

Treat Your "Best Friend" To
DOG OBEDIENCE

This Christmas

- Daytime, Evening & Weekend Classes • Puppy to Advanced Levels
- Agility in a 130' x 65' Indoor Arena • Pet First Aid Courses

The instructors at Life's Ruff wish you a joyous Christmas

Life's Ruff
Obedience Training

Voted #1 Obedience School!

Reader's Choice Award Winner

Gift Certificates Available

416-568-3222

(Markham and Surrounding Areas)



FAITH & LIFE

A MENNONITE PERSPECTIVE

by
Michael
Turman



A Simple Christmas

As we approach Christmas, I get a feeling in the pit of my stomach. I am not looking forward to this event.

It's not that I don't like Christmas. The fact is I can't stand the barrage of advertising and media-sponsored greed we see every year around this time.

Every December, TV and radio ads remind us that X-Mas is just around the corner, and that we must start buying things for the people we love. The malls are decorated with gaudy garlands, streamers, and other meaningless symbols.

I'm not saying that Christmas is all bad. I have had some great Christmases with my family, and no doubt I'll have a good one again this year. However, I don't enjoy the buildup by merchandisers leading up to this most significant holiday.

The Mennonite Church teaches that Christmas is a time to think about the gifts that God has given us, both in our lives and through the gift of the baby Jesus. It is a time to be with family and friends, and we must also consider the needs of others in our community. It's pretty simple, really.

That is what I believe Christmas needs most these days, simplicity. Our culture requires we make it complex, by buying the "perfect gift" for everyone - the most expensive, or the trendiest gift possible (often both). Christmas can be so busy because we're all trying to get our shopping done on time.

This year, why not use your own talents to make something meaningful for both you and the people you love? Whatever your skills, you can create something from the heart. If you put energy into it, it will be a gift they will

remember.

Instead of spending hours in the mall worried about the credit left in your account, why not spend it at home working on something you love doing? If you have many people to consider, make something similar for everyone, but with a small personal touch on each one. Or, find a gift from what you own. A personal gift, such as a photo album filled with family pictures, or a favourite and well-read book is more significant than a bright shower set or a power tool from a big department store.

These ideas may not be easy to put into action. I know that it would be difficult for me to ask for something simple instead of some of the great presents I could be getting.

That's how life is, full of hard decisions. In my opinion, choosing simplicity, although a difficult choice to make, is choosing a better Christmas.

It's up to you.

Feedback? We'd love to hear your comments. Please contact us at:

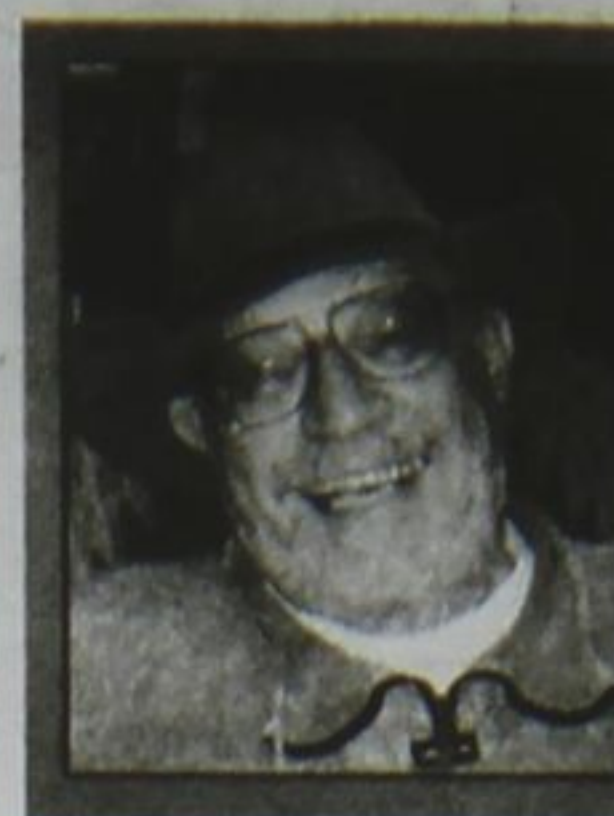
Box 95028, 5892 Main Street
Stouffville, ON L4A 2S8
ComMenChurch@aol.com

Community Mennonite Church

Parkview Village Auditorium
12184 Ninth Line • 905-640-9730

Sunday School: 9:45 - 10:30 am
Coffee Time: 10:30 - 11:00 am
Sunday Worship: 11:00 am

This Space Sponsored by Community Mennonite Church of Stouffville



POINT OF VIEW

by Ralph Pohlman

The Loneliest Time Of The Year

Some years ago, I knew a young man. Well, maybe not so young. He was about 30.

He had always been a bit different, which made him a target in school, so he didn't stay there for long. His father had abandoned the family early in his life. His older sister married and left for good and so he stayed on at home, living with his mother until she died.

Then he was not only isolated, he was alone. He had a series of low-paying jobs, but again he was always seen as odd, even eccentric. And so he lived his life alone in a room, often on public assistance, fearful of the world. And with good reason.

Once he was beaten up by a group of teens in a public park. After all, he wasn't very big, looked strange and so was a perfect victim. He was an intense man, vigilant for persecutions that might come his way. I remember his eyes as always moving, right to left, guarded, like a soldier seeking out the hidden sniper.

But despite all that, he never complained very much. He had a sort of stoic acceptance of the world, but was also quick to cringe, like a dog that has been beaten too many times. It's about time I gave him a name. Let's call him Jack.

One mid-December day, my secretary answered a call from Jack. He had a request. He wanted to know if Dr. Pohlman could please send him a Christmas card because he would like to receive something for Christmas.

I don't send out many cards, but I sent one to Jack. I tried to pick out a cheerful one, a card that might show some of the joy that's expected to fill this season of the year. But still, it was just a card, and I later wished I had taken the time to send a real gift.

A week or two later, I was spending Christmas with my daughter and her family in Stirling, a small village just north of Belleville. You could hardly get near the tree for the mountain of bright packages piled beneath it. And, of course, Santa arrived during the night, ate the cookies and milk that had been put out for him, took the carrots for his reindeer, left behind some sooty footprints on the hearth - and even more presents.

On Christmas morning we had our traditional carol-sing and someone read that old passage from Luke that begins,

"And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus ..."

Following that we passed the eggnog and began the frenetic opening of gifts. I was struck by the excessiveness of it all. There were toys, models, train tracks, skis, dolls, videos, CDs and wrapping paper scattered throughout the room. There were even wrapped squeaky toys for the dogs. But in the midst of all that abundance, I felt a note of sadness and thought about Jack, back in Toronto, and wondered if he was enjoying his Christmas card.

I moved up to Markham Stouffville Hospital not long after that, which was just too far for Jack to travel. As a result, I haven't seen him for years, but I still think about him when this season rolls around. There are thousands of Jacks out there. Disenfranchised, unable - by genetics, upbringing, education or illness - to compete in this unforgiving world.

We are coming up to another Christmas. There are now six billion people on the planet. We have experienced a century of genocide through the likes of Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot and other mass killers. But the killing goes on. Millions have no roof, have never even used a telephone. And I think of the moment in Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol when the Spirit of Christmas Present opens his robe to reveal two starving, hollow-eyed children crouching at his feet.

"Beware these children," says the spirit. "Their names are Ignorance and Want."

What was true in Dickens' time is still true. Only more so. The population increases and with it the gap between haves and have-nots. And the have-nots desperately risk their lives to share in what we have. Beware these children. Their names are Ignorance and Want.

I am going to finish on a lighter note with an e-mail that came into my hands one Christmas.

"You know what would have happened if it had been three wise women instead of men, don't you? They would have asked for directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned the stable, made a casserole and brought disposable diapers as gifts."

New LCBO store to open Dec. 9

The new LCBO store, located next to Shoppers Drug Mart in the No Frills plaza, makes its official debut Dec. 9.

"This store is double the size of the old one, with more than 5,000 square feet of actual shopping space," said LCBO spokesman Chris Layton. "There will be a considerably expanded product selection, with a total of 1,746 products, which is 346 more than at the old location."

A gift section will offer a wide variety of beautifully packaged wines, spirits and beers, many of which will combine distinctive bottles with collectible, branded

glasses. "We will have a Vintages corner, with about 126 wines and spirits, and a large VQA selection to showcase premium Ontario wines. We'll also have a tasting counter, which is a very popular feature in our other stores."

A wide range of domestic and imported beers, an expanded refrigerated section for chilled products, and more checkout facilities will also be featured at the store. The customer service counter will provide product information, fill special orders and offer recipes to complement LCBO products, said Mr. Layton.