

WOMEN'S

PERSPECTIVES

Blessed are the Trail Blazers . . .

By Deb Kerr Stanbury



A camp T-shirt that I once read, challenged all those who saw it with the words, “Do not go where the path may lead; go instead where there is no path and blaze a trail.”

Those who have been called to outside-of-the-box ministries are trail blazers. They have been called to a path that is uncertain. A path that is not well-known or easy in our denomination. It is a path that is not clearly marked, fully blazed, or easily walked.

It is not for the faint of heart, for the impatient, or for those who want to rest on the comfort of “the way we’ve always done it.”

It is for the avid adventurer! It is for the trailblazer! It is for those willing to do ministry that is on the edge and take the Gospel to the fringes. Outside-of-the-box ministry is for those who hold firmly to the belief that this Presbyterian church of ours is Reformed and yet still reforming. It is for those who have the time to be patient, even when it means waiting months, years or even a lifetime for the ministry to which they have been called to be recognized by our denomination in way that allows them to be ordained. Waiting for



In This Issue...

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- | | |
|--|------|
| Blessed are the Trail Blazers . . .
by Deb Kerr Stanbury | p. 1 |
| Mission in Our Backyard
by Rev. Paulette Brown | p. 3 |
| The Story of Hummingbird Ministries
by Rev. Mary Fontaine | p. 4 |
| Letter to a Young Colleague
By Pat Dutcher-Walls | p. 6 |
| How Dare You
by Paula Reid | p. 7 |

that trail they are blazing to be seen as a gospel call and believing each step of the way that it is. Outside-of-the-box ministry is for those who believe that God the Creator is constantly creating, and are willing to participate in that creative energy and imagine something new.

These trailblazers who have the words of Psalm 119, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and light to my path,” inscribed in their hearts and are committed to living it out. Never straying from the path God is unfolding for them.

Doing ministry outside-of-the-box means doing ministry on the edge. It is often through these ministries that the church is able to, “Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that (God’s) house may be filled.” Out the church is beckoned to go, beyond its walls, out-of-the-box, and past its comfort zone. Through unique and new ministries trails are blazed. The love and welcome of our Triune God is taken to the campfire, the social housing complex, the university campus, the Dean’s office, the classroom, the reserve, the prison, court, the stroll, the margins and the fringes.

I am most grateful for ministry of those willing to travel outside-of-the-box, for what they have taught me, the opportunities they have given me, and the ways in which they helped me to see the limitless and unconditional nature of God’s love.

I am grateful for a Presbyterian camp that encouraged its campers and leaders to dream big, to challenge themselves, and to always think outside-of-the-box – at camp, at church and in life!

I am grateful for a minister who encouraged a congregation to not box off their pulpit when he encouraged a 14-

year old girl to preach her first sermon and explore the ways God might be calling her outside-of-the-box she created for herself.

I am grateful for a seminary that encouraged its students to “Love what God loves,” while giving them opportunities to explore the truth that the love of the Triune God is entirely outside-of-the-box.

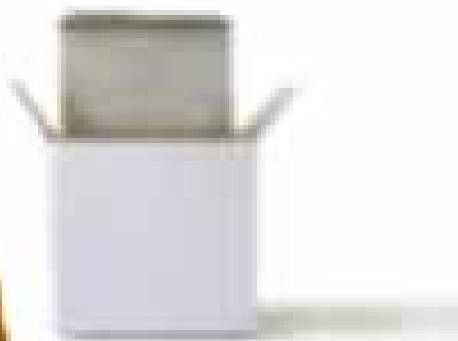
I am grateful for Evergreen Centre for Street Youth and the opportunity to participate in a ministry that is outside-of-the-box. I am grateful for the youth and staff there, my dear friends, who make every day exciting, challenge me to be creative and open my eyes to boundlessness and abundance of God’s amazing love.

I am grateful for trailblazers who inspire, encourage, and support. Their wisdom, experience, and support have helped others to continue blazing new trails for this generation.

I am hopeful that you will be inspired by the trailblazers whose stories, wisdom, and experiences are shared in these pages for I am grateful for them.

Blessed are the trailblazers, for these trails they blaze remind us of the boundlessness of God’s love, and allow us a glimpse at God’s kingdom.

Deb Kerr Stanbury grew up going to Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church and Glen Mhor Camp (now Camp Cairn). She graduated from Vancouver School of Theology with her MDiv in 2008. She loves working in ministry with street-involved youth at the Yonge Street Mission’s Evergreen Centre for Street Youth, where she spends time in drop-in, doing outreach, leading camping trips, and helping run a group for young women.



¹ Psalm 119:105

² Luke 14:23

Reverend Paulette Brown



“Miss, can you stand at the door and watch me ‘till I get home?”

“Rev, can I go home and pray and come right back?”

“Reverend Paulette I left the CD at home. Can I go and get it and

come back?” (This is the CD that we need for the after school program’s party that has already begun).

In the minds of our after school children, there is no clear-cut distinction between the backyard of the church and the backyards of the apartment buildings out of which they come. They come and go and come again tomorrow with ease. They stop on the way to the store, in between prayers and between school and Arabic classes. Most of our children in the after school program are fairly new to Canada. They come with a diversity and wealth that is both indescribable and not fully understood. Many of them have lived in several countries before entering Canada - Afghanistan, Pakistan, Russia, Ukraine, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Sri Lanka etc. For many of them, English is anywhere between fifth and sixth language as the first to fourth places are filled with various combinations of languages - Russian, Dari, Farsi, Hindi and Urdu. Their religion is Islam.

When I answered the call to Gateway Community Church and the Flemingdon Gateway Mission, what attracted me was the vision of a mission that was not so much about “making disciples” of all peoples, in the sense of its traditional, narrow meaning of “conversion” to Christianity. It was more about the board’s vision of mission as seeking new ways of being the church in the local urban setting of

Flemingdon Park, with a priority given to the struggle to discern what it means to work for God’s reign of righteousness and justice in the church’s backyard. This understanding of mission is humble and hard, yet exciting. Its about OOPS! Let’s try again! It is not about walking level paths at all. Rather it is about struggle, tripping into the unknown, thinking and praying the Lord’s Prayer on the spot, on the feet - asking not only for daily sustenance, but also for daily wisdom, helping hands, and a mighty deliverance from the temptations not to lead.

At the after school program, often it is not about what is clearly communicated and understood, as it is about the humility of trying again and again to figure out what is being communicated, and settling for a less than 100% understanding. It is about learning to be tough and kind, loving and firm while trusting that somehow, God is working out something new and transforming in our lives and in the lives of our children. Where is all this leading to? Hard to say! What will next year be like? Only God knows! Yet we continue to be alert and faithful. Knowing that in the midst of uncertainties God still calls us to be watchful for moments of revelation of how the urban space where the church is located, and the children who continually fuse the backyards of the church and the backyards of the apartments into one, could become signs of God’s transforming presence in one little corner of urban Toronto.

Paulette Brown is an Ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church who currently ministers to Gateway Community Church and the Flemingdon Gateway Mission. She is challenged to seek new ways of being church and doing mission in the local urban setting in Flemingdon Park, a multicultural community in northern part of Toronto.



By Rev. Mary Fontaine



The ministry of Hummingbird Ministries, is actually plural, not singular, meaning that there are several ministry locations - Tsawwassen First Nation, Madeira Park and Roberts Creek on the Sunshine Coast, Sechelt First Nation, Surrey, Richmond and Vancouver. Hummingbird Ministries goes where the people are, where the needs are for healing and healing and reconciliation between Aboriginal people and the Church. We are committed to 'walking with' Aboriginal people as God's people, in their healing journeys as identified by them. We also do ministry presentations at various churches throughout the year to bridge the gap between the cultures and promote good neighbourly love between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.



The vision for Hummingbird Ministries was inspired by my parents, Douglas and Dora Head of Mistawasis. My father would say, "Nitanis (my daughter), our people suffer a lot. Get an education and travel and maybe one day you can help our people in some way." My mother challenged her Presbyterian Ministers about the Bible and the Cree Culture. She asked deep theological questions of the late Rev. Stephen Howe, things he said that no one could answer and she would get frustrated and say, "But Mr. Howe, this is your Bible, why don't you know?!" My mom loved and respected both her Cree culture and her beloved Presbyterian Church.



That vision came from my parents melded with other influences and experiences in my life and translated into the birth and develop-

ment of Hummingbird Ministries. When I graduated in 2003 from the Vancouver School of Theology in Vancouver, BC, I wanted to start an Aboriginal ministry instead of finding a regular church. In the fledgling years there were many challenges in starting up this ministry and when funding was the challenge, my heart's response was, "this is not about money, it's not a job, it's my life, my mission, my purpose in life!"

It was a challenge getting support for a new way of doing ministry, a way that was meaningful for First Nations and the theological aspects and challenges this might present. Fortunately, the Confession of The Presbyterian Church in Canada had already outlined the theology and the sentiments needed to make this type of ministry credible and acceptable to presbyterians in general. Nevertheless there is always a journey from the written word to the living it out in reality. It took some time and some hard work to do it but we finally with the support of Canada Ministries, the dream for this ministry became a reality. The presbytery has been accepting of the ministries gatherings in circles – the circle reflecting First Nations worldview. Originally, this ministry was adopted as a program of Central Presbyterian Church in Vancouver but in February 2007, Hummingbird Ministries became a ministry of the Presbytery of Westminster.

One of the recent highlights for Hummingbird Ministries and for me personally, was my ordination to Ministry of Word and

Sacrament on May 22 at Mistawasis First Nation in Saskatchewan. For my Ordination, I had dreamed about being honoured and blessed by both my people and my church and that the ceremony would include both the Presbyterian Church culture and the Cree culture. The robing included Presbyterian ordination dress including a special gift of a stole by Rev. George Yando and from my people, I received a beautiful star-blanket which my family draped over my shoulders as part of the ceremony. What an honour! Other cultural aspects included Lakota and Coast Salish drum songs. My grandson, Talon's baptism took place this same day. This was a very special occasion and I am honoured to be the first Presbyterian minister of Mistawasis and the first full-blooded Aboriginal woman in Canada to become a Presbyterian minister.

There are many joys and challenges in this ministry. We are blessed by a very good Council who support me and the circle ministries. One of the joys of the past year is the transition of the children we work with in the crafts and musical projects, as they went from regarding music as yelling to actually singing!. Even though it is a tough job, it has been an honour to be accepted by the Tsawwassen First Nation as their community pastor for funerals and prayer services. It has taken time to get there, to get to be known and accepted as a credible minister. In the Salish and Inner Salish cultures, it is usually men who lead these services. It is a joy to see and to hear people come from a bad place to a good place emotionally and spiritually. It is a joy to have been a part of that even if

all I was able to do was listen in some cases.

I regret that the Salish languages have been lost because this would have been very helpful in connecting the heart to the Word of God. She recalls the first time she heard a Cree choir and Cree elders who spoke of God's work in their lives. People here do not have that luxury. She is grateful for the hospitality and grace of the Coast Salish people as well as for all the Church people, Presbyterians and others, who have walked with her in this God-led ministry journey of healing with First Nations and the Church.

It was an honour to be welcomed by the Tsawwassen to have our service on their land. It was wonderful to see the mixture of both the Tsawwassen people and the Presbytery gathered together on such a happy occasion.

Other challenges include some of the social and political problems which we have no answer for. Sometimes these challenges include prejudice at the schools and the problems kids encounter there. Recently an adult in one of the ministries experienced racial prejudice as well as an insult to her physical stature. Sometimes the problems stem from poverty and there is nothing we can do except pray. Many of the problems are due to relationships that have gone awry due to the loss of cultural and community values of First Nations people. Sometimes the problem is legal and involves the justice department but in all these ways, the PCC "walks with" Aboriginal people as God's people through Hummingbird Ministries.

Thanks for your prayer and support of Hummingbird Ministries.



Rev. Mary Fontaine is the Director and founder of the Hummingbird Ministries. She is Cree from the Mistawasis First Nation in Saskatchewan. She graduated from the M.Div program of the Vancouver School of Theology in 2003, when she began seeking the Church's support for HM. The Central Presbyterian Church adopted the ministry as a program of their church until Hummingbird Ministries became a ministry of the Presbytery of Westminster in February, 2006.

By Pat Dutcher-Walls

Deb,

You have asked me to write a short article for Women's Perspectives about my experience in alternative ministries and I figured I might do that by writing a letter to you, my young colleague in ministry. You are beginning to experience the joys and challenges of ministry that does not fit the traditional pattern of a minister in a local congregation located in a church building. I want to encourage you to continue thinking "outside the box" because I'm convinced that wonderful ministry happens in ways and places that aren't defined by the traditional pattern.

I felt called to ministry while I was studying for my Master of Divinity and I guess I just assumed that it would be a regular type of ministry at that point. However, my first call was to campus chaplaincy, and since it included being the Assistant Minister in a campus church, part of the tasks seemed just like a regular church job—preaching, celebrating the sacraments, pastoral counseling. But the other part of the job was teaching in the Philosophy and Religion Department and that's what got me hooked on teaching. I soon realized two things—that I felt called to be a teacher in the field of Old Testament and that I understood that as a ministry of teaching. Of course, as a professor first at Knox College and now at St. Andrew's Hall/Vancouver School of Theology, I've had many opportunities to preach and celebrate the sacraments both on campus and when I've been a guest preacher in local churches. But I think that my ministry encompasses much of what I do as a professor in the teaching part of my job, and even in the administration part.

In a couple of other ways, I've also been a part of alternative ministries. I was on the Board of Evangel Hall in Toronto, and now I'm on Hummingbird Ministry Council, here in Westminster Presbytery. I think both of these are ministries that bring the love and healing and reconciliation of God to a whole variety of people. Neither fits into a church building, and while both have ordained people who work as staff, the ministry that's done by the organization includes but also goes way beyond what you might find in a church building.

So I feel that ministry can happen in a lot of ways and places and by different kinds of people, lay and ordained. Now that's not an unusual idea, because our church does understand that lay people as well ordained people do ministry. But it does get me thinking about what ministry is—if indeed it doesn't need a building and the activities of preaching and sacraments to define it. In a way, if I start with my own sense of what I'm doing, I think teaching can

be sacramental. It can be a means of grace for the people of God. (Some of my students might disagree about how much grace they received, of course, during those exams!)

I think maybe this idea of sacramental action may be at the heart of what I understand as ministry. When we make God's grace visible in and through what we do, we're both announcing the Gospel and working towards the reign of God in the world. That happens when you provide clean socks for street-tired feet, or a listening ear for a heart-weary person, or a question that provokes a student to re-think and re-imagine a biblical passage. Sacramental engagement with the world allows God's grace to flow through us, and many times in spite of us—in the ways we offer our work, our compassion and our passion for the well-being of people. Now, lots of good people do wonderful things, and I wouldn't at all discount that as part of the greater good we seek. A Christian, however, who's doing ministry in whatever form or place, is acting not only on their own behalf, but on behalf of the mercy and justice and reconciliation that we've seen foremost in Jesus' own ministry, in his life and death and resurrection. Working from and toward that grace is sacrament, no matter how it's lived out.

Well, I've gone and gotten all theological for you, which may be more than you asked. But as I said, I've always felt called to a teaching ministry and this opportunity just turned into another teaching moment. I hope it's at least been helpful to you as you think about the vocation to which you are called. God's grace be with you in your ministry!

Pat

Dr. Dutcher-Walls is Professor of Hebrew Scripture and Dean of Students at the Vancouver School of Theology, an inter-denominational graduate school that prepares students for ministerial leadership in Canada. She holds a Doctor of Theology in Old Testament/Biblical Studies from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA and a Master of Divinity degree from Harvard Divinity School. She has published several books and a number of articles in scholarly and religious journals. A life-long Presbyterian, she was ordained by the United Presbyterian Church (USA) in 1978 and now is a minister in the Presbyterian Church in Canada. She has been active in the church through positions in campus chaplaincy, part-time congregational leadership, preaching, and social ministries. With a love of teaching, she has led numerous adult education courses, retreats, and continuing education courses. She is married to a Lutheran minister and has two children.

By Paula Reid

Pass us on the street turning up their noses
Pitiful
Curse us for the cards that life has dealt us
they hate us because we portray a “bad” image of their
streets
Yet right in front of us they discard their empty coffee
cups
Polluting the very streets they accuse us of destroying
Hypocritical
Because they’re rich they buy their heroine privately
Yet they judge us, call us drug addicts
Say they will not contribute their cents to our next “fix”
Me being homeless, doesn’t make me an addict
Correction,
I’m addicted to the streets now
To the rain that pours and washes away the scars and pain
To the snow that falls and smothers my flame of anger
To the winds that blow and clear away the debris of hurt
Addicted to the new beginning
The streets provide me with
To the escape
From the sexual, emotional, physical and mental abuse
Aside from what I suffer from the likes of them
Who fail to recognize I am a person
Just like them
Without the business suit and 300 dollar shoes
Unless there was something I missed
It’s not possible for one to be more human than someone
else

So they may think they are better than me
But biologically we are the same
So if that is the case
Then I demand to be treated equally
Regardless of ...
Where I live or don’t live
What I wear or don’t wear
If have or don’t have

This prayer was answered when I walked through the
doors of Evergreen
The love of Jesus that up till that time I thought was
invisible is plainly displayed so all can see
It is obvious to me that this is where each and every one
of us were meant to be
Keep the mission in motion, moving forward with God’s
direction
Because we are under a time limitation
Make sure that every chance we get we are taking it
So that when we go to meet the master of Creation
We will not only pass but exceed expectation
When we reach our final destination

*(As read at the Yonge Street Mission’s
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Mission’s Urban Lights)*



Women's Perspectives (WP) strives to keep women in touch with each other and share their theological perspectives, biblical insights, special interests, joys and concerns with the whole church. WP is published 6 times yearly. It is written by guest editors and overseen by WP Committee, in co-operation with the Women in Ministry Committee.

These committees are connected with the office of Ministry and Church Vocations, the Life and Mission Agency, The Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC). Views expressed in WP are not necessarily endorsed by the WP Committee or the PCC.

Readers comments and contributions are welcome at womensperspectives@presbyterian.ca

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