



CAMPUS NOTES



REFLECTIONS ON CONVERSATIONS OF FAITH AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

My heart skipped a beat. The tension in the room was palpable. I couldn't believe that within the first half hour of this event some of the most contentious issues in Christianity today were already rising to the surface.

The 'Faith and Social Justice Panel' was the final event of a weeklong initiative, *Portraits of Jesus*, which was a collaboration between various Christian groups on campus. I had the privilege of moderating the final event of the week: a panel discussion that featured local Christians involved in social justice work.

I was prepared for a discussion that focused on Jesus' heart for the poor and social justice. However, deep questions regarding salvation, evangelism and Christian duty

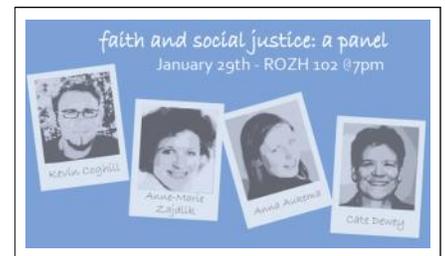
quickly exploded to the surface. "Is it possible to serve others as a Christian without explicitly telling them about Jesus?" "Are

Christians the only ones who receive eternal life, or does God's grace and love cover some of those who choose not to believe in Him?" "Are LGBT people saved?" "What is the gospel?"

These are some of the questions that rang through the lecture hall.

Amidst these questions, much of the conversation centred on evangelism. On one hand, some argued that evangelism by definition requires sharing our belief through words. Others opposed this by suggesting

that sharing the 'good news' was more about expressing God's love for others through tangible actions, and words



Poster advertising Panel Event

were to be used only when necessary. Some made a point of how there is an urgency to share the message of the Gospel, and it is a message that needs to be eagerly shared with our friends, family, and strangers.

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VISITING L'ARCHE DAYBREAK

Over Reading Week, I had the opportunity to join four other students in a visit to a L'Arche community in Toronto. The community known as "Daybreak" includes many homes where individuals both with and without intellectual disabilities share their walk of life with one another. There was an open house that allowed us to get a brief overview of what L'Arche is, what they strive to do, and how Jean Vanier got it all started. This was led by both one of the Daybreak spiritual leaders and one of the core members. Afterwards, we



L'Arche community values

were invited to participate in their weekly Friday evening worship service.

Having spent my summer co-op term working in the L'Arche community in Stratford, I was eagerly anticipating this trip to

Daybreak - a community I had heard so much about. The consistent highlight of our visit, voiced by each student as we chatted on our way home, was the wide-open welcome that we received at Daybreak. The glimpse into this L'Arche community gave me the opportunity to share more about my personal experiences from the summer. The core members I met at Daybreak reminded me much of my friends in Stratford, and the atmosphere reminded me of the lessons I learned there.

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GUELPH CAMPUS MINISTRY



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BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH MULTI-FAITH

Imagine a time when, despite differences in beliefs and worldview, what matters most to people is our common humanity. Now, take that a step further, and imagine a time when *because* of our differences in beliefs and worldview, people seek to learn from and understand other people who believe in and practice things differently than them. Now that you've imagined both of these scenarios, you have a rough idea of what the Multi-Faith Resource Team (MFRT) brings to its events every semester.

MFRT offers many events through the semester: Multi-Faith dinners where people come together to eat, Radical

Connections and Ask Big Questions where people come together to discuss difficult topics, Places of Worship

tours where people come together to learn about the locations where worship is held, and the different practices of worship in various faith communities, and Trivia

Nights where people come together to have fun. There are plenty of events, more than any one person can

attend in a semester. What they all have in common is that they create a safe space where people from different



Students, staff & Faculty gathered at the Multi-Faith Shabbat Dinner

faith communities or no faith background, can come together and learn from one another in safety and respect.

For myself, I try to get to as many events as possible

each semester because at each event I'm reminded of the ways in which we're all connected in a shared

humanity. At Shabbat Dinner, I've learned some practices and beliefs of Judaism, and have been challenged in my understanding of the Old Testament as a Christian. At Multi-Faith Trivia Nights I've learned basic facts about other faiths in a fun setting, and been challenged on my assumption about how much I know about the world.

Throughout the MFRT events the basic principles—of learning from one another, celebrating diversity, and creating safe and respectful places to discuss difficult topics and practice/build community—remain the same.

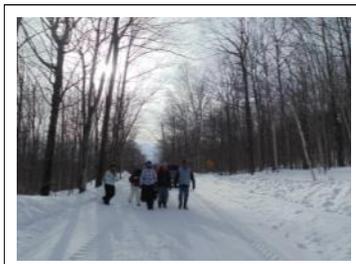
—Devin Hogg
Alumni/Student

MATTERS OF FAITH: A CONVERSATION

On March 11, I had the privilege of attending Matters of Faith, a monthly discussion forum sponsored jointly by Guelph Campus Ministry and the Ecumenical Campus Ministry. These sessions are attended by students and university staff and examine a variety of issues related to how we live out our faith in this world.

This session featured a presentation by Tony Chegahno, an elder from the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation located in the area of Cape Croker in the Bruce Peninsula. Tony is a deeply committed Christian who has worked to also maintain his identity as a member of an Anishinaabe First Nations community. His presentation focused on how the spiritual traditions of Christianity and of the Anishinaabe people could enrich each other, rather than existing in opposition. He spoke at length about the need for us to care for Mother Earth which was given to us by the Creator to nourish us and to provide a place for us to live. He pointed out that this

concept of creation care was common to the beliefs of Anishinaabe people and to Christians, and he deplored the exploitation of the earth that we so often see around us.



Students learning on the land with Tony

He also addressed the need for us to respect each other, not taking advantage of each other or seeking to dominate others. In that vein, he spoke of the tremendous damage done to First Nations people by white Christians in the residential school system. That system, he said, demonstrated the opposite of respect as it abused the children in the system and sought to destroy their identity as members of a unique people.

It was striking to me that

Tony appeared to harbour no anger against the white people, often Christians, who were responsible for this violence and abuse against his people. His presentation demonstrated a spirit of love and forgiveness, made possible, he suggested, by the use of strategies for conflict resolution embedded in Anishinaabe culture. Near the end of his talk he invited all of those present to stand and hold hands as an example of mutual respect and understanding.

The session was inspiring and encouraging, both for the presentation by Tony, but also by the obvious interest in the people present to learn more about other traditions and how they can shape the way the majority culture in Canada deals with people who are part of minority groups. I left the session with a sense of hope that the people who are involved with GCM and ECM play and will continue to play an important role in shaping the future of this country in positive, faith based ways.

—Gary VanArragon
Chair of GCM Board

L'ARCHE cont'd

The community was characterized by individuals that valued the ability to live genuinely, and give themselves wholeheartedly in service. This kind of service might not be what you are imagining; I found that the greatest way to serve others in L'Arche was not to strive to serve and do as much as I physically could, but to give my attention and my presence to those around me. This allowed me to give them what I could of myself and, in return, learn to appreciate and receive the gifts they gave and the lessons that they taught me.

—Alanna Zehr
Student



Eating Lunch Together at the Winter Retreat

REFLECTIONS cont'd

For others, approaching people with a message in mind feels a lot like friendship with an agenda.

Upon reflection, there are a number of things I learned from that night. Firstly, I realized that the topics discussed are more than opinions; they are foundational principles we hold to that are shaped by very personal experiences. For that reason, I think there's a lesson in approaching these topics with a sensitivity and a deep respect for the other person. We make ourselves vulnerable when we genuinely share our views of life and truly listen to what others have to say. Recognizing this tension, one of the panelists mentioned how a professor once taught her that opinions are to be shared with an open hand – we need to be willing to not only offer others what we hold to, but also to be open to what others offer us. It also got me thinking about what some of the underlying questions really were. On the surface, it may have appeared

as though much of the discussion revolved around which method is more effective for evangelizing: words or deeds. However, the real question that was being asked was: "How can we see people with the 'eyes' that God sees them?" It wasn't a matter of which tool for evangelism is most effective but whether or not we should even be conversationally approaching people with an end goal in mind. In other words, when we look at non-Christians around us, what do we primarily see - a person that is in desperate need of salvation through Jesus, or a beautiful creation that is made in God's image? Naturally, the two are not mutually exclusive and in many ways the lively discussion that ensued focused on how our understanding of these concepts should influence our interactions with others.

As I left that night, a number of thoughts filled my mind. Interestingly, I left with an assurance that despite the substantial differences in opinions of that audience, many of these differences stemmed from the same heart. Many of us deeply

desired to love others as God loves them; we just disagreed on what that looks like. Many of us are passionate about spreading God's kingdom, however, we have different understandings of the kingdom. As a result, the core question I was left with did not revolve around which opinions were truer, or which person I agreed with most. Instead, the question boiled down to a more personal issue of how I would approach others in times of disagreement. I had entered this discussion with a tendency to make judgments about others based on their views, yet this approach contradicts the very gospel that I claim to have experienced. Regardless of how I think the gospel should be 'spread', I need to ask myself, am I willing to allow the gospel to shape how I personally approach this discussion? To be gentler in the way I speak with others, to be quick to listen and slow to speak, to do nothing out of selfish ambition but learn from Christ's example of humility.

—Vincent Ng
Student



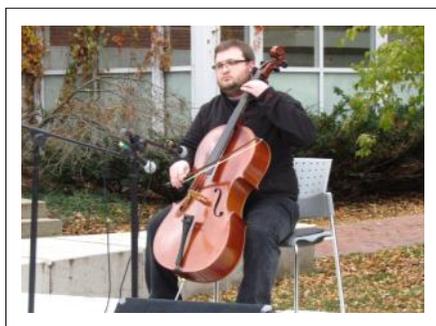
The closing benediction for the Jesus Week Panel Event was the following Franciscan Benediction:

*"May God bless us with discomfort
At easy answers, half-truths, and
superficial relationships
So that we may live from deep with-
in our hearts.*

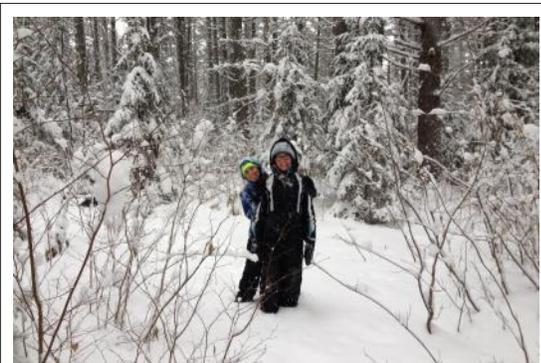
*May God bless us with anger
At injustice, oppression, and exploi-
tation of God's creations
So that we may work for justice,
freedom, and peace.
May God bless us with tears
To shed for those who suffer pain,
rejection, hunger, and war,
So that we may reach out our hands
to comfort them and
To turn their pain into joy.*

*And may God bless us with just
enough foolishness
To believe that we can make a dif-
ference in the world,
So that we can do what others claim
cannot be done:
To bring justice and kindness to all
our children and all our neighbors
who are poor.*

Amen."



Christian Playing Cello in Branion Plaza as part of the Peace Jam



Winter Camping adventures in a Snowy Wonderland of Algonquin Park



Hanging out by the fireside at the Winter Retreat

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