

No napping during Pastor Jim's sermon, please

It's that time of year when I don a clerical collar, (not really); stand behind a pulpit, (yes really) and deliver a state of the union address to the congregation of Stouffville's St. James Presbyterian Church.

While I skipped this tribulation in 2014, it seemed only right I should now accept the responsibility, since three other worship team members had already consented and one vacancy was yet to be filled. The reason for the void? Our minister is enjoying a well-earned vacation.

My date with celestial destiny is Aug. 16.

While I've undertaken this obligation on several previous occasions, frequency makes the task no less daunting. Preparations extending over a period of days, weeks, even months are extremely onerous. How pastors accomplish these assignments every Sabbath remains a mystery.

Fortunately, wife Jean is ready, willing and able to lend a helping hand — two hands at the organ or piano. She might even consent to a vocal solo, should I suffer a



Roaming Around

with Jim Thomas

memory block.

While well aware of the duties, the fact two predecessors performed so admirably only increases my discomfort. They addressed their audiences like full-fledged graduates of Knox College. No hesitations. No gaffes. Only occasionally did they need to check their notes.

I don't possess this kind of skill, but unfortunately a prompting panel at the rear of the sanctuary hasn't yet been approved by the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

It was the late Eldred King,

former mayor of Whitchurch-Stouffville and chair of the Region of York who, in one of his subliminal moments, suggested I'd missed my calling that, rather than a journalist, I should have been a minister or a politician.

Sorry, Mr. King, despite the complexities of the fifth estate, your professions as suggested would have been nothing less than intolerable. I have no regrets.

It's no secret, service formats within the Christian church have changed dramatically in the last 20 years. Pianos and organs have been replaced by drums and guitars, even in denominations where, three decades ago, that would have been deemed blasphemous.

However, the Presbyterian fraternity has, for the most part, remained firm.

The first approach to every pastor's assignment is selecting a theme. Everything that's included in the service content must be in tune, even the hymns. Otherwise the congregation's sure to become lost, even, Lord forbid, fall asleep. The occurrence of this calamity is undoubtedly the ultimate of humiliations.

Once the subject question's addressed, the remainder falls into place. Or should.

While every career change has its peaks and valleys, I honestly feel it would be good for all to fit our feet into a pastor's shoes, high heels or otherwise.

Over the years, ministers have sometimes been accused of "choosing messages out of a barrel" or, in other words, regurgitating sermons used decades ago that no one has hopefully heard.

Then there's "the royal George", that very special oration he or she sets aside for exceptional occasions like anniversaries. Earned or unearned, they're sure to lead to accolades and handshakes.

While education requirements vary with denominations, most pastors today are university graduates. Those who are not, possess diplomas or degrees of equal

equivalence.

For a layman like myself who had to scratch and claw his way through high school, stepping into the shoes of a cleric even one Sunday a year, is an extremely taxing chore. But I'll try.

The other issue is what to wear? A clerical collar is out. So also is an embroidered scarf. And a gown, at 30 C, would be ludicrous even though St. James is blessed with air-conditioning.

Selecting the other extreme, such as short-shorts and an open-necked shirt would send some traditionalists darting for the door. To be on the safe side, I'll just sweat it out in a two-piece suit.

While every career change has its peaks and valleys, I honestly feel it would be good for all to fit our feet into a pastor's shoes, high heels or otherwise.

Then, and only then, would we actually come to appreciate the rigors of a profession some folks, for our sakes, have chosen to follow.

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 60 years.

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