

## **The One Appointed by God as the Judge of the Living and the Dead**

This week, I received some difficult news—news relating to one of the missions of the Presbytery of Montreal. I'm currently serving as convener of the Missions Committee of the Presbytery of Montreal. Our presbytery has a great number of missions, including two university chaplaincies—part-time, full-time, McGill and Concordia—Église St-Luc, which continues to receive from the General Assembly Budget or *Presbyterians Sharing...*, Tyndale St-Georges Community Centre, Action Réfugiés Montréal. And we did make a request for a grant to Livingstone Presbyterian Church, which is on Jean Talon St.; it's a multi-ethnic congregation, with a new minister, and newly self-supporting; it used to be a joint charge with the Hungarian Presbyterian Church.

So, all of our missions received the grant as requested, except for one; and that was Tyndale St-Georges Community Centre. Their grant was halved, from \$50,000 to \$25,000. The money that goes from *Presbyterians Sharing...* to Tyndale St-Georges supports the salary of the executive director at Tyndale St-Georges.

Now, many of you will know about this community centre. It's located in an area of Montreal known as Little Burgundy or Petite Bourgogne (as l'Office de la langue française would have us identify it). But it is located in Little Burgundy, in an area which has the most concentrated amount of social housing in Canada, we are told, by the current director of Tyndale St-Georges, whose name is Jennifer de Combe. It also has a high proportion of families headed by a single parent or even by a grandparent.

And so, one of the activities at that community centre is a grandparents' group, in support of the grandparents. There is what they call a pre-employment programme. This is to help people with employable skills, such as how to operate a cash register, how to develop their own CV that they can hand out to employers. And there is an after-school programme there, where one of the chief goals is helping children with their homework; but also they are fed; they are fed a meal.

The reason why Tyndale's grant was halved this year, was, ostensibly, because there is not a sufficient amount of evangelism going on there. And this judgement has a come from a particular source, or sources, rather than—generally—from the people in Toronto, for example. So Synod Mission conveners meet with the Associate Secretary of Canadian Ministries/The Vine as well as his assistant, Sheila Lang, and arrive at the grants. This time, the Synod Mission conveners had—maybe—a lot more say than in the past.

In any case, Tyndale has had their grant from the Presbyterian Church in Canada halved. And we are now at a comparable level to what the Anglican Church is also giving, which is roughly \$25,000. This is in a budget of over one million. It is a

very active and vibrant community centre.

Now, what should we say is the basis for this argument that there is insufficient evangelism at Tyndale St-Georges? Well, let me say that the previous director of Tyndale St- Georges, Patricia Murphy, characterized Tyndale as having three models it was working by— what she called a “business” model, a “community centre” model, and a “church mission” model. So, as executive director, one had, essentially, to work with all these three models—something of a juggling act, perhaps.

The Board of Tyndale is influenced strongly by what we could call the “business” model—or has been in the past. And, in fact, Tyndale has their own foundation. It has shown great success in fund-raising. It is also supported by the Quebec government, particularly in their pre-employment programme, which has received “five-star” rating, so to speak, from the Quebec government, in preparing people for the employment world.

Now, the “community-centre” dimension is certainly well-represented. There is community involvement in a significant way, there. And the community, is, as I said, single parents, people of quite low income, but also immigrant families— people learning English. English is, I would say, the dominant language at Tyndale, with some French also being used. But the immigrant population is very noticeable at Tyndale. So here is a community that is helping to welcome newcomers to Canada, and does a very good job at it.

Now, the “church mission” model has its own dimension. There is a chaplain. However, the chaplain is of a very advanced age, although he is there four days a week, and puts in many hours. He is from the Anglican Church. And there are connections between churches in Montreal, such as Montreal West Presbyterian Church, and the Church of Saint Andrew and Saint Paul, out of which this mission began—or out of the efforts of one family from that church, from which Tyndale began.

Given the nature of the community—multi-ethnic, multi-religious, etc.—the way in which the Christian faith is expressed has been done carefully, although meaningfully. Now, it happens this halving of the grant to Tyndale comes right at the point where their new executive director is in position for, now, six months; she began in March, 2011. And this woman, whom you will meet, if you come here January 29, at 2:00 p.m.—this woman, first of all, taught Christian education in schools in the Eastern Townships; she went from there to studying at McGill, in theology; and received a S.T.M. (Sacred Theology) degree. She worked as the Youth and Young Adult Coordinator at St. James United Church, and she was, if not the director, then strongly involved, in Montreal City Mission. So it’s unfortunate that this halving of the grant comes right at the time when Tyndale is in a much stronger position to be able to convey the Christian faith, thanks to the background of their current director. Other directors have served well and effectively, but have brought

another dimension, whether it was a social work or administrative dimension. But Jennifer brings, particularly, a faith dimension to her work. And yet, unfortunately, right at this point, is when the grant to Tyndale is halved.

Of course, all of this I want, eventually, to relate to the matter of our text from Matthew's gospel, where the statement is made by the Son of Man, "Inasmuch as you did it to the least of these... , you did it also to me." One characteristic of Tyndale is that the financial people, the board (or some representatives of that board with a particular financial inclination), the people who are focussed on Tyndale as a community centre, the people who see Tyndale as a church mission—they are all focussed on service of neighbour. And that's where they find their unifying factor. And, to that extent, they fulfil the mandate which is expressed in this passage from Matthew's gospel, which talks, among other things, about "welcoming the stranger".

Now, my wife, Linda, who is in the congregation today, served, in a volunteer capacity, at Tyndale St-Georges, as a chaplain. Now, it's not that easy getting in to Tyndale, as some of you people who work in Montreal, know. It requires considerable time by train, particularly, if you are going in. But one of Linda's discoveries was how spiritually alive this place is, how much questions of faith are uppermost in people's minds. And, perhaps, that's not surprising given the

fact of this passage from Matthew's gospel, which says, "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these... you did it also to me." That could be interpreted—"Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these... you did it following my command." But it could also mean, "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these...you did it to me..." and therefore you sense a certain unity with what my message has been, my mission to the world—welcoming the alienated from God, bringing reconciliation between people, feeding the hungry, and so on. So, in essence, the activity at Tyndale is one where you could expect, where it is not surprising, that the Spirit of God is active and bubbles up in its reality.

So Tyndale has unfortunately received this news at an unfortunate time—the complaint that it is not sufficiently involved evangelism.

But could we look at Tyndale, and then consider ourselves? Or consider churches? Churches may complain about Tyndale, that there are not that many services of worship. The other day, we are told, there was a service of worship conducted by the Rev. Jeff Veenstra, who is the current minister at the Church of Saint Andrew and Saint Paul—and the room at Tyndale was packed to overflowing.

So one could have the complaint of some church people that Tyndale doesn't sufficiently evangelize. But, on the other hand, we could ask of churches, "Are you churches sufficiently community centres, areas where people can come and feel comfortable, and participate in a variety of different activities?"

That certainly, I think, has been true here. There has been a lot of different activities in this church, where people come. They may or may not be members of this church, but they are involved in activities in this building. And so, Margaret Rodger Memorial Presbyterian Church, in many ways, echoes something of what Tyndale does. We have after-school programmes, among other things. We don't have a pre-employment programme. But it's perhaps something to consider. We don't have a grandparents' programme—something to consider. Now, unfortunately, we will be losing one of our social groups, or one of our evening groups, our musical groups, the Redemption group. Now, the music of the Redemption group is not particularly my favourite. However, I do very much value the fact that people get together for that event. The next one is mid-December, the last one of that group. That helps makes this church something of a community centre—a place where people can go, meet other people, and the like. And, surely, that is an aspect of mission to the community. We preach the gospel. But the gospel can also be made flesh when there are community activities, where there is the opportunity for people to participate in things that meet their needs, and benefit from those events.

Now, Tyndale, also, as I have said, devotes a lot of money to these projects. Tyndale has its own foundation. It relies, to some degree, on the churches, and also government sources, and the like. That is perhaps a challenge to churches to use their own financial resources, their physical resources, in ways that also benefit the community and not just themselves. And, I think, Margaret Rodger Memorial Presbyterian indeed does some of that, despite our difficult financial situation.

Tyndale has not perhaps evangelized in the way we tend to associate with that word. But, over the next few years, it will be increasingly connected with churches, and with the proclamation, the making-known of the gospel, thanks to the emphasis of the current director, Jennifer de Combe. And Tyndale is a challenge to churches to be themselves not only preaching the gospel, but to be a community centre where people can come and have needs addressed, and where financial resources are used towards this end as well as towards the functioning of the building, paying of staff, and so on.

Right at the beginning of Matthew's gospel, we hear John the Baptist saying to people who came to be baptized, "Bear fruit that befits repentance." Bear fruit that is a consequence of your baptism. Well, the church needs always to reflect how it is fulfilling its own baptism, its own reality of the Church of Christ. There isn't anything automatic about it. It calls for discernment, it calls for repentance, at times. But one of the ways in which we show the fruits of the Spirit is feeding the angry, giving water to the thirsty, clothing the naked, welcoming the stranger, visiting those who are sick or in prison. May we bear fruit that corresponds to the baptism that we have in Jesus Christ our Lord.