

Clergy Insight

Respect for all living things

By REV. BOB MATTON
Trinity United Church

Last time I focused on the importance of teaching a respect for all living things that inhabit God's creation, contending that in teaching about the importance of co-existence and according a higher regard to those creatures weaker and smaller than ourselves we might more effectively counteract the negative influences that too often lead to anti-social behaviour and criminal activity.

It is a tragic and yet, I believe, telling coincidence that on the very same day of my article a troubled teenager in Springfield, Oregon who grew up maliciously killing animals went on a shooting rampage in a high school cafeteria. Was Kip Kinkel's murderous spree attributable simply to the "gun culture" that exists south of the border, or can it be traced more broadly to a fundamental lack of respect that unchecked, might render the unconscionable act commonplace?

There is, without a doubt, a waning of respect in our society in our interpersonal relations. In the workplace and in our schools, in our homes and neighbourhoods

and on the streets, in regard to our once-honoured institutions and amplified by the media, it would seem increasingly displaced by a general disregard for the rights of others if not a blatant violation of their personhood. Indeed, the many forms of judgment and discrimination convey disrespect upon another that can easily escalate to the level of hate crimes.

Similarly, the various forms of harassment may be said to represent one's lack of respect for another person that can escalate to incidents of abuse and assault, and ultimately murder.

While many would argue for tougher laws in order to punish the offender, such an approach is too late for the victims. Rather than merely appeasing the gut-level reaction that angrily cries out for retribution, the advancement of justice would be far better served in the long run if we focused more on getting to the root of the problem.

Employing the analogy of a tree, much as a mature tree's misshapen trunk or otherwise poor health is often an end result of less than favourable growing conditions during its early years as a sapling.

So I would also contend that the incidence and consequences of anti-social behaviour and criminal activity may be traced in large measure to negative lessons learned at an early age during one's formative years. Just as little can be done for an unhealthy mature tree, our best efforts to correct the ways of a wayward adolescent or adult more than often come to naught. Much like our staking and caring for a young sapling, our timely intervention in addressing early on incidents such as childhood taunting and schoolyard bullying that convey disrespect are worth every effort.

Further, we as adults have much responsibility in teaching our children by our example the meaning of respect that extends to all relationships and all people, beginning first and foremost with the respect we accord to them.

Above all else, much of what is learned about appropriate and respectful behaviour will be a reflection of what they witness in us. Let us therefore carefully consider our role in moulding and shaping our children as to learn the lessons of respect.



FOND FAREWELLS. Acton High school will lose five of its staff to retirement at the end of the month. Those leaving include seated left to right, Geoff Sansom, Principal Joyce Bradley and Bonnie Vaivods. Standing Ruth Wilson and Helen Grebenc. — Frances Niblock photo

Fond farewells at Acton High

By FRANCES NIBLOCK
The New Tanner

Acton High school will lose five of its staff to retirement this year, including Principal Joyce Bradley who has been at the school for five years.

Bradley, of Campbellville, ends her 33-year career with few regrets and fond memories of events like the Acton Achievers breakfast, held last week to honour students who have been good, all-round citizens.

"I think that a well-balanced program is something that this school is able to offer to kids. We have very talented staff who are willing to cross a lot of boundaries with their varied skills," Bradley said.

"One mom was just saying that we make time at Acton High to encourage kids to go out for things like the musical or jazz band or sports. We recognize that each student is important," Bradley said, adding that her only regret is not having enough time.

"I'd loved to have been at every team game and every practice but I have to pick and choose because I also have a job to do and that's

managing this school. I would have loved to have seen more of our kids do the things that make them special," Bradley said.

Bradley's retirement plans include singing with an award-winning barbershop quartet, and in January,

as a volunteer, Bradley will bring a new Smart Risk injury prevention program to Acton High.

Unlike many, Bradley said her retirement plans don't include any travel.

"I want to have time to stay home. I want to find my house, see my friends and figure out where the bank is."

Teacher Geoff Sansom is retiring after 29 years at Acton High school, most of that time spent teaching English, theatre arts, history and media studies. When asked what his fond memories of the school are Sansom said he wasn't sure if what stands out in his mind about his career at Acton High is a fond memory.

"In the past couple of years things have certainly changed. When I got into teaching I felt it was a very exciting profession to be in where almost anything was possible," Sansom explained recently. "I think what I see now seems to be very concerned with bureaucratic, political issues so the fond memories that I have are the good old days."

Sansom's retirement plans include expanding a counselling practice he now operates and "waiting for more rejection slips from publishers" for two books he has written.

Library and computer teacher Donna Grebenc will also retire at the end of the month after having spent just one semester at Acton

High. "My fond memories are short and sweet but I really liked ending my career at Acton High," Grebenc said.

"There isn't a lot of movement with library staff, so it was nice change for me to come to Acton to replace Ken Ellis who retired earlier this year," Grebenc said, adding she plans to do more clothing design when she retires.

Bonnie Vaivods spent 13 of his 32 year teaching career Acton High, teaching English.

"My best memory is the people that I taught and worked with. They give me energy and they give me life and hope," Vaivods said.

Asked about his retirement plans Vaivods said he wants to spend more time with his family and friends and at his cottage.

"I will need to get my bearings once the school year is finished and my future plans are really tentative at this point," Vaivods said.

Family studies teacher Ruth Wilson will miss "the people — the students, my colleagues" when she retires this month, after spending 22 years at Acton High.

Wilson's first year of teaching coincided with the opening of the new high school in 1976.

"That was a pretty exciting time and it was nice to have been here from the beginning," Wilson said, adding that she plans to expand her Guelph document editing business when she retires.

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