

Renewal News!

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The Renewal Fellowship within The Presbyterian Church in Canada

is a means to contact and encourage those concerned about the evangelical renewal of the PCC.

Our mission:

To lead each other and The Presbyterian Church in Canada to authentic Biblical thinking, powerful Spirit-led prayer and effective Gospel witness.

Our executive director is available to speak to congregations and groups weekdays or on Sundays.

Contact info Page 8.

The Renewal News is a quarterly publication of Renewal Fellowship.

We welcome your stories

We have a prayer

By Rev. Andy Cornell
Executive Director

A renewed call to prayer for The Presbyterian Church in Canada has been answered. Nine new prayer groups — in varying stages of development — are in the works in reaction to decisions by General Assembly in June to redefine marriage. The proposed changes — in the form of remits — still require the approval of presbyteries and next year's Assembly before adoption. The new prayer partners join two existing groups in Hamilton and Ottawa.

The impetus is Renewal Fellowship's statement in reaction to the remits. In July, the board approved a statement (see Page 2) which states that Assembly's decision to move towards full inclusion of non-celibate LGB persons contravenes our understanding of authentic Biblical thinking. Renewal is calling for presbyters to vote against the remits.

The statement was widely distributed. Prayer is the logical followup. I was encouraged by the response to our call to prayer in my July 27 blog. As of early September, we are starting to work with prayer leaders in the following communities: Dresden/southwestern Ontario, Dunnville/Niagara, Regina, Huntsville/Central Ontario, Calgary, Scarborough, Grey Bruce Maitland,

Kelowna BC, London/southwestern Ontario.

Each group is being encouraged to take on a life of its own and meet according to its own calling. Prayer topics are up to the leaders and participants in each place, but Renewal is producing a prayer guide in order to kick things off, along with our ongoing national Prayer Calendar, which publishes a new prayer daily.

It's been suggested by some Renewal supporters that this effort is too little, too late. The battle to renew the PCC into orthodoxy has been lost in light of Assembly's decision. And even if the remits fail, the tide has turned.

Notwithstanding the theological drift from orthodoxy — which does not appear to be slowing down — prayer is still needed for the following reasons:

1. Those who hold to authentic Biblical thinking need prayerful support wherever they are.
2. While we need to pray for presbyters to heed God's will when considering the remits, we need to pray over the outcome if the remits pass.

See PRAYER Page 2

Plus ca change . . .

By Ian Shaw
Renewal Fellowship Chairperson.

I recognize the possibility of anthropomorphism whenever one seeks to discern the core (and secondary) messages in the scriptures. Perhaps this risk is most acute when one's imagination is activated. Nonetheless as I have been pondering various themes for this piece, I began to wonder what feelings God was experiencing as the scene in Genesis 3 [serpent, Eve, Adam and fruit] played out.

The one that I find more and more dominating the episode is sadness — deep, heart-numbing, painful sadness. God could not have

been clearer — *'And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."'* And God could not have been more intimate — *'the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day.'* And God could not have been more generous — *'The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.'*

See MESSAGES Page 5

Renewal's response to the 2019 remits on marriage and sexuality

"We are grateful to the Special Committee of Former Moderators for their diligence in presenting a report that fulfilled their mandate to offer a way forward. We are also very appreciative of the commissioners who worked hard to word remits that were deeply graceful in their design and intentions.

"However, after serious reflection, the Board agreed to take an unprecedented step, namely to comment on a decision of the General Assembly. We believe the 145th General Assembly's adoption of Pathway 'B' does not arise from authentic Biblical thinking, which is one of our three main goals for renewal in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. We therefore align ourselves with the 91 Commissioners who voted against that decision.

"We also therefore cannot support the remits which, if approved through the Barrier Act process, would alter our doctrine and practice to a position not rooted in authentic Biblical thinking.

"As we discussed these actions by Assembly, we expressed regret that so many of the resources within our denomination have been dedicated to this issue to the detriment of other essential gospel ministry. We reaffirmed our intention to continue seeking renewal within The PCC by leading each other to authentic Biblical thinking, powerful Spirit-led prayer and effective Gospel witness.

"While the board is of one heart in our love for God, for our denomination and for each other, we were not of one mind on our response to the actions of Assembly. The absence of full unity, along with the intensity of our convictions, was and remains painful and challenging. The distress we experienced in formulating this response serves as a reminder that in this and in all things, we are called to embrace all our sisters and brothers with the grace and truth found in Jesus."

Faithfully,

The Board of the Renewal Fellowship

Remits go to presbyteries

Renewal's response to the remits — the full text is printed on this page — was released in late July and is being distributed not only to supporters but to the wider church. That's a challenge for us, as we do not have official standing in the denomination. We have to reply on our membership, supporters and social media for distribution.

We believe it's important to get the statement into the hands of each presbyter. We are working with those holding similar concerns in each presbytery.

We are also tracking how each presbytery is handling the remits. Presbyteries have until April 1, 2020 to submit their responses. That allows lots of time to consider the remits. We pray that each court will take advantage of that opportunity and will carve out a generous amount of time to discuss and debate the issue.

You can help!

- Join a local prayer group. Email renewalfellowshipccc@gmail.com and we will connect you to the closest one.
- If you are a voting member of presbytery or appendix to roll, consider acting as an ally to help distribute our statement.
- Let us know when your presbytery is discussing the issue and planning to vote. We can lift this up in prayer.

The remits consist of recommendations to allow two parallel definitions of marriage ("a man and a woman" or "two adult persons") and to allow congregations and

presbyteries to "call and ordain as ministers and elect and ordain as ruling elders LGBTQI persons (married or single)."

As it would change doctrine, the recommendations are submitted as remits for consideration under the Barrier Act.

Approval of those remits is required by at least half of the PCC's 45 presbyteries (50 per cent plus one equals 23 presbyteries) which represent at least half of the combined total of the constituent members of presbyteries. It's a double majority.

Here's an example. Assume there are 1,000 members of presbytery across the PCC (some presbyteries may have only 10, others could have 50.) Let's say 24 presbyteries approve, but when you add up the total members of those approving presbyteries, there's only 485. It fails. You could have a large number of smaller presbyteries which approve, but their combined total of presbyters may be a fraction of the total. Or let's say most of the larger presbyteries approve and the combined totals add up to 600, but most of the small presbyteries say no. It also fails.

If the double majority is not reached, the matter dies. If the double majority is reached at the presbytery level, then it goes to General Assembly 2020 for final approval. The 2020 Assembly may approve it and it immediately becomes law. Assembly may reject it and send it back to presbyteries for reconsideration. Commissioners could also take no further action, or they could send an amended or totally new proposal back to the presbyteries.

Prayer

Continued from Page 1.

I'm aware of the fact that this recent prayer initiative is in response to crisis. God has no time or patience for those who pray only in times of trouble. Job doesn't put it kindly. "People are arrogantly indifferent to God—until, of course, they're in trouble, and then God is indifferent to them. There's nothing behind such prayers except panic; the Almighty pays them no mind." (Job 35) Ouch! So it's wise to approach our reignited prayer initiative with a dose of humility. Notwithstanding the urgent situa-

tion in which we find ourselves, we need to also be thankful — eternally grateful — for the amazing things God is doing. As I've pointed out in my summer blogs, I'm so encouraged by the outpouring of faith in my brothers and sisters, like green shoots quickly sprouting up out of the ashes. The church has not died and never will die and is brimming with life. We just need more of it.

So let's guard against the temptation to use prayer as a dumping ground for trash. God will accept our tears and trash; but he also wants us to share the treasures, and there are plenty.

A message the world doesn't want to hear

Too many of us have become slaves to our desires

The following is excerpted from a message by Renewal executive director Rev. Andy Cornell to Mt. Zion Presbyterian Church in Ridgeway, Ontario on Sept. 1, 2019.

The world is changing – fast. Every week, there's a new advance in technology. Each year, our computers and cell phones become outdated. Trends come and go like the flavour of the month.

On the one hand, change is good. Growth is impossible without it. Any farmer will tell you that. And Christ tells us to turn from our selfish ways.

Wouldn't it be great to be able to press a pause button and stop life for everyone else, but allow you to wander around and take a look at things that are frozen in time? It would be a way of taking stock of the world. Hollywood does this. There's a technique in which the scene freezes except for one actor, who explains what's going on to the viewer. Of course, the world of photography is all about that. Consider three iconic images. There's Muhammad Ali's knock out punch of Sonny Liston, the V-J Day Times Square street scene with the sailor kissing a girl, and the planting of the American flag on a mountaintop in Iwo Jima. These are great photos, which capture a moment in time and tells us all that we need to know.

Imagine your own lives. Press the figurative pause button and then take a walk around and for as long as you need to get an idea of what's going on in the world. I did that recently. I spent some time in thought, asking myself, what's the state of the world in which we live?

I believe it's important to do that. If we, as followers of Christ, are to witness to the word, we need to get a handle on what's going on. What's the zeitgeist, the spirit of our times? The postwar years, the 1960s, the 70s, 80s and every decade is known for a particular attitude. Today, I'm going to suggest that the word which captures the spirit of the times is this: egoism. It's a fancy word which the Oxford English Dictionary defines as "self-interest as the foundation of morality." Unpack that: it means our values are based solely on what I want or what gives

me pleasure in life. In other words, it's all about me.

We hear a lot these days about the Millennials, the generation of people who are in their 20s and 30s and how they are so high on themselves and expect to make a lot of money and retire by the age of 40. Truth is, I could have easily used that to describe my own generation, people born in the 1960s. There's nothing new here, except our obsession with ourselves has deepened to the point where it's become a crisis.

We live in an age in which the prevailing philosophy is that there are no rules. You decide for yourself. The biggest one, at least for me, is the belief that a child can choose his or her gender. Not so long ago it was only teens who might have been aware that we have varying degrees of masculine and feminine qualities in us. Now children, long before they are teens, are being told the same thing with the suggestion that it's OK for boys to think and act as girls to the point where they can contemplate changing their own gender. It's not uncommon for young people in their 20s to identify as neither male nor female and come up with their own pronoun.

This is just one example of a world in which we've stopped looking to authority for cues on behaviour and beliefs. We look to ourselves. We look within.

Is it any wonder that our churches are mostly empty and the souls that enter these places are from a different age?

In that light, I want to give you some hope. I want to review the fundamentals. It's good to press pause and remind ourselves who we are and why we're here. And not why we're in a church on a Sunday morning, but why we're on this planet.

Assuming that we believe in God, the one who created the heavens and earth and remains active in the universe, we are told by God's Son that the two most important commandments are to love God and love each other. "You must love

the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.'³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.³⁹ A second is equally important: **'Love your neighbor as yourself.'**⁴⁰ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:37-40)

How do we show our love for God? Same as we do for our earthly parents. "If you love me, obey my commandments" (John 14:15). His commandments are found throughout scripture. It's the foundation of the authority of scripture. His commandments are to live in obedi-

Our values are based solely on what I want or what gives me pleasure in life. In other words, it's all about me.

ence to Him. Read scripture. Listen for the prophetic voices of our day. Ask if what we are doing is in tune with the spirit of the law.

Which leads us to the second of the commandments, to love one another. We care for the least of these. And that includes pointing out when someone is doing something that's bad for them and bad for creation.

That's the first thing. The second is this. After Jesus fed thousands and walked on water, he told his amazed followers to seek eternal life. How? Very easy. "This is the only work God wants from you: **Believe in the one he has sent**" (John 6:29). Believe that he was the Son of God. Believe in what he did. Believe in what he is doing.

Jesus also told us to put God first. After his disciples rebuked him for describing his death, saying "never, this will not happen to you!" Jesus told them to be quiet. "Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's." And then he said this: "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must **give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me.**"²⁵ If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. (Matthew 16:24-26)

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A message the world doesn't want to hear

Too many of us have become slaves to our desires

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So what do we have here but a radical call to love a God we can't see and love each other even though we don't like each other, and to believe in the unbelievable Jesus. And then to forget about what you want in life. Give it up for God. Submit your entire being to the one who created you. It's about God.

It's the polar opposite to the prevailing spirit of this age.

Let's take it a step further and see how this might apply. Paul's instructions in 1 Cor. 6 make sense.

"You say, 'I am allowed to do anything'—but not everything is good for you. And even though 'I am allowed to do anything,' I must not become a slave to anything."

This was written to the most liberal society. Corinth had permissive attitudes that were similar to today: anything goes. Paul quotes their own words: "I am allowed to do anything."

There is a belief then and now that if God has created something, and it's enjoyable, then we are fools not to take advantage. God gave us bodies that are capable of experiencing great pleasure, so use them. But the problem is that we become addicted to that pleasure. What does Paul say in the next sentence, don't "become a slave to anything." Don't let anything control your life. I love how Eugene Peterson puts in his translation:

"Just because something is technically legal doesn't mean that it's spiritually appropriate. If I went around doing whatever I thought I could get by with, I'd be a slave to my whims." (The Message)

There is so much wisdom in that. Read it over, pause and reflect on the deep truths.

Scripture reminds us that we are to be slaves to God in Christ. God is to be our master. Paul called himself a slave to Jesus Christ. And we are reminded that if we want to be free from the control of sin in our lives, we need to be slaves to Christ. Be under His control.

That's the opposite of what the world teaches, that if only we all signed up for yoga and spent more time in quiet contemplation and got in touch with our inner beings, then we would be at peace with ourselves and each other. What that amounts to is worship of the self. God is missing. Which is beyond tragic. It's actually insane to think that we are our own gods.

Many corners of the church have bought into that lie. It's why many churches have abandoned scripture in pursuit of a philosophy of peace. Didn't Jesus tell us that he came to make us free? Didn't Jesus come to bring life, and bring it to the full? Yes, but Jesus wasn't talking about the body. He was talking about our souls and eternity.

The truth is that God has chosen us, he created us in his image. We are fearfully and wonderfully made. He has chosen to allow sin to enter into this world and for it to be part of the human experience. He has chosen to send his Son to show us the way and to live a sinless life. And to die for us. God has chosen one way to connect to Him, and that's through his Son, who said clearly that "I am the way, the truth and

the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

I have no choice but to believe that. It is admittedly a narrow path.

When we give in to our human desires, we lose control. Our desires control us. They lead to destruction. When we give into God, He controls us and leads to life.

Here's a truth that the world refuses to believe. We need to position ourselves as slaves to Christ. We need to submit. Who is our master? If it's not God, then it's the enemy. It's black and white. That does not mean we become robots. It means we surrender control to him. There's a difference.

Unless you consciously make God the ruler of your life and seek a lifestyle based on Biblical purity, then you are working for the enemy. (Don't for a second think I've achieved that. None of us have and none of us will. We are all sinners.)

We need to recognize that and turn from our sins, turn to Christ and believe that he is the way, the truth and the life.

We are wise not to be slaves to this world and the lies of the enemy. We will never be satisfied. We will go deeper and deeper in our pursuit of peace and never find it.

We are invited to be slaves to Christ, who truly brings life, who brings freedom from the lies, freedom from anxiety and worry. This is true peace.

If only the world would understand.

We are reminded that if we want to be free from the control of sin in our lives, we need to be slaves to Christ.

A prayer request, or two!

Want people from coast to coast to **pray** for your congregation?
Send requests (specific dates and events are helpful) to Linda Shaw at
RFPrayer@gmail.com.

The next deadline for our Prayer Calendar (January-March) is **Dec. 1.**

A holy discontent

By Diane Eaton

Renewal board member

Discontent can be a destructive energy that harms us physically, emotionally and relationally. It may be a symptom of ingratitude or an inability to accept one's lot in life – never having “*learned to be content whatever the circumstances*” (Phil. 4:11 NIV). At its root, one is shaking an angry fist at God, accusing Him of failing to satisfy one's expectations. This kind of discontent is self-centered, cynical, and can become vengeful. It turns its back on God. It pushes others away from God. It's unholy discontent. There's also a holy kind of discontent, as author, W. Willimon suggests: What makes it holy? “A holy kind of discontent seems to be fertile ground for God's prophets.” * I say: It keeps facing God. It empathizes with God's heart for humanity. It sees human fallenness from God's perspective. It refuses to discount or deny anything that assaults God's character. It yearns for God's mercy on fallen humanity. It is expressed in prayerful weeping and pleading with God, even while resting contentedly in His promises.

Unholy discontent lacks mercy. It refuses to cooperate with God's lavish grace towards sinners. It leaves nothing but cold dead emptiness. Unholy discontent may be the driving force behind pushy and noisy evangelistic zeal. It's a turn-off. It produc-

es infertile and passionless Christianity. Conversely, holy discontent ignites spiritual passion. It is propelled by divine love, which energizes people to partner with God in the formation of true and vibrant Christian living.

Do you see why holy discontent is “fertile ground”? It is life-producing! It flows out of Life itself – God's life. It refuses to give up on God's enduring promises, even when circumstances look bleak, and sin seems unabated. It allows one to stand firm, with spiritual eyes watchful and fixed on the bigger hope. This holy kind of discontent is seen in the prophetic writings. That's why the Biblical prophets can still inspire us today, as they did in the early church.

The apostle Peter underscored the value of the prophet writings in scripture, saying: “*We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.*” (2 Peter 1: 19 NIV)

We may not be prophets. Yet like them, we will find ourselves distressed over the effects of injustice and evil –

whether through civil authorities, social peers, church, family, or other. Discontent is natural. Yet it is also natural to react out of strong emotions. Fear or anger may arouse our fight-or-flight instincts; and we become driven by grievance and a sense of moral superiority. Discontent is not our problem. It's the inability to see from the perspective of God's heart. We must learn to wait on the Lord, allowing

Him to transform our reactionary tendencies into mature patience and restful trust. Those qualities will guide us towards wise choices.

When affronted by human sinfulness the question is,

“Which kind of discontent will rule my life: holy or unholy discontent?”

May the following be our own personal prayer: Lord, purge any root of unholy discontent in my heart and replace it with a holy kind of discontent. Work with me so that, even if You should require me to confront injustice and wrong, I will always be shining the beautiful light of Your Son into the brokenness.

* William H. Willimon, Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 60.

A holy kind of discontent seems to be fertile ground for God's prophets.*

Messages

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And God could not have been more personally attentive – “*The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.*”

Yet God received blatant rejection, wilful disobedience in response. Human pride asserted; humble service denied. And a second ‘not good’, divine sadness echoed throughout creation.

Two things I do not perceive in the story. One is surprise. God was not caught

off guard by human hubris. The Source of Love knows there is risk in the love we call “Agape.” In the mystery of the divine economy, restoration and salvation through Jesus was already established. God was prepared for the rebellious betrayal of Eve and Adam.

The second absence I discern is divine anger. The sadness is profound, the anger wonderfully absent. Partly because God wasn't surprised; mostly because God knows we are frail creatures of dust and is filled with compassion for us (Psalm 103). With sadness God describes the diminished prospects caused by disobedience and executes the writ of eviction. God also provides proper clothes and a promise of

evil's demise.

As I have often revisited the Board's decision to state that the decision of the 145th General Assembly to embrace Pathway ‘B’ does not reflect Authentic Biblical Thinking and to consider next steps [short and long term], I have found many emotions careening through me. Doubtless you have as well.

I believe that like the eating of the fruit in Genesis, last Assembly's decision failed the test of obedience. I doubt if God was surprised. So, I rest my hope for us and our denomination on God's compassion and ability to turn dust into gold. Join us as we engage in powerful Spirit-led prayer for The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

RF's mission

To lead each other and The Presbyterian Church in Canada to authentic Biblical thinking, powerful Spirit-led prayer, and effective Gospel witness.

A special request

First, the good news. After a few years of deficits, Renewal appears to have balanced its revenue and spending. So far in 2019, we are breaking even. God is good: donations continue and we are exercising greater self control with spending.

The bad news: our budget doesn't leave us with much room for travel. The board does meet once a year in person and the rest of the time, we gather electronically, via Zoom. That's saved a few dollars. When the executive director hits the road within a few hours of his home, the costs are not unreasonable.

But Canada is greater than just Southern Ontario. We believe it's essential for the ED and board members to be able to meet face to face with our members and others from coast to coast. The ED had a successful 10-day trip to British Columbia in 2018, but it cost several thousand more than we had budgeted. We vowed not to hit the road again unless money was in the bank in advance.

Which brings us back to good news. The ED's call for donations in August prior to his planned road trip to Moncton (Sept. 20-23, 2019) resulted in several donations. That trip's cost is now covered. Thank you! Donations are still needed for future travel as he sets up new prayer initiatives (See story Page 1) and brings encouragement to others in this season of theological discontent in the PCC.

It's worth reminding you that almost 100 per cent of our revenue is from donations. Prayer is always the most important contribution you can make. And if the Lord is leading you to support us financially, there are a number of ways:

- ◇ Ask your church's Mission Committee to consider adding us to the congregation's annual budget.
- ◇ Encourage one other person to become a member of the Fellowship. Details are on at renewal-fellowship.ca, see SUPPORT US.
- ◇ Renew your membership.
- ◇ Make regular donations through the PAR plan on our website. Or email us at renewalfellowshipcc@gmail.com
- ◇ Make a one-time or occasional donation by credit card or by cheque. No matter what the method, we are grateful for all your financial support.



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Members normally serve for two terms of three years each (six years total) but this is often extended. Board members are elected at the spring annual general meeting. The board meets at least three times a year.

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