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*Wednesday November 19, 2014*

## **Back to an old old story**

**By Jim Taylor**

**The other day, about the time the first blast of frigid air out of the arctic reminded us of the inexorable onset of winter, a Stellar's jay landed on our bird feeder.**

**I love Stellar's jays. Deep blue black in colour, iridescent in the sunlight, crest proudly erect against the north wind...**

**I was fascinated by this bird's manual dexterity. Most birds just peck away at the seeds lying on the platform. This one plucked an individual sunflower seed from the trough, took it to the edge of the platform where he could grip it neatly between his toes, and split it open with his beak to get at the kernel inside.**

**The next day, two Stellar's jays arrived at the feeder. And a couple of days later, two more.**

**One day, we had six on the feeder at once. Obviously, jays can communicate with each other.**

## **Membership losses**

**I find myself thinking about those jays, as I read that the Canadian Legion has suffered a serious membership loss. This, despite having had a record-setting year for selling poppies and receiving donations.**

**The Legion is, of course, an organization for veterans of the Canadian armed forces and their families. But it has been almost 70 years since the last big war ended. There are no veterans left from the first World War, and fewer and fewer from the second. Occasional peace-keeping missions since then**

**haven't produced enough veterans to keep the Legion going.**

**The Legion might be excused for believing that its survival depends on having another massive world war.**

**When I started work at The United Church Observer, over 40 years ago, one of my first assignments was to chronicle the decline of Sunday schools. Membership had tanked. In the process, I also had to examine adult membership figures. I found that the church was much like the Legion – membership peaked after each war, then declined. Sunday schools simply declined a little sooner than adult attendance.**

**Like the Legion, the church might have been tempted to think that all it needed to restore its heyday was another major war.**

**Yes, I know, that would be an irrational response. But organizations in crisis are not necessarily rational.**

## **Desperate solutions**

**An executive person in a service club stated, "We're drawing new members through the front door. But they're leaving just as fast out the back door. We've got to lock that back door!"**

**Another organization hit a plateau. They're pinning some hopes onto a corporate re-design – new name, new logo, new website.**

**A youth sports organization considered making a rule – you can't enroll your child unless you agree to help with coaching.**

**Yet another group hopes that use of the social media can save them.**

**In the past, I've done work for organizations that couldn't understand why their annual meeting or their fundraising drive didn't produce the results they had hoped for. "But we had a really good write-up in our newsletter," they'd lament.**

**The jays on my feeder might have something to tell all of us.**

**Whether it's religion or politics, sports or business, the most effective communication is personal contact. Face to face. Word of mouth.**

**Or, in the Stellar's jays' case, word of beak.**

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## **YOUR TURN**

**Unless I lost some of your letters (always a possibility), I received only two pieces of feedback to last week's column in which I suggested that the real benefit of democracy was the right to evict people from office. I referred to all candidates as unknown quantities – a pig in a poke – and noted that some do turn out to be pigs.**

**Charles Hill in Texas evoked echoes of George Orwell's Animal Farm when he asked, "But what if all the choices are pigs, some just having been chosen by a different herd of pigs than others?"**

**Tom Watson wrote a longer letter: "A confession: I have considered not voting. Near the end of Jean Chretien's time as Prime Minister, I was so discouraged I decided not to vote in the next election. My wife appealed to my sense of duty as a citizen of Canada and I voted. Then, in the last two federal elections, I was close to the same mindset again. Why? Because I was again so discouraged that I thought it simply didn't matter whether or not I bothered. Those I didn't want in there were going back in regardless of whether or not I voted.**

**"You raised the question as to why more people don't vote. You provided part of answer when you said that we frequently don't vote 'for' someone but 'against' someone else. But that isn't good enough, is it?**

**"Truth is, at least from my point of view, that we really don't have democracy, only a shadow thereof. But, maybe...hopefully...there will come a time when we do, and then it will matter again whether or not we vote, and we will vote 'for' someone and not just 'against' somebody we want out of office."**

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## **PSALM PARAPHRASES**

**Ah, Psalm 100 – one of the glorious psalms that almost begs to be sung loudly and with enthusiasm, not muttered sotto voce as if we were ashamed of being heard! I'll include a paraphrase, but instead of using it, I'd urge you to get hold of Linnea Good's inspired musical setting, 'Make a Joyful Noise,' (#820 in the United Church hymnbook Voices United, or through Borealis Music, or by e-mailing Linnea [lg@linneagood.com](mailto:lg@linneagood.com)).**

**But if you insist on speaking the words instead of singing them, here's a**

**paraphrase:**

**1 Leap and dance with joy --**

**The showers have ended, the sun has come out again.**

**2 Splash through the puddles!**

**Roll in the grass!**

**Let laughter rise in the air like flights of sparrows!**

**3 This is God's world!**

**God made it, God made us -- and it is good!**

**We spoil it if we stare at it through sour faces.**

**God set us free to frolic, to gambol, to celebrate the gift of life.**

**4 So dance your way down the garden;**

**scatter rose-petals with every step.**

**With every breath, enjoy the goodness of God!**

**5 From the beginning of time, God has poured out love;**

**God will continue loving until time grinds to a close.**

**For paraphrases of most of the psalms used by the Revised Common Lectionary, you can order my book *Everyday Psalms* from Wood Lake Publishing, [info@woodlake.com](mailto:info@woodlake.com).**

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YOU SCRATCH MY BACK...

If you know someone else who might like to receive this column regularly via e-mail, send a request to [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca). Or forward them a copy of this column. But please put your name on it, so they don't think I'm sending out spam.

For other web links worth pursuing, try

- Ralph Milton's HymnSight webpage, <http://www.hymnsight.ca>, with a vast gallery of photos you can use to enhance the appearance of the visual images you project for liturgical use (prayers, responses, hymn verses, etc.)
- David Keating's "SeemslkeGod" page, [www.seemslkegod.org](http://www.seemslkegod.org);
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, [www.traditionaliconoclast.com](http://www.traditionaliconoclast.com)
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap," write [reynoldsrap@shaw.ca](mailto:reynoldsrap@shaw.ca)
- Wayne Irwin's "Churchweb Canada," an inexpensive service for any congregation wanting to develop a web presence, with free consultation. <http://www.churchwebcanada.ca>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write [alvawood@gmail.com](mailto:alvawood@gmail.com) to get onto her mailing list.

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You can access several years of archived columns at <http://edges.Canadahomepage.net>.

I write a second column each Sunday called Sharp Edges, which tends to be somewhat more cutting about social

and justice issues. To sign up for Sharp Edges, write to me directly, at [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca), or send a note to [sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca](mailto:sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca)

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