



Outward from the Centre

A publication of The United Centre for Theological Studies
Editor: Sandy Peterson

Message from our Executive Director

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My brother-in law loves Christmas. He has loved Christmas since I first knew him when he was thirteen years old. He is now fifty. I think he loves Christmas now more than he did when he was a teen-ager. He starts to get ready in the summer buying presents for the kids. Usually around that time he phones his sister to tell her the state of his gifting buying. November it is ornament time. He adds to his collection of Santas and elves and reindeer. He even has a Nativity scene or two with countless sheep. He also has a collection of nutcrackers that covers the mantle from end to end. Then on December 1 the tree goes up. It is always tall, green and real. There is no plastic Christmas in his house. The lights are added and each ornament put in its place. There are green boughs everywhere throughout and cheesy Santa is on the lawn. By the time the fat man comes down the chimney everything is perfect.

I don't think I am sharing any family secrets when I say that my brother-in-law is not religious and I don't think he would call himself a spiritual person either. But he loves Christmas. He just doesn't



Terry Hidichuk, Executive Director

connect the dots to any faith tradition at all. He's not alone.

I have done a lot of thinking about this over the last few years and I have come to the conclusion that there are really two Christmases. There is the secular Christmas of celebrations and family gatherings, and Charles Dickens and Gramma's shortbread. That is the Christmas that comes out of a certain cultural context. That's the Christmas my brother-in-law loves and more power to him.

Then there's the Christmas of the story. The Christmas of Bethlehem, shepherds, wise men, Mary and Joseph, a baby and the incarnate love of God.

I have come to believe those two Christmases are separate. One





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Christmas is rooted in a consumer culture that is fueled by some innate need to hunt and gather more and more stuff. The other Christmas is the love of God at work in the world.

The German theologian Jurgen Moltmann tells us the awful truth about life. He writes, "*humankind is not loved by humankind*". There are moments when the chalk lines between the two are blurred and the Christmas of the culture stops and allows the Christmas of the story to emerge. In those moments love holds sway over hate. And in a particular moment in time we find the presence of Christmas. Sometimes it doesn't even need December.

I am reminded of a story that I heard about that was reported on extensively, I have used the CBC.ca as my source.

When Mahmoud Elkadri arrived at the mosque in Cold Lake, Alta., early Friday morning, two days after Officer Cirillo was killed and gunfire reverberated through the halls of Parliament, he was met with a disturbing sight. The words "*Go home*" and "*Canada*" had been sprayed across the front face of the building sometime over the night. Vandals had also smashed two of the mosque's windows.

"When you're coming in the morning for a peaceful prayer, it is hard," said Elkadri, who is one of the mosque's board members.

"This is our home. My kids have been born and raised in Cold Lake. ... I have been in Cold Lake since 1996." Only a couple hours later, it was a much different sight. Over the course of the morning, dozens of people from the town showed up to help repair the damage. Some helped paint over the damage, while others taped their own messages to the window reading "You Are Home" and "Love Your Neighbour."

Cold Lake resident Matt Downey, who came down to the mosque with his daughter to deliver flowers to Elkadri, says he wanted to show that the vandals didn't speak for the majority of the people in town.

The presence of Christmas is found in the face, in the heart and in the actions of Matt Downey and others who bring flowers when some want to throw rocks. In those moments when humankind loves humankind, there is hope.

Blessings to all.

Peace.

Terry Hidichuk
Executive Director
United Centre for Theological Studies



As many of you are aware the United Centre for Theological Studies and the Global College are offering a joint course entitled: Theological Reflections in Context: Religion, Rights & Relationships in Israel & the West Bank that will run during the Winter Term 2015. As part of the course some students will be traveling to Israel and the West Bank. If you would like to support these students please click the link below and watch this video: <https://foundation.uwinnipeg.ca/projects/support-student-field-course-to-israel-and-the-west-bank/>



News and notes:

Debbie Orton (STM 2007) is presently finishing up a D.Min at Acadia University in Wolfville, NS and is serving as the Spiritual Care Practitioner/Chaplain at Valley Regional Hospital, Kentville Nova Scotia.

UWSA Health Plan

Did you know that UCTS Graduate Students who do not have health insurance or just want to supplement the plan they already have can opt into the UWSA health plan. For more information please contact the UWSA office.

UWSA Health Plan Coordinator | T: 204-786-9992 | F: 204-779-4115 | E: health@theuwsa.ca

The University of Winnipeg Students' Association (UWSA) Health Plan provides extended health, dental and vision benefits.

Students may choose to opt in to the UWSA health plan by filling out an [opt-change form](#). You can also extend your coverage to a spouse and/or dependents by completing using the same [opt-change form](#).

For forms, deadlines and more information, see [Student Health Plan](#).



Dia-blogging.

A word or many more from James Christie, Professor of Whole World Ecumenism and Dialogue Theology, and Director of the Ridd Institute for Religion and Global Policy

OK. I confess. It's not a word; and I'm not really blogging. But raise your hand if I have your attention; at least for a few minutes. And I will gradually drag myself kicking and screaming into the 21st Century over the upcoming months. Watch for a fresh web presence and (gasp, sigh) maybe even twitter.

For now, read on: there's a lot happening!

I write just shy of the winter solstice, and have to note that these shortest days of the year are becoming more and more crammed with possibilities for the New Year.

On a personal and connective note, both the Global College and UCTS have a new relationship under construction with **Project Ploughshares**, the definitive peace initiative of the Canadian Christian constituency. Born of the Canadian Council of Churches and from the fertile minds of Ernie Regehr and Murray Thomson in 1976, Ploughshares vision is that of "a secure world without war, a just world at peace." Headquartered now at Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo, I was elected Chair of the Governing Council as of December 1st. We anticipate a range of new possibilities for both collaborative action and research. Check out www.ploughshares.ca

The most eminent Professor **Patrice Brodeur** of both the *Universite de Montreal* and the *King Abdullah Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue* in Vienna will deliver the *El Tassi Lecture*, **Wednesday**,

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**There is still time to register WINTER term
Deadline to pay Winter term fees is Jan 19, 2015**

CHECK OUT THE [NEW TIMETABLE](#)

Registration for Spring/Summer starts March 1, 2015

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January 21st, 7 pm, in Eckhardt-Gramate Hall, Third Floor, Centennial Hall. A world leader in dialogue, Patrice will speak on *Building Space for Dialogue: Identity, Politics and Religion*.

“*Calling all theologs,*” as we used to say! The *Canadian Theological Students’ Conference* will meet at The University of Winnipeg from April 29th-May 3rd, 2015. The theme will be *Theology and Human Rights*. The option of participating in a 3 credit intensive course will be offered: watch the UCTS website.

This is but an anticipatory taste of much to come. Watch the website!

May you all experience every blessing of the season, and enjoy the happiest of New Years to come!



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The United Centre for Theological Studies is committed to excellence in theological education within a liberal arts University. We welcome all those who wish to study theology and we seek to empower leaders for religious and social service by providing a safe and respectful environment for critical reflection that is contextual and global in scope and values social and ecological justice. We are shaped by the historic contributions of the United Church of Canada and its commitment to the social gospel movement, liberation theology, and whole world ecumenism.