature of the perennial incarnation of Christ's life in us using presentation, meditation periods, optional small groups, his own music and recorded music and concluding with a contemplative Mass.

This spiritual activity is being spearheaded by the Rocky Mountain Regional Council as a way for all four of the region's communities to interact and experience communal fellowship on a quarterly basis. A September activity brought all four of the communities together at Joshua Station in Denver by providing and serving an evening meal for its 80 residents.

### How I found the ECC



#### **Growing Up Catholic and Finding My New Church by Marybel Good, Church of the Beloved**

In my childhood experience, being Catholic was intrinsically woven with strands of diversity, social justice, food for the hungry, service to the poor, equity for immigrants—so many of society's issues that lay the foundation for my personal and political values in adulthood.

I was born in Selma, Alabama in 1965, the only white baby in a black community served by the Fathers of St. Edmund mission. My parents were living in a church-owned building, teaching and running a boys' club. Before Selma, my father had been a primary organizer for the Young Christian Students college movement, recruiting students at campuses to work for social justice.

Growing up on the lower east side of New York City in the 1970s and 80s, we lived on the edge of Chinatown and attended a church that was primarily Hispanic. The church, St. Teresa's, owned the building we lived in. My dad cleaned the bingo hall and priests and nuns were friends and frequent dinner guests. My mom worked for Bread for the World and later at Catholic Relief Services.

As a young adult living away from home I held this rich, Catholic experience in my heart, but I did not agree with a lot of Church policy and Church had no appeal to me. Yet, I hope I have lived my faith through my life choices. Whether in my past role as a Big Sister, a foster parent, an immigration amnesty volunteer or a non-profit employee, I tried to put my time and energy into programs that bring dignity to people.

In 1993, when my soon-to-be husband and I decided that we wanted to be married by a priest we began "shopping" for a parish. We were making our home in Colorado and found a wonderful church with plastic seats, lively music, a strong culture of social justice and a kind pastor who liked to wear his team's colors on football Sundays. For many years, this worked for us.

The church in Colorado was changing, and our parish, which had always had a "free spirit" ambiance, was conforming. Although we had met a lot of wonderful people, some of the new priests rotating through our church were short on people skills, long on telling us what we were doing wrong. Big issues began to weigh on my heart: the cover-up of abuse, using abortion to make the 2008 presidential race a one-issue election, the Pope's anti-condom statement in an AIDS-ridden Africa.

My husband and I were married in the Church, baptized four children and saw two children through First Communion, and yet, I felt stuck. I didn't know how to reconcile my faith, which was rich in community, diversity, inclusiveness, generosity and compassion with the Church as it is today.

In the fall of 2009, there was a front page article in our local newspaper about a woman who had been ordained as a Catholic priest. I was immediately intrigued; after all, everyone knows that this is not possible. Little did I know that we were about to embark on a new faith journey as a family. We had stumbled upon the Ecumenical Catholic Communion (ECC). On its website, the ECC states that "we are deeply committed to our Catholic identity and practice a distinctively Catholic Faith Tradition that is rooted in the ancient Church.

We also believe that as Catholics we have the responsibility of honoring our Catholic Tradition while responding in love and wisdom to the needs and realities of the contemporary world." Wow.

As a family, we attended the Church of the Beloved in Northglenn on the first Sunday of Advent this past December. We were nervous and not sure what to expect. Greeters welcomed us immediately—it is hard to ignore our big and noisy family in a small church. Before Mass, one member made a point of letting us know that we were all welcome to participate in communion. The presider was Mother Kae who is an ordained priest and also a wife and a mother.

As anyone who has grown up Catholic can imagine, this felt strange and different. However, the people were kind and the Mass was Catholic, easing our nervousness. I was relieved to see an Advent wreath, one of the Christmas traditions we practiced in our own home. The songs we sang were ones we knew, and the prayers we said were the ones we have always said. Everything about the celebration of Mass was familiar and the statement from the priest that "all are welcome at our table" moved me.

Could it be this easy? Was there really a Catholic option for people like me? We had stumbled upon a Catholic Church that was fully inclusive and that better reflected the values I want to pass onto my children.

Knowing that the ECC is an option for others gives me hope for the future of the Catholic Church. I am not the only person of my generation struggling with issues of church, both in America and globally. For sure, there must be others like me, raised Catholic who would like to continue to be Catholic, but can't support the Roman Catholic Church of today. If you meet any of these people, please let them know that "all are welcome at the Ecumenical Catholic Communion."

**Editor's note:** This article is a shortened version of the one that appeared in the October 2010 issue of *The American Catholic*. This article is reprinted by permission.

## Giving Thanks

by Sheila Dierks

Again it comes. Giving Thanks day. But why, we remind ourselves, only one day? How do we find ways to make Gratitude the way in which we live?

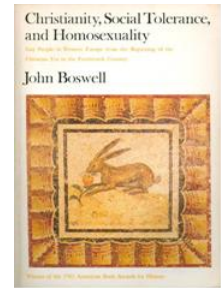
Brother David Steindl-Rast, in his lovely book, *Gratefulness, the Heart of Prayer*, suggests we begin with Surprise, opening ourselves up to its possibilities. Surprise gets our attention. It leads to the Amazement of what we did not earn.

That full response to the present moment expands into Gratefulness, which can be poured out into Thankfulness each day of our year.

To participate in how Brother David sees amazement, open YouTube to: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLIXHPBhC4&feature=related>

## Book Review

**A review of John Boswell's  
*Christianity, Social Tolerance  
and Homosexuality*  
by Tim Shead,  
Light of Christ**



One of the joys of being a member of our communion is our individuality. Freed from the hierarchical dictates of dogma, we are directed to follow Philippians 2:12 "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." To respectfully question the status quo is not only our right but our duty. The doctrines that so many follow today are rooted in what has gone before, especially in the writings of the Angelic Doctor, Saint Thomas Aquinas. Therefore, to reconcile these doctrines with our modern world, it is of great use to understand the historical development of the doctrines. First published in 1980, John Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* traces the complex changes in social tolerance of homosexuality from the Greco-Roman acceptance of gays in pre-Christian times and Thomas Aquinas' denunciation of homosexuality in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In this landmark work, Boswell openly challenges the thought process that the Christian faith has always been antithetical to the concept of homosexuality.

Using an engaging and exceptionally erudite manner, Boswell divides the exploration into four parts. In the first section, he establishes the background, outlining the scope and purpose of the work, discussing definitions of homosexuality in history, and a substantive overview of the cultural place of gay men in Roman culture up to the time of Christ. The second section works through a historical-critical examination of the relevant Scripture, a discussion of the place of a nascent Christianity in a declining Empire, and the theological traditions of the Church Fathers which carry us forward. The third section canvases post-Empire Europe (alternately called the Early Middle Ages or the Dark Ages), the revival of urban life during the 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries and the flowering of a relatively open gay culture. The final section discusses the rise of intolerance to homosexuality in Europe during the 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries, discussing both the social changes and intellectual changes that brought this about, ending with a summary.

Throughout the work, the scholarship oozes from the pages with footnotes which threaten to overwhelm the main text. As if this was insufficient to the task, Boswell includes two appendices with texts and translations of primary sources.

The true test of a book of this nature is two-fold. It must generate debate and the scholarship must stand the test of time. For 30 years, people have been passionately arguing over Boswell's conclusions, but few challenge the quality of the data to this day. For a deeply informative look at the development of attitudes towards homosexuality in the Christian West, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* is an invaluable resource.

Boswell, J. (2005). *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.

### Frankly Speaking by Rev. Frank Quintana

Tony and Carolyn<sup>1</sup> had a quarrel with the Roman Catholic Church starting with pre-marital counseling 28 years ago. They missed a session because of a scheduling mix-up. The pastor



scolded them as if they were kids from the parochial school down the street.

"It was not our fault, but he had issues with us. He threatened not to marry us because we missed a session," said Tony, clearly still stinging at the memory of what he considered priestly arrogance.

The relationship of the couple with the Catholic Church went downhill from there. They, both raised in deeply devout families, disagreed with the church's positions banning artificial birth control, intimacy of engaged couples, and felt they were constantly being "spoken down to" in homilies and resented what Carolyn said was "the guilt" the Catholic Church heaped on people. "I didn't want that for my kids," she said.

Today, Tony and Carolyn, who raised their twin girls in their home parish, Holy Evangelists Episcopal Church, are still happy with their decision to leave, what they now call the "Roman institution."

"Our decision was not to leave the faith and spirituality we were raised with. We loved the Mass, the sacraments, the prayers, all of it. We loved being Catholic. We just couldn't live with the old 'pray, pay and obey' mentality that we thought Vatican II would sweep away," Carolyn says.

"We wanted to be engaged, and dialogued with," says Tony, "not dictated to! We were willing to learn and explore and reason. Had the church done that, respecting our opinions and accepting where we were, we may have still been there."

They are not alone. The pastor, Fr. Morton Smith-Horvath, reports that more than 15 per cent of the members in his congregation of nearly 400 used to be "Romans." Holy Evangelists is a "high church" Episcopal parish, sometimes called "Anglo-catholic," because it reflects the strong influence of the nineteenth-century Catholic revival in Anglicanism. "This makes us appealing to disaffected Romans," according to Fr. Smith-Horvath.

Vicki Forrest spent years wrestling with Catholicism, mustering the will to show up at Mass with her family, irritated by the teachings she didn't agree with and attitudes about women that made Sunday Mass a weekly occasion for anger and not joy. Rome's declaration that women would never be ordained and that Catholics were forbidden to even think or speak about its eventuality sent her out the door.

She started meeting with a small group of other disappointed Catholic women in her area. Eventually, she grew weary of "whining all the time about the state of women in the Catholic Church." She began attending St. Andrew Methodist Church in her neighborhood. She's never looked back.

Vicki was later joined by her husband, David, a lifelong and devout Catholic who said his loyalty was finally worn down when a new bishop in their diocese began dictating changes in liturgy, requiring such things as chalices made of precious metals, moving laity farther from the altar, forbidding the joining of hands during The Lord's Prayer, prohibiting priests from leaving the altar during the kiss of peace, and going to communion in bread only. Yet he describes his move from his parish as gradual and occurring over time, with no one thing causing him to leave.

Berta and Johnnie, lifelong Catholics, self-described as formerly average in their practice, did not have any real arguments with the church. Where they didn't see eye to eye with Rome, they just decided to follow their conscience.

"We felt, or maybe it was more me, that a religious and spiritual element to our family life was important to a healthy family. We were both raised Catholic, so we just continued in what we knew," says Berta.

All well and good, from their perspective, until a life changing circumstance affected their family. "It all started when our eldest son, Johnnie Jr. came home from school one day in the late fall. He attended the local Catholic high school. When he came home, it was obvious that he had been in a fight. His nose was broken, and one eye was swollen shut. Berta called me at work, very upset and asked me to come home right away. She told me what had happened and that Br. Gerard, the principal, had called wanting to set up a conference," recounts Johnnie, Sr.

"It was so unlike him to get into a fight. He was a good student. He was pretty popular and well liked. The teachers admired him. Sure there were those who didn't like him, but

that's true of most of us. Anyway, Johnnie refused to return to school, and wouldn't tell us the whole story. The next day was Friday, so we let him stay home."

"We made an appointment with Br. Gerard for that Monday. When we got there, he had a somber look on his face. He told us that Johnnie started the fight and was suspended, pending a review of the situation, he may be expelled. We were dumbfounded. Johnnie was a good boy, never had any trouble at school. We had a hard time believing that he had started the fight. There must have been something that made him feel seriously threatened. Was the other boy hurt? Given Johnnie's record and reputation, could he not get off with a warning? What was the fight about?"

Berta continues: "Br. Gerard told us, with a certain tone, that we needed to have a talk with our son. He dismissed us, telling us we would be hearing from him soon. Boom! In and out inside of fifteen minutes!"

"When we got home, we tried to talk to Johnnie," Johnnie Sr. says. "At first he resisted, and said he didn't want to talk about it. He didn't care if he was expelled and would be just fine going to the public high school in town."

"When we tried to press, he burst into tears and told us he thought he might be gay. That was what the fight was about. In the Christian Morals class, the subject came around to homosexuality. Johnny asked several questions which, according to Br. Gerard, could have been construed as challenging the Church's teaching on homosexuality."

"After school, one of the other boys came up to Johnnie, seemingly to continue the conversation that started in class. After a short time this other boy asked our son if he was gay, is that why he was 'against the church?' Johnnie replied, 'What if I am gay? What difference would that make? And if I am gay, how does that mean I'm against the church?'"

"The other boy let out with a string of foul name-calling and said Johnnie was going to burn in hell. He elbowed our son as he turned. Johnnie pushed back and the fight was on."

"Br. Gerard called, saying another appointment was unnecessary, that the Board had decided that violence was not to be tolerated at school, and that although Johnnie had an excellent record in the past, that the school's policy against violence trumps any consideration he might be given. If you're wondering, the other boy was not expelled; he was only suspended for a few days."

"The mood was somber around the house for a long time. We accepted the expulsion without a protest. We put our emotional energy into coming to terms with our son coming out."

"After his expulsion from school, which we came to believe, was more because he was perceived as 'militant gay' than

anything else, Johnnie was very depressed and angry. Before we sought family therapy we spoke to our pastor."

"Fr Steve seemed very sympathetic, and met with us a number of times. He encouraged us to love and support our son, no matter what, and he would be willing to talk to Johnnie, if we thought it would do any good."

"Although Johnnie continued to go to Mass with the family and receive communion, he didn't want to talk to the priest, because, he figured, the priest would probably hold to the church's teaching which he already knew because he had been reading."

"We felt isolated. We knew about PFLAG, but we felt we wanted to give and get support from other Catholic families going through this. We went to Fr. Steve and asked if we could start a support group at the Church for other Catholic families experiencing the same thing. He said that he'd think about it and get back to us."

"For several weeks, after Mass, Fr Steve would shake our hands and say that he has been thinking about our request, or that he was going to talk to the Chancery for some guidance. As we waited for a reply, we got a letter from Fr. Steve. In the envelope where copies of pastoral letters from the bishops. In his letter, Fr Steve declined our offer to start a support group. As charitable as the work might be, he didn't feel the parish would be ready to accept a group exploring the subject matter we proposed."

"The documents Fr. Steve enclosed had a pastoral tone, and in some ways very comforting, but the phrases 'objectively disordered' and 'intrinsically evil' cut into our hearts. That was not our experience of our son. Since then, we've worked through a lot in family therapy. Although no longer in therapy, we have a way to go."

"Our son is in graduate school, now. He quit going to Mass when he was in college. 'In the end, Mom, the church was not there for me when I needed it the most. I only felt abandoned and lost. I felt unacceptable and like damaged goods, someone who God could never accept.' That breaks my mother's heart."

"My husband and I have slowly drifted away, too. Sometimes when there are weddings or funerals, or special events in our extended families, I get a little nostalgic and miss going to Mass, but I sense that we just wouldn't fit anymore."

These three families fit the profile of disaffected Catholics who are leaving the church by droves, and are either dropping out altogether or finding refuge in other denominations. Some perceive that the Roman leadership has spiraled further and further into a more aggressive absolutist, monarchical and judgmental kind of leadership that distinctly and genuinely has embraced a method that is neither pastoral nor loving. Others feel the conciliatory

renewal that was to occur in the post-Vatican II Roman Catholic Church has gone stagnant. While still others feel that there is no longer a place for them in the church where they grew up, because their lives don't exemplify that of "the good Catholic."

A study released in 2008 by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life appears to support the sense that Catholics are leaving in greater numbers. It reported that the Roman Catholic Church in America has experienced ... "the greatest net loss" of any major religious group. Slightly more than 10 percent of American adults (10.1 percent) have left the Catholic church after having been raised Catholic. The adult population of the United States was 228.1 million in 2008. So, if one in 10 U.S. adults were former Catholics, that 22.8 million would make ex-Catholics the second-largest religious group in the country behind the Roman Catholic Church itself. In the U.S., who list 68.1 million members, according to the National Council of Churches' 2010 Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches. The ex-Catholics would far outnumber the next largest denomination, Southern Baptists, who claim 16.2 million adherents.

We, in the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, after this just completed synod, are uniquely equipped and poised to offer a home to the millions of our sister and brother Catholics who have grown disillusioned, disgruntled, or disaffected. Many, who drift from the institutions of Rome, still love the Catholic Faith and spirituality. Yet they feel they have no alternative but to drop out altogether or to join another denomination. While we honor and respect other denominations, perhaps we can offer a new vision of a just Catholicism. A Church that welcomes women to its altars. A Church that welcomes the accountability of its leadership to be transparent, loving and pastoral. A Church that welcomes LGBT and ALL people to its pews. But, they cannot come if they do not hear. They cannot hear if we do not tell them.

<sup>1</sup> The individuals named in this article are composites of many people Fr. Frank Quintana has counseled.



**Editor's note:** Each issue of News and Views will include a story under the heading "How I found the ECC." To include your story about how you found the ECC in future issues of News and Views, please send it by email to Sheila Dierks at [books@wovenword.com](mailto:books@wovenword.com).

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