Jonathan Hamilton-Diabo: Ministry Through Service at First Nations House

The scent of freshly ground coffee and the word ‘welcome’ greets all visitors to First Nations House, nestled in the heart of U of T’s St. George campus. The script appears in U of T blue and is translated from English into Ojibwe (Ahneen), Cree (Tansi) and Mohawk (Seko). Here, amidst the hustle of student visitors and guests of the house, between the vibrantly coloured, hand-painted murals, director Jonathan Hamilton-Diabo carries out his ministry.

First Nations House typically sees 300 students annually. Most of them visit because of social or cultural events, but others come for personal support and advice. Hamilton-Diabo makes it his mission to serve all of them—to make them feel welcome and heard. “I offer someone a cup of coffee, hot chocolate, whatever . . . it’s a small service, but there is meaning in that service; it immediately breaks the ice. My ministry is in my service to people, to my community.”

Hamilton-Diabo, who grew up in Kahnawake, QC (Mohawk Nation), has a history of leadership and ministry through service. After receiving a bachelor of business administration from Concordia University in 1993 and a bachelor of education in 1996 from York University, he began working as a program coordinator at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto. In 2000, he joined the University of Toronto as a recruitment counsellor at First Nations House. A year later, he offered counselling in academic and financial aid as well. He enjoyed the counselling aspect of the position, but was aware that he needed more academic credentials behind him to properly care for the students, particularly those who were facing serious challenges economically, socio-culturally and spiritually.

By the time he decided to pursue graduate education, the application deadline had passed. Although he was disappointed at the time, it was a blessing as it led him into conversation with the First Nations House

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I think students are beginning to understand that recognizing historical and contemporary injustices toward Aboriginal peoples requires redressing imbalances and, ultimately, re-thinking theology and ministry.”

Wyatt Vic 6T6, Emm 8T3, former principal, and Margaret Grisdale, former registrar, he realized that the pastoral studies program could complement his work as a counsellor.

Once he was into the program, however, things changed: “My life got a bit more complicated,” he recalls with a grin. In 2003, his role at U of T changed to director of the house and his first child was born. Quite naturally, his focus had changed and he transitioned into the master of theological studies program, although he continued to take pastoral studies courses, graduating in 2011. He credits his experience at Emmanuel with broadening his opportunities both within and outside of the university workplace setting: “My experience at Emmanuel did benefit me in ways I never thought it would. I’ve participated as an alumnus in many different ways—everything from moderating panels to participating in conferences.”

In addition to working and participating in life at U of T, Hamilton-Diabo serves on various advisory committees that focus on Aboriginal education and communities such as the Toronto Police Services Aboriginal Peacekeeping Unit’s advisory committee and as a member of the Council of Ontario Universities’ Aboriginal Reference Group and Self-Identification working group. Past volunteer positions include vice-chair of the National Aboriginal Student Services Association, membership in the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities Aboriginal Post-Secondary Framework working group and chairing the Toronto Urban Native Ministry and the City of Toronto’s Aboriginal Affairs Committee.

With his finger firmly on the cultural pulse of Aboriginal communities within Toronto, Hamilton-Diabo is eager to see those communities—especially youth—thrive in the university setting. Students, he argues, don’t park their ‘selves,’ their spiritualities and beliefs, at the door of a classroom: “We don’t change our identity as we move through our communities. We interact and engage differently in communities, depending on our own responsibilities and roles.”

There are already numerous courses offered at Emmanuel that support Aboriginal voices and include Aboriginal writings and readings, but these have largely been incorporated into larger topics of research. Alf Dumont Emm 8T5 had taught some Aboriginal studies courses in Emmanuel, but his retirement in 2009 provided Hamilton-Diabo with an opportunity to broaden the curriculum. Along with Tom Reynolds, a faculty member at Emmanuel College and Hamilton-Diabo’s former academic advisor, he will co-teach a course in 2015 that specifically focuses on Aboriginal communities, historical relationships and tensions, belief systems, religious practice and spirituality. Both Hamilton-Diabo and Reynolds hope to invite leaders of indigenous communities to speak and they mutually share an interest in taking the class on a site visit to the Woodland Cultural Centre in Brantford, former site of the Mohawk Institute residential school. Both think a trip of this type would be an incredible learning experience, but also one that is spiritually powerful.

Susan Beaver, a Mohawk from Six Nations of the Grand River Territory and current MDiv student, is encouraged by the incorporation of more Aboriginal history, thought, teaching and ongoing involvement in the curriculum. “It’s a positive step and it helps to create awareness and prepares students for ministry beyond a traditional, white, urban setting. I’m encouraged by Emmanuel’s desire for a broader, more engaged and sustainable relationship with First Nations people.”

Tom Reynolds agrees with Beaver. “The timing is right,” he says. “I think students are beginning to understand that recognizing historical and contemporary injustices toward Aboriginal peoples requires redressing imbalances and, ultimately, re-thinking theology and ministry.” Of course, Hamilton-Diabo, like Reynolds and Beaver, recognizes that there is still a long way to go to creating a more inclusive curriculum, where Aboriginal voices and histories are fundamental and formative to understanding theology. But, until then, Emmanuel is pleased to welcome back its former student as a leader and teacher in the field and to see him continue to carry out his ministry through service. •
Conversations swirl in church circles these days about the nature of leadership. Often, the conversation is surrounded by anxiety about the current state of the church and its future. What is the future of the church? I am often asked that question. I usually respond, “I’m an historian of the church; predicting the future is mostly outside my wheelhouse!” Certainly, the future of the church is connected to the quality of its leadership. Theological education hopes to provide leadership that suits the church of tomorrow. But how can a school prepare leaders when nobody knows for sure what tomorrow’s church will be? Nancy Ammerman recently concluded, “Being a religious leader today no longer means stepping into a ready-made community; it means building one.” In the history of Christianity, that was once assumed, and now must be assumed anew. As an historian, I like to emphasize enduring traits generally found in the lives and work of successful Christian leaders of the past. When seeking or developing leaders, neither the church nor theological education can afford to ignore these traits.

**Character**

Many aspects of character are formed long before anyone enters theological education. Theological schools and churches depend on the testimony of others in assessing whether an aspiring leader is a person of integrity who possesses a reliably strong character. Character has to do with the moral fibre of a person, emphasizing things such as honesty, authenticity and courage. Good leadership depends a great deal on character. When you encounter young people of strong character, encourage them to become the kind of leaders we need for the future, but try to do so without the note of despair we seem to so good at expressing these days.

**Knowledge**

Character is informed by many things, not the least of which is knowledge. What one knows actually shapes one’s character. By knowledge, I do not mean to emphasize something like “understanding of facts” or “knowing the right answers.” Knowledge is often best demonstrated where one knows enough to be humble about what one does not yet know. Sometimes knowledge is most clearly indicated by the ability to ask better questions. What should Christian leaders know beside the fact that good leaders don’t know everything? They should possess an extensive knowledge of Christian identity, and personally live within the midst of it. Their personal identities should be formed by an active expression of biblical literacy, a literacy shaped by both historical and theological awareness. Christian leaders should know something about the history of Christian thought and practice, have an awareness of how the church has succeeded and where the church has failed, and why. Good leaders develop habits that make them lifelong students.

**Oriented to Serve**

The ironic message of the gospel is that the best leaders are those who are the most effective servants. They serve both church and community. In general terms, the Bible often connects service to concerns for social justice. We serve those in need, but not without attention to rectifying (‘to set right’) those things that create their need. Service involves both social benevolence and social transformation. Further, Christian leaders must develop the skills of service. What skills enable partnerships, both ecumenical and interreligious, that make for more effective service? In addition to opportunities to practise these skills, and others connected with worship, preaching, community service, or the provision of spiritual care, theological education helps potential leaders develop and hone their skills in analyzing social and ecclesial contexts. Leaders must be skilled in matching activities of service to their appropriate contexts. Good intentions wrongly applied are never helpful. What did somebody say about the “road to hell?”

**Maturity**

The good leader, one might say, is well seasoned. A little seasoning makes a leader much more palatable! Maturity is not about age. It does not arrive automatically with accumulating years. Maturity, especially for Christian leaders, is really much more about spiritual sensibility. One develops it. The mature person has an appropriate understanding of the self in relation to God and others. That kind of maturity comes only with spiritual formation. A good theological education attends to it. A good leader continues to nourish and develop it through the years.

“Being a religious leader today no longer means stepping into a ready-made community; it means building one.”

**Vision**

Finally, every good leader possesses vision. Good vision is itself dependent upon character, knowledge, a servant heart and maturity. A person with vision assesses where we are by understanding where we’ve been and where we are likely to go. A person with vision imagines and enables change that makes a positive difference. Though likely not the best translation, I still like the old KJV rendering of Proverbs 29:18: “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” And we worry far too much about perishing these days.
Annual Cousland Lecture: Douglas Hall Emm 0T3 Delivers his Last Public Lecture

Speaking about The Future of the Church, Douglas Hall delivered his last public lecture to a packed room in Alumni Hall, Old Vic, at the 2013 Cousland Lecture on October 16. Marilyn Legge, associate professor of Christian ethics and Cousland Committee member, said of him: “Professor Hall’s erudite lecture called us to embrace the loss of dominant Christian status. The church finds hope and resilience born of grace, compassion and faith engaged where there is profound material and spiritual need.” Hall is professor emeritus of Christian theology in the Faculty of Religious Studies at McGill University. He is also author of numerous books on theology and the recipient of many awards, including the Order of Canada. The Cousland Lecture is an event sponsored by the Emmanuel College Student Society and honours former professor and principal, Kenneth Cousland. To watch the lecture in full, please visit http://uoft.me/cousland.

Two Emmanuel College Grads Claim Second Prize at National Hymn Competition

May your Hearts Be Ever Merry, a hymn composed by two Emmanuel graduates, received second place in the Great Canadian Hymn Competition II, and was sung in concert by the acclaimed Pax Christi Chorale on Sunday, October 6, 2013 at Grace on the Hill Church, Toronto. John Wesley Oldham Emm 6T9 wrote the lyrics as a prayer-blessing, inspired by a dying friend. The late Larry Marshall Emm 7T6 set the words to music and included it in their book of songs published in 2009 and 2011 Music of the Spirit...Songs of the Heart. For more information on the piece and to read the lyrics, please visit http://uoft.me/1HL.

Emmanuel College Receives Grant for Interfaith Course

Emmanuel College has received a $5,000 grant from the Center for the Study of Jewish-Christian-Muslim Relations at Merrimack College to fund the teaching of an interfaith course. The new course, Intertwined Texts: Bible and Qur’an in Dialogue, is being taught this semester by Nevin Reda, assistant professor of Muslim Studies.

The course explores narratives shared between the Bible and the Qur’an and how major Muslim, Christian and Jewish scholars have approached the relationship between the texts across the ages because of shared narratives, which demonstrate both commonalities and profound differences. Students are learning the difference between author- and reader-oriented approaches, influence theory and inter-textuality, and how different presuppositions can impact how the texts and their relationship are read. Students are also engaging in scripture-based interfaith dialogue and experiencing first-hand how some of the established and developing approaches are practised. This course enhances Emmanuel’s commitment to interfaith dialogue by providing students with an opportunity to study both the Bible and the Qur’an side-by-side with people of different faith, and by looking at scholars who themselves have engaged in inter-textual study and analysis.
A Matter of Degrees at Emmanuel College: New Conjoint PhD and Projected BTh

In conjunction with the Toronto School of Theology, Emmanuel College will offer a PhD program in theological studies for the entering class of 2015. The new program is expected to feature the following: support for research projects supporting the church’s reflection on God and the church’s self-reflection, although theological enquiry of other faith communities can also be supported in some instances; collaborative education among the entering cohort of students with scholarly interchange across the traditional sub-disciplines of theological studies; courses and research projects that will consider interdisciplinary, ecumenical, and global perspectives, with interdisciplinary research projects encouraged; focused attention on issues of method in research and interpretation; and, incorporating learning goals in educational theory, course design, and instructional practice. Newly admitted students to the 2014–2015 program may have the option of transferring into the new degree stream and other ThD students who entered in fall 2013, or later, are eligible to enrol in a bridging program or continue with their initial degree program. To read more, please visit www.tst.edu.

In addition, faculty will be creating a proposal for a new Bachelor of Theology degree, conjoint with the University of Toronto. Upon approval, Emmanuel College could become a location for undergraduate studies in theology. After completing two years covering a broad spectrum of liberal arts and science courses in an undergraduate college or university, third-year undergraduate students could transfer to Emmanuel College to complete a major in theology and receive a Bachelor of Theology degree conjointly from Emmanuel College and the University of Toronto. Students interested in ministry could then complete a one-year Master of Arts degree in theology at Emmanuel and receive the testamur certifying educational readiness for ministry (equivalency to the Master of Divinity program).

New Painting from El Salvador

Last May, students of Emmanuel College/Toronto School of Theology’s Spirituality and Peacebuilding class travelled to El Salvador. The class was an outgrowth of the fall 2011 Religious Peacebuilding course, during which participating Emmanuel College students became friends with José “Chencho” Alas, who was named a Tanenbaum Peacemaker-in-Action in 2000. Chencho works from the precepts of Christian faith and Maya spirituality, training leaders for peace-building throughout Latin America. During the course, the students enjoyed a presentation from a community program of artists with physical disabilities and the class chose one of these paintings to bring back to Emmanuel as a gift. The painting Mis Casitas, by artist José Cruz, will hang in the student lounge and be officially presented at one of Emmanuel’s community lunches in March.

Mark Toulouse Appointed to Second Term

The Board of Regents, in a unanimous motion, and upon Victoria University President Paul Gooch’s recommendation, appointed Mark Toulouse to a second term as Emmanuel College principal. President Gooch noted that the review committee, representing faculty, students, Victoria University, the Board of Regents, and the Toronto School of Theology, was impressed with the many accomplishments of Emmanuel College. In enthusiastically recommending the re-appointment of Principal Toulouse, the committee expressed gratitude for his wise and strategic leadership. Principal Toulouse has accepted the offer and will continue to serve as principal for a second term of up to five years. Since his installation in January 2009, he has worked to enhance educational excellence at Emmanuel. Of particular note is the new conjoint PhD program in theological studies with the Toronto School of Theology, which Emmanuel will offer students as of 2015. Principal Toulouse is also credited with placing a priority on providing MDiv students full tuition grants for all courses taken in the first 12 months of their program. Under his leadership, Emmanuel College has been positioned as an educational and spiritual resource for Muslim students and communities. He has encouraged interfaith dialogue in accordance with the history of scholarship in the United Church of Canada and to encourage Emmanuel students to appreciate and understand more fully the importance of contextual education.
Teaching at Emmanuel College has been a unique learning experience for me, one which has enriched this stage of my spiritual, academic and theological development in new and exciting ways. As a Muslim faculty member in a Christian theological school, one has the opportunity to engage in a variety of novel activities, of which the first communal worship service has become—for me—the peak of the interfaith experience. Like praying in a mosque or circle of remembrance, it exemplifies an invitation by God to witness God’s majesty and transcendence, a humbling experience to be so honoured.

Seeing God exalted by those of different persuasions and history has afforded me a glimpse into God’s magnificence, in whose remembrance hearts rejoice and are raised to new levels of consciousness and empathy with God’s creations. Hearing God’s praises sung within an age-old tradition, that yet lives and thrives, is a living example of God’s transcendence, recalling something of the timelessness of Mecca, to which people have come since the days of Abraham (peace be upon him, henceforth: pbuh) to glorify God. The mention of Jesus Christ (pbuh) in ways that I could relate to made the experience all the more touching; this familiar and beloved figure became an indication of God’s loving kindness, God’s sending of prophets with guidance to all peoples across the ages. It is an experience for which I have the Emmanuel College community to thank, whose hospitality encompassed me and my beliefs and practices.

Like worship, academia can be permeated with the joy of learning and the excitement of discovery. It provides the background and training for engaging in some of the most dynamic and current discourses in the area of Islam, whether it is democracy, Sharia law or women’s rights. My primary area of research is the Qur’an, often in relation to women, Islamic law or the Bible. I am currently working on a long-term project, the poetics of narrative structure of Surat al-Baqara, the longest and most challenging of the Qur’an’s 114 chapters. My most recent finished work is a theology of democracy, which is forthcoming from Cambridge Scholars Press. Among the various strands of evidence, I use the story of the Queen of Sheba in Surat al-Naml, Chapter 27 of the Qur’an, as a role model for democratic governance and responsible leadership. In another article, also in the area of Islamic law, I use her story to argue for women’s equal rights to political leadership positions.

Working with Solomon and the Queen of Sheba in the Qur’an has contributed to my developing theology. The story is in conversation with its Biblical counterpart and the institution of the trade routes, which became a primary source of income for the Levant, Yemen and the lands in between. It tells of Solomon (pbuh), who when learning of the existence of this wealthy, sun-worshipping queen, rather than rush out to conquer her lands or exact tribute, invites her to come visit him. The Queen of Sheba comes making peace. Solomon’s words at the height of his dominion are indicative of the association of knowledge with power and the incumbent need to give thanks. When a person of knowledge manages to transport the queen’s throne in a blink of an eye, he says: “This is a privilege of my Lord to try me as to whether I will thank Him or become ungrateful; whoever thanks, his thanks benefits himself, and whoever is ungrateful, my Lord is self-sufficient, generous” (27:40).

For me, his words are the foundation of a theology of pluralism, a conviction which enables one to live in peace and harmony with the other, whether the other is someone of one’s own religious tradition or from another. For if one values one’s knowledge and religious heritage, then one should envision ways of thanking God for these gifts. For me, thanking God does not entail looking down on God’s creations upon whom God may not have bestowed the very same gifts; rather, thanking God means stretching out one’s hand in kindness, inviting to peace and wholeness, as Solomon did to the great queen. Ultimately, peace-making leads to prosperity in this world and the next; in Solomon’s case, his innovative peace-making initiative leading to untold riches for himself and others.

Nevin Reda is an assistant professor of Muslim Studies at Emmanuel College.
News and Moves

Phyllis D. Airhart, associate professor of the history of Christianity at Emmanuel College, has written A Church with the Soul of a Nation: Making and Remaking the United Church of Canada. It is available for purchase through McGill-Queen’s University Press and Amazon.

Bronwyn Corlett Vic 0T3, Emm 1T0 has recently moved back to the Toronto core from Hamilton. From 2010–2012, she was the minister at Binkley United Church in Hamilton. In 2012, however, her career path changed when she became the program coordinator for ministry recruitment in the Ministry and Employment unit at the General Council Office of the United Church of Canada. To read more about Bronwyn Corlett or to submit your own update, visit Emmanuel’s new webpage, Ministry on the Move, at www.emmanuel.utoronto.ca/alumni.

Kate Crawford Emm 9T1 was the keynote speaker at the 121st Queen’s Theology Annual Conference, held last October in Kingston. The theme was “How I have Changed my Mind about Preaching.”

David Csinos, current doctoral candidate and Teaching for Ministry fellow at Emmanuel College, has published two books. The first, Faith Forward: A Dialogue on Children, Youth, and A New Kind of Christianity is a collection of presentations from a 2012 Washington, D.C., conference that explored children and youth ministry. The second, Children’s Ministry in the Way of Jesus, is a co-authored book which illustrates how children become disciples and churches become centres of lifelong discipleship. Both are available for purchase through Amazon.

Rob Fennell Emm 9T4 recently edited Intercultural Visions: Called to Be the Church (United Church Publishing House). This volume includes essays from a number of Emmanuel graduates including Hyeran Kim-Cragg Emm 0T6, Debbie McMillan Emm 0T8, Professor Emerita Greer Anne Wen-h-In Ng Emm 8T0, Hans-Martin Rumscheidt Emm 0T2 and Aruna Saroea-Alexander Emm 0T6. Each chapter explores a line from “A New Creed” and its significance in the United Church’s quest to become an intercultural church. It is available for purchase through www.ucrdstore.ca.

Nancy E. Hardy Emm 6T8 has been awarded the 2013 McGeachy Senior Scholarship for her “Worship in the City” project. It will result in a newly created compilation of hymns and other worship resources that reflect the realities of city living and will provide fresh worship resources to United Church congregations. Read more about it at www.united-church.ca.

Garry McEachern Vic 5T8, Emm 6T1 has written his second local history book If Freedom Means as Much to You, Meaford and St. Vincent Township and the Two World Wars.

Janet Stobie Emm 8T9 has written her fifth book, Fireweed. Woven throughout this mystery story of the challenges of adolescent relationships, is a series of practical, common-sense strategies for dealing with grief. To learn more about this publication and Stobie’s other books, please visit www.janetstobie.com or email revjanetstobie@gmail.com.

Leif Vaage, associate professor of the New Testament, has written Borderline Exegesis (Penn State UP), an alternative approach to Biblical interpretation that bends the boundaries of traditional North American methodology.

Deaths

Louise Nault-Gallant Emm 0T0, in Brampton, Ont., April 27, 2012.

Eric A. Read Emm 5T5, in Nanton, Alta., October 19, 2013.

J. Harding Vowles Vic 4T6, Emm 5T0, in Toronto, January 3, 2014.
SINGING OUR FAITH

Young and old, people in the pews and those singing in the choir, downloaders and uploaders, musicians and listeners, insiders and outliers, clergy and music directors, karaoke singers and band members, people up on their feet and even people who sit on their hands, all have a playlist of their favourite music. In the 21st century we have witnessed an explosion of musical genres. Beyond the familiar categories, check anyone’s playlist and you could find anything from Afro-beat to Zydeco or adult contemporary to traditional hymns. In the midst of such diversity what might a playlist for today’s church sound like?

> DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI/AE AWARD DINNER TO FOLLOW AT 6 P.M.
HONOURING THE 2013 RECIPIENT MALCOLM SINCLAIR EMM 7To.

See www.emmanuel.utoronto.ca/alumni for more information and to register.

MARCH

Sexuality and Spirituality: Body as Blessing? with Anne Simmonds Emm 9T6
March 21 and March 22, 10 am to 4 pm, Emmanuel College.
Workshop fee $150 plus HST, includes lunch.
Register by March 14.

Creating Sustainable Missional Ministries with Eric Law
March 29, 10 am to 5 pm, Emmanuel College.
Workshop fee $95 plus HST, includes lunch.
Register by March 21.
This introductory day is for individuals or teams considering participating in the fuller program.

See Know and Serve the People within your Reach with Tom Bandy Emm 8T1
March 29, 10 am to 3 pm, Woodstock, Ontario.
Workshop fee $60 plus HST, includes lunch.
Register by March 21.

APRIL

Atonement Theology: Seeking Non-violent Alternatives with Lee McKenna
April 5, 10 am to 4 pm, Emmanuel College.
Workshop fee $95 plus HST, includes lunch.
Register by March 28.

Courage to Lead® with Mardi Tindal and Fred Montieth Emm 8T9
A five-session, retreat-based program runs from April 2014 to April 2015 with three gatherings at Emmanuel College and two by conference call.
April 7 to 9, August 11 to 13, October 27 to 29, January 26 to 28, 2015 and April 13 to 15, 2015.
For more information, please visit http://uoft.me/lead.
Register by March 7.

See, Know and Serve the People within your Reach with Tom Bandy Emm 8T1
April 25, 10 am to 4 pm, Erin Mills United Church, Mississauga.
Workshop fee $95 plus HST, includes lunch.
Register by April 16.

MAY

Emotional Intelligence and Human Relations Skills with Roy Oswald and Colleagues
May 12, 9 am to 9 pm, May 13 to May 15, 9 am to 9 pm, May 16, 9 am to 1 pm, Emmanuel College.
Workshop fee $800 plus HST, includes meals.
There is an additional $182 fee for the Emotional Intelligence Survey.
Register by April 11.

For event details and registration, visit www.emmanuel.utoronto.ca or contact Betsy Anderson at ec.events@utoronto.ca or 416-813-4096. A congregational discount of 15% is available for groups of two or more participating members, and students pay half price. There is a 15% discount for an individual attending two or more events in the year.