Bronwyn Corlett: Finding Creative Ways to be Church

There are stereotypes about what a minister looks like, what ministry is and what the future of the church might be. Bronwyn Corlett Vic 0T3, Emm 1To seems to brush off these stereotypes with ease. Corlett looks to the future of the United Church of Canada with optimism: “I don’t know what that church will look like, exactly, but I know that there will continue to be gathering and worshipping. I want to be part of that growth and that change—I want to help.”

As of March 2015, Corlett will have been in her most recent position as program coordinator for ministry recruitment at the United Church of Canada (UCC) for two years. Her primary focus has been on communications—finding out what aspiring ministers want and need to know and providing them with necessary support and information. She populates the UCC website with information about the different streams of ministry, education and training options, stories of active ministers, as well as inspirational ‘call’ videos. She runs workshops at events such as Rendez-Vous and Worshiplude, and will be the keynote speaker at London Conference’s Youth Forum in April.

As a recruiter, her goal is to expose youth and young adults to vocation and to demonstrate that the church is a safe retreat when weighing difficult life choices. “We are not all called to ordered ministry but we are called to live out our faith,” says Corlett. In that vein, she is helping to host “Faithful Living: A Day to Explore Life Choices” on March 18, 2015, at which teens and young adults are invited to experience campus life, engage in discussion about how others are living faithfully, worship with the Emmanuel community, and meet students and faculty. “Even if students are just exploring U of T as an option at this point,” she says, “I want them to know that there is on-campus support available—Christian communities and chaplains with whom they can connect.”

Corlett’s experience at Emmanuel College informs her role as UCC recruiter. Although she found the College “academically challenging,” she says it was also uplifting. Her experience is one of the reasons she encourages others to...
As president, Corlett has her sights set on rejuvenating aspects of alumni/ae programming at Emmanuel. Emmanuel Alumni/ae Day 2015 will “focus less on continuing education and one keynote speaker and more on bringing alumni/ae together, sharing knowledge and experiences, and renewing each other for the ongoing ministry,” she says. “Emmanuel alumni/ae have a wealth of resources to offer each other and it’s important that ongoing networking is supported through the College.” Emmanuel Alumni/ae Day will take place April 13 and will feature an alumni/ae dinner, worship, fellowship, and will also include opportunities for small-group discussion and reflection.

As ECAA president and recruiter for the UCC, Corlett demonstrates a commitment to ministry, but also to ministerial support. William Kervin Emm 9T4, the associate professor of public worship at Emmanuel who supervised Corlett’s final-year thesis, says, “She has always combined a commitment to congregational ministry with a passion for denominational support and wider ecumenical work. Her master’s thesis on baptism in the United Church and its relationship to the work of the World Council of Churches emphasized the need for an ecumenical vision of our worship practices, an emphasis that continues in her advanced degree work on the Eucharist. She sees worship as both a local and global, congregational and ecumenical practice; a view that is frequently missing in our efforts at congregational renewal.

Her lively interest in how scholarship supports congregational ministry is an ideal perspective to bring to her work as a recruiter for ministry with the United Church of Canada.”

Corlett says that her role in recruitment might seem “odd” to some people. “Ministry has been viewed—and is still viewed—as a divine calling. My role isn’t to talk people into ministry, but rather to get people to consider it, to show them their options, and encourage them to faithfully discern whether they or someone they know has a call to ministry.” She believes that it’s her calling to inspire individuals to make the right career choice. “Ministry in the United Church can mean many things,” says Corlett, “and it’s important that people realize and prayerfully consider what it is that they are called to do—it might mean ordered pastoral work and preaching, but it could also be volunteerism, social justice or sacred music.”

Today, Corlett’s ministry is lived out in her recruitment role and as a voluntary associate minister at St. Andrew’s United Church in Toronto. Her passion for ministry endures and she’s determined, more than ever, to spread that joy and fulfillment amongst her colleagues and peers as well as among the next generation of ministers. “The reason I went into ministry and am doing my current job is,” she says, “because I believe there will be a United Church of Canada for years to come. Christian communities have met for over 2000 years, even in difficult or dangerous times. It comes down to finding creative ways to be church.”

“Theological school cannot ready ministers for every difficult situation they encounter, but Emmanuel ensured that I was theologically prepared.”

hands with Bronwyn. She is a true leader within the church and the communities she serves. She appreciates the place and purpose of Emmanuel College not only as a community where leaders are taught and trained, but also a community through which alumni are nurtured and sustained. I am excited by the vision she is bringing to alumni/ae and the energy she brings as the new president.”
Tradition and Change

BY MARK G. TOULOUSE

In today’s world, if you mention the word “tradition,” you are likely to start an argument. On the one hand, there are those who are primarily oriented toward the future and who can see nothing worthwhile in tradition. On the other hand, there are those who remember with fondness the virtues of the past and they defend tradition with all they can muster. All each can do is to talk past the other. One side attacks tradition, while the other defends it. But both sides of the argument have one thing in common. They both believe that tradition and change have nothing to do with one another, and both are wrong! They are, I think, confusing “tradition” with “traditionalism.” What do I mean exactly? Jaroslav Pelikan, long-time historian and theologian at Yale Divinity School, once wrote: “Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. Tradition lives in conversation with the past, while remembering where we are and when we are and that it is we who have to decide. Traditionalism supposes that nothing should ever be done for the first time, so all that is needed to solve any problem is to arrive at the supposedly unanimous testimony of this homogenized tradition” (The Vindication of Tradition, 1984). Pelikan said the same thing again in a bit simpler way late in his life, when he received the John W. Kluge Prize for the Study of Humanity in 2004: “Take what you have inherited from your fathers [and mothers] and work to make it your own.”

While traditionalism is incompatible with change, tradition (a past that exists in “continuity” with the present) and change are fully compatible. Consider our own lives: We live in the present, but only as persons who are shaped by our past. We reshape ourselves in light of the experiences we encounter today and tomorrow, but we do so in the midst of an encounter with our lived experiences of the past. For Christians, the normative does not exist in a time-bound traditionalism, however defined, but within the “eternal order of things,” which unfolds in history and includes not only the past, but the present and the future as well. We affirm that God acts in human history, in our past—our present—our future, pulling us forward, asking us to make decisions in contemporary contexts that will provide for more justice, not less.

In recent years, some within the United Church have openly worried (or worse, lamented) that Emmanuel College is abandoning its tradition of educating Christian ministers and leaders by offering Muslim and, as of this semester, Buddhist courses and programs. I can assure these folks that this is not the case. The tradition of Christian theological education is alive and well at Emmanuel. Is the Christian theological education offered today the same as it was in 1965 or 1935? No, it is not—and thank goodness for that! If it were, we would be terribly guilty of traditionalism instead of honouring a strong tradition of excellent theological education.

Emmanuel's tradition places Christian theological education in continuity with the missions and purposes associated with both the United Church of Canada and Victoria University. We also keep the conversation between church and academy alive by honouring the standards associated with both, and seeking to serve God above either one of them. Theological schools should be the one place where everybody is working hard not to confuse finite realities, like the church or the University, with an ultimate status that is attributable only to God.

We stand in a tradition of ecumenical commitment, expressed in our work with the Anglicans, Catholics, and Presbyterians of the Toronto School of Theology, and with those numbering among the Baptists, Mennonites, Lutherans, and other Christian groups who have historically chosen to be students at Emmanuel.

Over decades, Emmanuel has stood in a tradition seeking to embody social justice, whether when dealing with matters of poverty, of gender and racial equity, or of sexual orientations and gender identities.

Tradition and change: Can the two exist together? Indeed they can. Is Emmanuel still dedicated to its brand of Christian theological education when it opens doors to Muslim and Buddhist study? Indeed it is. In fact, we are finding that the Christian identity of faculty and students alike is enriched and sharpened by our conversations with these new and faithful partners. We believe these changes are fully congruent with our tradition: one that offers a Christian theological education in relationship with both the church and the University, maintains a long-standing commitment to ecumenism, and embodies concerns of social justice. I suppose one could even argue that a healthy view of tradition actually leads to change! How exciting is that? 

United Church of Canada and Victoria University. We also keep the conversation between church and academy alive by honouring the standards associated with both, and seeking to serve God above either one of them. Theological schools should be the one place where everybody is working hard not to confuse finite realities, like the church or the University, with an ultimate status that is attributable only to God.
Creativity and Spirituality Flourish at Emmanuel

Historically, the arts have played an important role in theological curriculum, worship and preaching, but they have not traditionally been a core component of ministerial study. The Creativity and Spirituality course at Emmanuel, led by Johanna Selles and currently in its second, non-consecutive year, provides the framework and inspiration necessary for students to conceptualize their ministry beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries and to work in more interdisciplinary ways.

While no artistic background is necessary for the course, some of the students are more comfortable holding a paintbrush than others. Henna Kim for example, a professional artist in her own right, is one of 11 students exploring interdisciplinary aspects of art in worship and pastoral care this term. “Seeing how one’s spirituality through creative art could be nurtured,” says Kim, “and how one’s creativity through spiritual meditation could be fostered, I realize that I might share my spiritual experience not only by sharing my artwork as an artist, but also by providing a place in which the congregation and faith community are able to experience their own spiritual journey through art.”

How that ministry might be conceptualized and practised would, of course, vary from church to church, and from minister to minister, says Selles. “Ministry might mean anything from storefront to city hall, and from doing drama with groups of different abilities, to encouraging adults to re-imagine their earliest faith formation using art, photography and writing. Imagining that things might be other than they are is one of the strongest motivations to work for justice and change, and students are eager to use art to open up those big questions,” she says. “The focus of the class, is on inviting others to embrace and celebrate ‘everyday creativity’ in ways that enhance spirituality.” And while she guides them theologically, she invites guest lecturers such as Kelly Aitken, artistic instructor at the Art Gallery of Ontario, to provide lessons in technique. “Play, curiosity, imagination and innovation are essential ingredients of human resilience,” says Selles. “Learning to harness those skills towards a common purpose, or to provide spiritual self-care in the face of burn-out, is an important skill.”

“Tear the Heavens Apart:” An Advent Message of Hope from UCC Moderator Gary Paterson

Gary Paterson, moderator of the United Church of Canada, joined the Emmanuel College community worship team as the guest preacher in November 2014. In his sermon, entitled “Tear the Heavens Apart,” he noted the apparent disconnect between the subject matter of some of the Advent readings—particularly those despairing verses in Mark and Isaiah—and the optimism and joy one feels (or expects to experience) at Christmas. He compared these opposing themes, that of rebirth and apocalypse, to Christians who might feel excited by the Saviour’s birth yet simultaneously stressed by the season’s consumerism. In the face of this, it is tempting, he said, to skip over the judgment, the wrath and the dark side of humanity in favour of something lighter. The danger in doing this, he implied, was that we miss the sliver of hope that can visit us in moments of abject despair. These precious moments—however fleeting—are pivotal in reminding us that hope can be found in darkness.
Celebrating Volunteers: Dale Skinner Emm oT3 Receives Arbor Award

Since 1989, alumni and friends of the University of Toronto have received Arbor Awards in recognition of exceptional volunteerism. In September, Dale Skinner’s contributions to Emmanuel College were recognized with the award for outstanding volunteer service. “For me,” says Skinner, “the University of Toronto—and especially Emmanuel College—has contributed to my personal and vocational growth. To give back as a volunteer seems like the right thing to do.” Skinner became a member-at-large of the Emmanuel College Alumni/ae Association (ECAA) Executive in 2008, served as president until 2014, and continues to serve as past-president of the association. While Skinner is busy with his congregation, he always makes time for Emmanuel. A dedicated leader, he has focused on increasing communication and engagement with alumni/ae and encourages current students to participate in alumni/ae events. Congratulations, Dale!

A Brighter Vision: Aruna Gnanadason and the Eco-Feminist, Indian Lens

Aruna Gnanadason, who was the Anne Duncan Gray Visiting Scholar at Emmanuel College from September to December 2014, delivered a paper to the Emmanuel College community in October entitled “Subaltern Challenges from Asia to the Ecumenical Movement: Through an Indian Feminist Lens.” Organized by the College and the Centre for Asian Theology, she was joined by two respondents, Marilyn Legge Emm 8T1 and Lois Wilson Emm 7T8.

Gnanadason argued that there is “an urgent need for the global ecumenical movement to redefine itself in the context of the diminishing power and influences of churches in the west.” There are active calls for a “new ecumenism” she argued, citing the recent successful Asian intervention in defining the theme of the last Assembly of the World Council of Churches as an example. In spite of resistance, she said, the approved theme was “God of life, lead us to justice and peace.” This approval is monumental for Asia, especially in making a “tangible contribution to the development of new theological, liturgical, missiological and spiritual resources” in a global ecumenical movement. A second, active call would be the “emergence of subaltern voices,” which she defines as marginalized voices due to race, gender, caste, ethnicity and sexuality. She also specifically points to the contributions of Asian women, and eco-centered spirituality and theology as examples of demands that need to be recognized and engaged by theologians.

While Christians have made great strides in their contributions to global ecumenism, she believes that individual churches are more preoccupied with their own institutional survival than in broadening their popularity in Asian countries. It is subaltern communities themselves, she argued, that should be looked to for hope: “It is their attempts to forge a new ecumenical spirit through joint actions and reflections that have kept alive the hope embedded in the Christian gospel to shape an ecumenical vision for Asia.”

A Lasting Legacy for Cedar Springs United Church

When Cedar Springs United Church closed its doors in 2013, church members saw an opportunity to commemorate years of faithful service to the Blenheim community by creating an award at Emmanuel College. The Cedar Springs Church was founded in 1874 and so its members have a long history of commitment to faith and fellowship. With the sale of the church building, they generously donated $45,000 to establish The Cedar Springs United Church Scholarship. The award will be given to an Emmanuel student achieving excellence in her or his studies, with preference given to a student pursuing ministry from the Chatham-Kent area. Nancy Thompson, Cedar Springs United congregant, made an additional gift of keepsake books, made by her family, that document the history of Cedar Springs. The scholarship and additional mementos ensure that Cedar Springs United Church will never be forgotten and will, in fact, continue in perpetuity to assist and inspire the next generations of church leaders.
I once had a conversation with a woman who told me that she didn’t do theology. A lay leader in our community, this woman facilitated the Bible study I attended. Each week she helped us connect stories from scripture to our own lives, to our church, and to the world around us. One summer, she had us depart from the text to share our personal spiritual journeys with each other. As we all deepened our intimacy, we also began to understand our various interpretations of each Biblical story more fully. Beyond classroom Bible study this woman, along with her husband and children, also cooked a weekly dinner for a group of women living in transitional housing. Through this humble yet dedicated practice, her family learned about hospitality, structural inequality and communion.

So when this woman told me she didn’t do theology, I was a little surprised. I had seen her thinking, teaching, acting and living theology in manifold ways. Her life was a testimony to an ongoing theological grappling with everyday life, and her theology was what we might call an everyday theology.

So why, I wondered, did she think she didn’t do theology? Was it because she didn’t write the kind of theology we read in books—the kind of theology we might call academic theology? If we understand everyday theologies as happening close to the concrete practices of everyday life, then we can understand academic theologies as trying to articulate the texture of that everyday life in more systematic, historically grounded ways. By necessity, academic theologies happen much further from those concrete practices because they’re trying to understand them in relation to the broader social, historical contexts that shape their meaning.

But here’s the thing: both everyday and academic theologies are crucial for the ongoing life of the church. Everyday theology helps us live Christian traditions in each new generation. Academic theology helps us articulate those living traditions. At their best the two exist in a mutual conversation with each other that helps us all sink more deeply into faith. The problem is that most of the time these two types of theology are not all that good at working together.

As I’ve researched the ways in which people construct their everyday theologies, and as I’ve listened to my students struggle to make the academic theologies they’re studying find traction in communities of faith, I’ve been struck repeatedly by a simple fact: everyday and academic theologies are two ways of doing the same thing. Or, to put it differently, they’re two dialects in the same language. They are able to converse with each other, but only if each works a little harder to listen to the other.

I see this deep listening working when students in the Contextual Education program begin integrating their ministry experiences with classroom study. When a congregant voices concerns about language used in a worship service, a hospice patient struggles with how to live in the face of his approaching death, or an ex-offender re-orients herself to a new life, the student ministers draw on their Bible, history, theology and pastoral classroom, learning to listen more deeply to what the people in their care are saying. Understanding how a theological intuition that someone holds has developed throughout centuries of Christian belief and practice helps the student see how that intuition or belief connects with or disconnects from myriad other theological intuitions. And such focused vision helps the students respond in ways that are full and robust in relation to the experience of the person in their care. It helps them open up worlds of theological imagination that can reorient people anew to their lives right at the moment when they need it. By the same token, hearing the everyday wisdom of these intuitions in action helps the students really dig into understanding the gifts and gaps in the theologies they read. Hearing this wisdom infuses new and necessary life into the words on the page.

In my recent book, *Ethnographic Theology*, I tell these stories of how everyday and academic theology come together in practice, how they can speak back and forth to each other, share their wisdom, and together create new insights and possibilities for Christian living. And I think about how we might nurture these types of conversations that are so crucial for the ongoing life of the church. The book might be one of those academic theologies but, nevertheless, I hope it’s one with a flair for the everyday. In fact, my hope is that it’s a theology that might shift how we even do theology—everyday and academic—so that the gulf between the two feels less difficult to bridge.

Natalie Wigg-Stevenson is assistant professor of contextual education and theology at Emmanuel College. Her book *Ethnographic Theology* is published by Palgrave Macmillan.
News and Moves

Gerald Kerr Emm 0T2, 1T1 recently moved back to Ontario to accept a call to St. Paul’s United in Perth. Following ordination in 2003, Gerry asked for transfer and settlement to the Brooklyn Pastoral Charge on the South Shore of Nova Scotia, from his home in Owen Sound, Ontario. In 2005, he accepted a call to the Onslow-Belmont Pastoral Charge, near Truro, a three-point charge which amalgamated into Trinity United under his leadership. Before leaving Emmanuel, he enrolled in the Master of Pastoral Studies program. He completed the requirements, including a clinical pastoral education (CPE) unit through the Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax, and Dartmouth General Hospital, as well as a 2011 sabbatical at Queen’s University to complete the degree. He describes congregational ministry as “a wonderful ride and joyous experience of relationship building through creative worship, pastoral care and outreach experiences.” To read more about Gerry’s time in Nova Scotia or to submit your own update, visit Emmanuel’s webpage, Ministry on the Move, at www.emmanuel.utoronto.ca/alumni.

Alvin A. Lee Vic 5T3, Emm 5T7 received the City of Hamilton Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Arts for his work as a teacher, scholar of Old English poetry, literary critic and general editor of the 30-volume Collected Works of Northrop Frye (University of Toronto Press).

Leif Vaage has been named the 2014 recipient of the United Church’s Davidson Trust Award. Recognized for his “excellence in teaching and scholarship” in theological education, he is also being celebrated for his ministry with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and his work as an adjunct professor at Universidad Bíblica Latinoamericana Recinto Lima Perú on behalf of the United Church. Vaage has actively participated in theological scholarship on various levels on numerous committees at Victoria University, the University of Toronto and the Toronto School of Theology, to name a few. Made possible through Roy Mitchell Davidson’s generosity, the purpose of the trust is to reward “outstanding people in the service of the theological colleges within Canada, associated with the United Church.”

Deaths

Herbert Albert “Bert” Batstone Emm 5T3, in Ajax, ON, September 16, 2014.

Kent D.J. Garrett Emm 9T9, former member-at-large of the ECAA Executive, in Woodstock, Ont., January 3, 2015.

Emmanuel College Plans Consultation with Leaders

On April 16–17, 2015, representatives of five United Church Conferences (Bay of Quinte, Hamilton, London, Manitou and Toronto) are meeting with the faculty and Advisory Committee of the Emmanuel College Council. The purpose of the two-day meeting will be to address and discuss the challenges facing contemporary churches and how Emmanuel can help in providing a response. Emmanuel hopes to work with these Conferences to encourage continued professional development while also providing the type of theological education and support that is required to address the emerging and changing needs of the contemporary church.

Board of Regents

The Board of Regents is seeking expressions of interest for consideration for the 2016 nomination cycle. Please forward suggestions to vicu.regents@utoronto.ca.

MILESTONES

Alumni are invited to send information for inclusion in Milestones. For marriages, please indicate, if applicable, whether you prefer to be known by your married or birth name. An obituary must accompany death notices.

Or e-mail your Milestones news to emm.alumni@utoronto.ca.
MARCH

Day with Emmanuel
An open-house event for future students.
March 7, 9 am to 3 pm,
Emmanuel College Campus.
Advanced registration required.

Emmanuel Reads
with Natalie Wigg-Stevenson
Natalie will talk about her book Ethnographic Theology: An Inquiry Into the Production of Theological Knowledge.
March 11, 4:15 pm to 5:30 pm,
Emmanuel College.

Faithful Living: A Day to Explore Life Choices
A chance for youth and young adults to consider where God may be at work in their lives and explore the U of T campus. Co-sponsored by Ecumenical Chaplaincy at U of T and Ministry Recruitment, the United Church of Canada.
March 18, 10 am to 9 pm, Emmanuel College.
Fee $30/person or $100 for four people, includes all meals.
Register online at uoft.me/2AY by March 12, 2015.

APRIL

Sexuality and Spirituality
with Anne Simmonds Emm 9T6
April 24, 25, 10 am to 4 pm,
Emmanuel College.
Workshop fee $175 plus HST, includes lunch.
Register by April 16, 2015.

MAY

Worship and the Arts
Join award-winning recording artist Kyle Matthews.
May 1, 2, Humber Valley United Church.
Workshop fee $120 plus HST, includes meals.

Emmanuel College Convocation
May 14, 4 pm, Isabel Bader Theatre,
93 Charles Street West.

Emmanuel Alumni/ae Day 2015: April 13
REFRESH, RECONNECT, REFLECT

Come back to Emmanuel College campus to refresh your spirit, reconnect with friends and faculty and reflect on your time on campus as a student. Remember and relive your experiences, accomplishments and friendships. The day will include the ECAA AGM, worship with The Rev. Norm Seli Emm 9T1, and small-group discussions will be held in the afternoon. There will be a wine-and-cheese reception with faculty followed by a Reunion Dinner, featuring the presentation of the Emmanuel College Distinguished Alumni/ae Award. Pub space has been reserved at the Foxes Den on Bay St. to continue the celebrations. For information and to register visit www.emmanuel.utoronto.ca/alumni.

Alumni Gathering at General Council 2015
A gathering for Emmanuel alumni/ae will take place during the 42nd UCC General Council in Corner Brook, Newfoundland, hosted by the ECAA.

The General Council meeting takes place August 8–15, 2015, and the gathering will offer Emmanuel alumni/ae space for connection and fellowship (exact time and date TBA). Details will be sent via the alumni listserv closer to the date (please send your e-mail address to the Alumni Office at emm.alumni@utoronto.ca).

Day with Emmanuel
SATURDAY, MARCH 7, 2015
9 AM TO 3 PM
EMMANUEL COLLEGE,
75 Queen’s Park Crescent, Toronto

Advanced registration is required. Please visit www.emmanuel.utoronto.ca/about/events.

Day with Emmanuel is an on-campus event designed specifically for future students. Experience a day in the life of a theological student. Attend mini lectures and worship, learn about Emmanuel College programs and financial aid, take a tour, and meet students and faculty.

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.

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