

June 30, 2010

Dear Colleagues and Friends;

This morning in our chapel service, Lydia Pederson led us in a hymn sing covering a great selection of hymns written by Canadians. Lydia played the piano and was accompanied by Bill Kennedy on the trumpet, and Abiel Khalema on the drum. It was a fine way to prepare for Canada Day, and I noticed that Lydia and I had shared the idea of wearing red and white today, in honour of tomorrow's celebrations.

Oh Canada, as it is found in Voices United, was included in the selections, and that reminded me of a time a few years ago when I attended the church of one of my most admired ministers on Canada Day. I remember being touched by the sermon, which had offered a meaningful theme out of what I might have considered to be one of those impossibly violent Old Testament passages. Conversing after the service, I found that the minister had left with a heavy heart, having been roundly criticized by someone in the congregation who felt that he must have been deliberately unpatriotic to have a July 1 service that did not include the singing of Oh Canada. I was astounded at the time, (it was before I worked for the church) but I think of it now as an example of how we within the church sometimes fall short of our Christian ideals in how we behave towards one another. Fortunately it isn't always that way – there are wonderful inspiring moments of relationship too!

As we approach July 1 this year, it is hard to reflect on all the things we celebrate about being Canadians, without feeling disquiet about the events that surrounded the G20 conference in Toronto last weekend. Having worked closely with police for a good part of my career, I was very conscious throughout the weekend (and in the time of preparation leading up to it) of the tremendous pressure that they would feel in trying to protect world leaders, and all citizens, in the context of large groups of people where moods and behaviours can shift quickly. It's very difficult work. At the same time, hearing the news reports in the aftermath of the meeting, and reading some of the individual stories of people who were detained, there are some shocking stories that, if true, are impossible to understand in the context of the rights and freedoms that we assume are part of living in Canada. It will take more than long weekend barbecues and boating to calm our national distress at the images from a week ago.

Yesterday we had a baby shower for Sarah Bernath, a colleague in the Office of the Moderator and General Secretary who is expecting her first child in August. We all seemed to appreciate the time to relax together and share in looking ahead to the arrival of this new child. These times, aside from being good fun and fellowship, make one conscious of the best and worst in the world that we will welcome this new little Canadian into.

Lydia's choice of prayers for this morning's worship lifted up the best of what we seek to be in our intercultural United Church of Canada. I wonder if people sometimes think it is too commonplace to use the prayers offered in Voices United, but they are such good prayers. "You Embrace All Peoples", found at #525 contains the words:

"Help us to remember

That you embrace all people with your love,  
That all religion is a response to you,  
That the yearnings of other hearts  
Are much like our own, and are known to you."

Thanks be to God. Blessings to all for Canada Day, and all the days beyond.

Nora Sanders