

A NEWSLETTER OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF GOD - CANADA

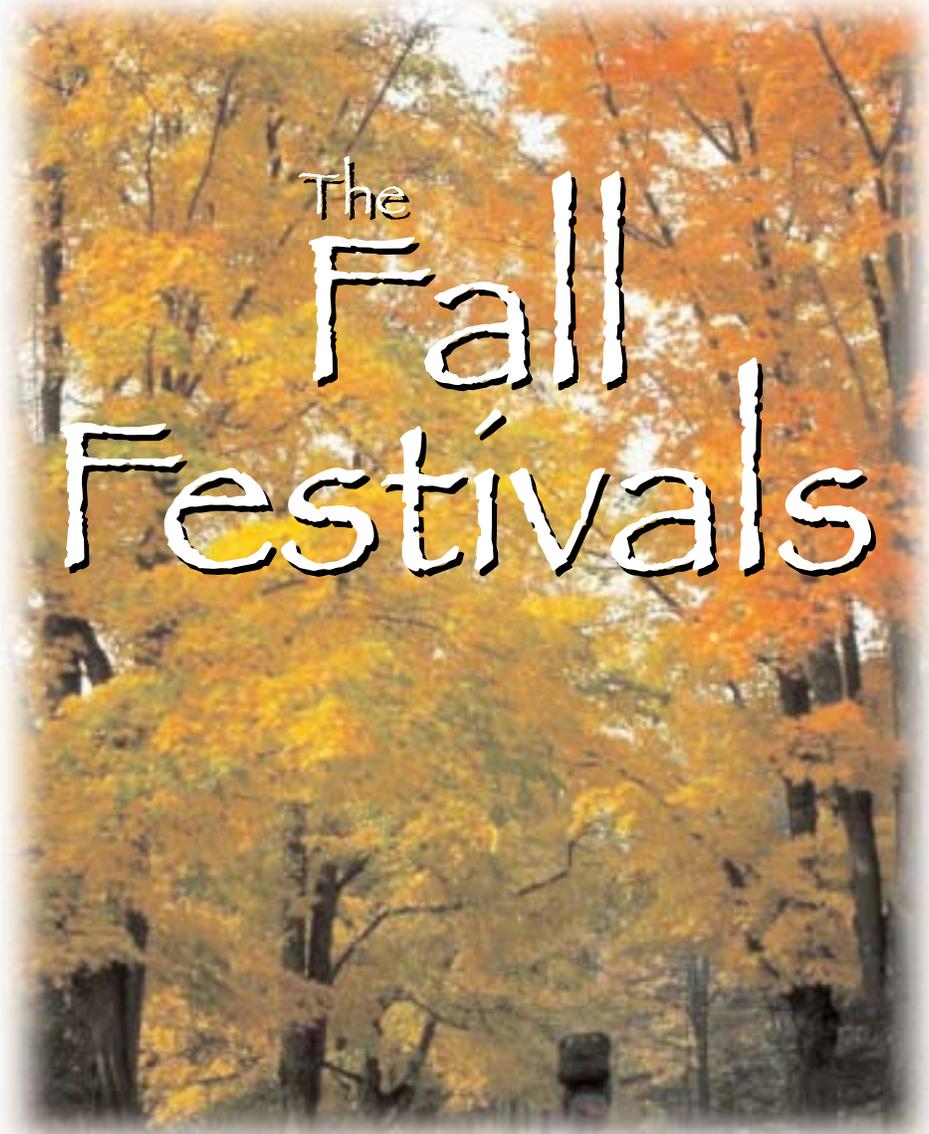


# United News Canada

VOLUME 8, NUMBER 5 • SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2003

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# The Fall Festivals

UNITED  
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CANADA

P. O. Box 144, Station D  
Etobicoke, ON M9A 4X1  
[www.ucg.ca](http://www.ucg.ca)

TORONTO AREA  
(905) 876-9966

TOLL FREE  
1-800-338-7779

FACSIMILE  
(905) 876-0569

INTERNET  
[www.unitednewscanada.org](http://www.unitednewscanada.org)



And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The Feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My Feasts.'"

—Leviticus 23:1-2

# Thy Kingdom Come!

BY RAINER SALOMAA • EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

It is hot outside! It has been that way for a long time this summer, especially in southern British Columbia. We have had the least amount of rainfall for this time of year in the last 100 years. Conditions in most of British Columbia have been tinder dry. Our premier has put the entire province in a state of emergency.

There are over 800 forest fires burning. Alberta has around 40 fires. Roads have been closed off. People have been evacuated, including the entire town of Barriere. Sixty homes, as well as a sawmill, burned down. About 7,500 area residents had to flee.

Another major fire erupted in the Okanagan Valley between Kelowna and Penticton. As I write, it has destroyed over 200 homes in Kelowna and forced over 30,000 to flee from the vicious blaze. Rosemary Moore, one of the members put on evacuation alert, said, "This place is burning up. We are losing houses left right and centre. The fire has crossed over the Kelowna barrier set up earlier, it's coming down Shute Lake Road. Smoke and debris are every where...I had everything packed to take on one hour's notice - just basics, and photo albums and necessities. It is very stressful."

This is only one of so many problems suddenly hitting Canada and the nation is staggering, like a punch-drunk boxer. These are not minor inconveniences.

I asked Laurie Nyhus to write an article on Mad Cow Disease, since he lives in Northern Alberta, an area that has felt the effects of this crisis. It is shocking

to realize that Canadian beef and cattle have been shut out of 34 countries, hitting beef producers really hard. It is a \$4 billion beef export trade. (One article I read said that half of Canada's beef producers face financial ruin if the border to the United States doesn't open soon.) All of this is from one cow!

SARS continues to be in the news. It hit the city of Toronto really hard. A local politician helped organize a rock concert that had an attendance of around 400,000 to try to show the world that it was all safe that city. Imagine the Rolling Stones being used to bring confidence to wary travelers!

I live in Northern British Columbia where the area is reeling from an on-going softwoods lumber dispute with the United States. The logging industry is struggling to stay solvent in the face of the 19 per cent tariffs that have been imposed on most Canadian lumber exported to the States. Mills have shut down. Loggers are struggling to find work and to support their families.

Our judicial and political systems have stirred up a hornet's nest with the issue of same-sex marriages. Gay couples lined up in Ontario to get legally married after a judge ruled it was unconstitutional not to allow it. This has spread to other provinces. The Bureau of Vital Statistics here in British Columbia, says the British Columbia Appeals Court has reviewed its decision with regard to same-sex marriage and has made it a legal option in the province.

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#### EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Rainer Salomaa

#### ASSISTANT EDITOR / LAYOUT

Ruth Kerr

#### PROOF READERS

Angie Erickson, Kevin Ford, Ed van Pelt

#### DOCTRINAL REVIEWERS

George Carter,  
Graemme Marshall, Glen White

#### ON-LINE VERSION

Ken Kerr, Jr.

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# Feasting With a Focus

BY ANTHONY WASILKOFF • OPERATIONS MANAGER

During the depths of a long, arduous winter, one of my sources of hope is a good quality colour seed catalogue. Many of us receive a copy or two from various seed houses in January or February. I enjoy thumbing through a copy to look over the plants that are promised to grow if I plant that company's wondrous seeds. The flowers and vegetables are portrayed as tantalizingly lush and lovely.

Finally, at long last, spring does arrive and we are privileged to plant an array of seeds that germinate and poke through the ground with their tiny wisps of green. Some turn into gorgeous flowers, others into leafy vegetables. Every spring I think of John Denver's song in which he melodically implores, "Inch by inch, row by row / Someone bless these seeds I sow...."

Don't you just love the first taste of fresh chives straight from your back yard? Don't you enjoy picking the first batch of radishes and slicing them into a crisp green salad, loaded with succulent lettuce also from your very own kitchen garden? It seems nothing beats the joy of harvest. Oh, how good the first batch of baby potatoes, carrots and peas taste. The joy of harvest, even though miniscule in the spring, is a remarkable treat. A vine-ripened tomato plucked from the pot on your apartment balcony easily beats its cousin purchased at the local supermarket.

This year the Feast of Tabernacles begins on Friday evening, October 10, and concludes on Saturday evening, October 18. (Of course, the eighth day is a separate occasion even though we tend to see and experience both Festivals as one unit.)

You will probably be aware that the third day of



the Feast falls on Monday, October 13. However, this is not just an ordinary Monday. This Monday happens to be Canadian Thanksgiving Day!

Is there any connection or correlation between the Feast of Tabernacles and Thanksgiving Day? The seventh chapter of the gospel of John describes our Savior observing the Feast of Tabernacles. In his *New Testament Commentary*, for John 7:2, David Stern writes, "The festival also celebrates the harvest, coming, as it does, at summer's end, so that it is a time of thanksgiving. (The Puritans, who took the Old Testament

more seriously than most Christians, modeled the American holiday of Thanksgiving after Sukkoth.)"

The wonderful Feast of Tabernacles is identified by its Creator by more than one just one name. In Exodus 23:16-18 we read, "Three times you shall keep a Feast to Me in the year...and the Feast of Ingathering which is at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field." The Feast of Tabernacles is connected to the major harvest that occurs at the end of the growing season. In a sense, it is a type of harvest festival – a time of gathering in, a time of enjoying the fruits of one's labors, a time of expressing gratitude to the One who makes it all possible.

Of our wondrous Creator, Acts 14:17 states, "Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." This passage seems especially applicable during the eight days we spend together at the Feast of Tabernacles.

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# Feasting With a Focus

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“We humans are the recipients of the bounty of a benevolent God.”



In the Northern Hemisphere the connection between the autumn harvest and the Feast of Tabernacles is hard to miss. Even today, there are numerous Fall Fairs where avid gardeners bring their produce and compete for the biggest pumpkin, squash or rutabaga. How often have we seen the Feast of Tabernacles stage decorated with a harvest motif? I have vivid recollections of Festival stages with beautifully-fashioned cornucopias and a colorful array of autumn fruits and vegetables cascading outwards.

Our family was blessed to observe the Feast of Tabernacles in Prince Edward Island one year. Some of you readers may have been at that lovely locale during the years the Church sponsored a Feast in the home province of Anne of Green Gables. One of my recollections is that of the brethren from Newfoundland taking excursions to local fruit orchards after Church services. They so much enjoyed picking a goodly number of apples to take back home with them. There is definite joy in participating in the harvest.

Deuteronomy 16:13 instructs us, “You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your

threshing floor and from your winepress.” The agricultural connection is clear, isn’t it! Those amongst us who are farmers see the significance of this connection more readily than others. Verse 14 further admonishes, “Seven days you shall keep a sacred Feast to the Lord your God in the place which the Lord chooses, because the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you shall surely rejoice.”

What this implies is that we humans are the recipients of the bounty of a benevolent God. Thus it is necessary for us to express our gratitude and joy accordingly. Too often Thanksgiving Day is lacking because many people aren’t really thankful while those who are don’t know who to direct their thanks toward.

The Pilgrims came to North America in search of religious freedom. The Mayflower Compact was an amazing document: “[H]aving undertaken for the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith...a voyage to plant the first permanent colony...” They soon discovered that their search for permanence was not easy to come by. The first Thanksgiving observed in October, 1621, centered on acknowledging God for seeing them through the ravages of winter, when half their contingent sadly succumbed to the elements.

Abraham Lincoln established Thanksgiving as an official event by a proclamation issued on October 3, 1863. In his proclamation, Lincoln upbraided his fellow citizens for having “forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us.” Lincoln continued, “We have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own.”

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# You Go! I am Coming

BY ROBERT BERENDT • EDMONTON

About 40 years ago, when God was calling me into His truth, the strongest driving force I felt came through an understanding of the magnificence of the life of Jesus Christ here on earth. I considered myself a Christian and I firmly believed that being a Christian meant being a follower of Jesus Christ. I did not realize that I had been giving lip service and not following in His footsteps. I did not really believe that He was who He said He was. I did not understand the full importance of the Bible guiding my feet.

I have found that I was not the first to lack in a belief towards Jesus Christ. There are many scriptures that show that almost all those present with Jesus failed in their comprehension until after His resurrection. That got their attention. One story that I have found to be most motivational and inspiring is recorded in John 7. I found many clues in this chapter that helped me better understand some of my shortcomings. First of all, like the brothers of Jesus (verse 5) I realized that I did not believe Him. In my case it had to do with ignorance due to not studying the Bible and relying on the explanations of men who I thought were constantly striving to live by the Bible. I actually listened to ministers tell me "this is what the Bible says, but..." I cannot except any "buts" today. The Bible is the only recorded word of God, and is not to be tampered with.

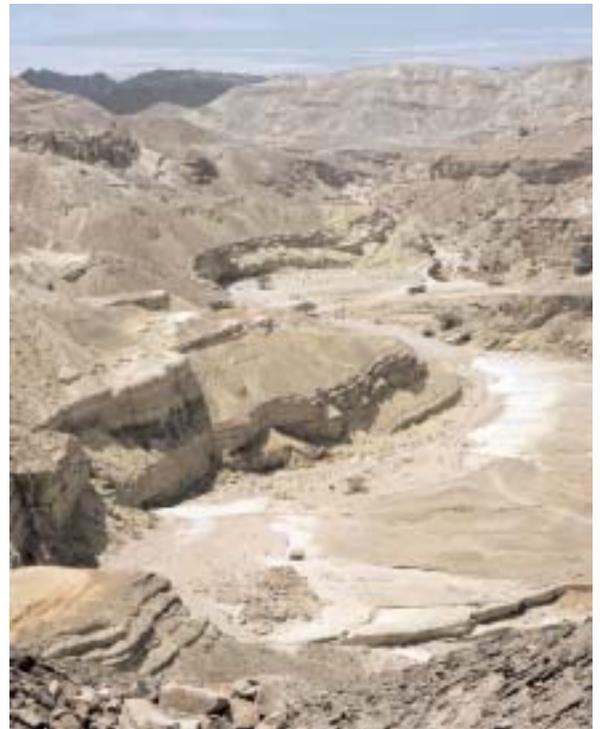
Chapter seven is broken into several logical parts according to our thinking. Verses 1-9 record the disbelief of the brothers as to "who" Jesus was. Verses 10-24 tell of Jesus bringing the Word of God and living by it. Verses 25-31 reveal the ongoing search for the Messiah. Verses 32-36 tells of the puzzled queries of the Pharisees. Verses 37-39 yield the promise of the Holy Spirit which was to come.

Verses 40-44 ask the question "Who is He?" Verses 43-52 express the rejection of Jesus by the religious authorities. I did not want to remain among those who rejected Jesus. I wanted to be like Him.

One point of great interest to me was that this whole chapter records events that took place during a time called the "Feast of Tabernacles" (verse 2). There was some confusion because I thought it was the "Jews' feast."

How amazed I was to learn that it is God's Feast as recorded in Leviticus 23:33-44. Jesus did go and keep this Feast as He kept every Feast day that God had given to His people. He went even though His life was in danger and He had to walk or ride a donkey and

perhaps small boat over a distance of over 160 kilometres (100 miles) as the crow flies. He traveled past hostile villages and through dangerous territory to attend the Feast of Tabernacles. I had never even heard of this Feast. How was I to be like Jesus Christ and not do the things He did in His worship of God? I could not reconcile that and so I have kept the Feast ever since 1965. What a blessing to understand the significance of these great days as well as the grandeur of all of God's Holy Days.



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# You Go! I am Coming

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“I learned much about the precious gifts of God through the keeping of His Holy Days.”

John 7:16-19 had strong words about what I was learning. Jesus said He was living by the doctrine of God the Father – not His own personal doctrine. He says, “If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.” In verses 21-24 Jesus distinguishes between the law of Moses (circumcision) and the law of God (the Sabbath). Jesus went on to state that He was sent and that the religious leaders did not know God and thus could not recognize Him. How greatly that position is paralleled today. What a duplication of the past is evident when we see the image, deeds, footsteps and direction of Jesus Christ changed, manipulated, cancelled or mocked. In a way, humans have continually sought to kill Christ rather than follow Him. A true Christian will follow His example.

In John 6:37-38 Jesus spoke boldly in the temple telling of the promise of the Holy Spirit to those who believe in Him. Those who thirst for truth and oneness with Jesus Christ and God the Father will be given this great gift.

I learned much about the precious gifts of God through the keeping of His Holy Days. The Feast of Tabernacles is the one time where a person could spend eight or more days in fellowship with those of like minds – “like” one another and, more importantly, “like” Jesus Christ. It is the oneness with Jesus Christ that binds us all together. Believing is not enough; actions that reflect that belief must follow. These days were set aside by God to look forward to the time when the kingdom of God will be established on earth and Jesus Christ will be the great King and Priest. Justice, godliness, lawfulness and peace will be poured out upon the earth. God’s law will go forth to all the nations and there will be no more wars. That glorious time which lies in the future is taught by keeping these days. That future moment is being experienced and reconfirmed by those

who are determined to attend.

I also learned that a person can keep this season even if something like an illness or serious matter may prevent travelling to a chosen site. You can even keep it at home, but the will of God is that we join together and keep these Feast days in larger groups. God’s ministry tries to choose convenient places in which to meet. People are expected to adjust accordingly. Our first Feast days in the past were kept in tents due to the cost of travel and our restricted finances. No doubt Jesus Christ knew what life in a tent meant.

James 2:19-20 states that demons believe. They also tremble. We humans ought to see belief is not enough and trembling is not enough. As James wrote, “Faith without works is dead.” Our works involve following the example of Jesus Christ who taught and lived in the flesh according to the doctrine of the Almighty Father. I want to be like Jesus Christ. I want to be like the Father. I believe all humans have some sort of desire to find the Creator of life and learn of Him. God says He has placed eternity in man’s heart (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Humans worship almost anything, but that is not good enough. It is through Jesus Christ that we can grasp the true direction. If we are to be like Him we need to accept and capture His values and way of life. I am speaking of the godly and religious values. We do not need to wear a robe and sandals and live in the Middle East. We do need to clothe ourselves with the spiritual garments God has designed.

This year in Canada there are several Feast sites to choose from. Kelowna, Regina, Mont Sainte-Anne and St. John’s all have established sites. A new site is opening in Horseshoe Valley, Ontario. If you need any information please contact us at [www.ucg.ca](http://www.ucg.ca). I truly hope that you too have a burning desire to follow Jesus’ footsteps and be like Him. -UNC

# The Trumpet Shall Sound

BY GLEN WHITE • CALGARY

For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, with the trump of God and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

At the close of this significant section of scripture, the Apostle Paul exhorts the brethren to comfort (stimulate, encourage) one another with these words! These words, preached to the Church in Thessalonica and to all mankind, are emphatic words of the return of Jesus Christ and the resurrection into the kingdom of God. Paul's central message, throughout his ministry, was the kingdom of God (Acts 19:8; 28:23,31). He continued the Master's message that began in Galilee.

Notice, Jesus came preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God, "...saying, the time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

Jesus launched this vision and the apostles preached, lived, and sacrificed everything to spread this hope for mankind. When the disciples were sent out, their instructions were few but succinct. The central message was to preach the Kingdom of God. Further, the apostle Paul was adamant that any altering or diminishing of this message, this vision, was blasphemous, writing, "...but there be some that trouble you, and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be



accursed" (Galatians 1:7-9).

Let us take a long and appreciative look at this fundamental teaching that will explode into fruition on the Feast of Trumpets, the time of Christ's return to gather the firstfruits into the family of God.

Paul took the time to more fully explain this visionary event, with very basic but colorful descriptive analogies. This scripture is intended to encourage, stimulate and

drive the Christian to fuller efforts to be ready for this time. He wrote, "All flesh is not the same flesh; but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fishes and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one start differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption" (1 Corinthians 15:39-42).

Paul continues with more comparisons and remarkable analogies. Then he launches into eloquent concluding statements in verse 49 saying, "And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man." He goes on to write, "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (verses 51-52).

"Jesus launched this vision and the apostles ...sacrificed everything to spread this hope for mankind."

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# Feasting With a Focus

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“Spiritually speaking, so much has been given to us.”

The Feast of Tabernacles is surely a time of rejoicing and celebration. But it must also focus on expressing sustained gratitude to the Source of all our blessings and bounty. We do this all week long. This year we have the special opportunity of expressing extra thanks on Thanksgiving Day Monday.

In Luke 12:48 we read, “...to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.” Of the Sabbath keeper, God says in Isaiah 58:14, “Then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken.” In Matthew 13:16-17 we read, “But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”

Spiritually speaking, so much has been given to us. Our ears are blessed to hear and our eyes are blessed to see what others earnestly wished they could but couldn't. We are given spiritual food and

drink all year round but especially so on the annual Holy Days. Most of all, we are given spiritual sustenance in remarkable quantity and quality at the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day.

In a column she wrote some time ago, Dr. Laura Schlessinger addressed the topic of covetousness. She referred to a front-page story in the *Wall Street Journal* about the “haves and the have-mores.” Even in these times of an economic bonanza, one could observe “the wave of envy gnawing at those near the top of the economic pyramid as they see others making even more.” Dr. Laura concluded her column by saying, “With the help of the commandments we can rise above these baser instincts to focus on our blessings and be thankful for all that we do have. Gratitude is the best medicine for covetousness.”

Hebrews 6:4-5 describes what happens to us as the result of conversion, “enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come.” Surely this occurs to us most of all at the Feast of Tabernacles, a time of celebration, rejoicing and thanksgiving. -UNC

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## The Trumpet Shall Sound

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The apostle John, quoting the vision given him by Jesus Christ writes, “Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever’” (Revelation 11:15)! This is the same trumpet that Paul described in 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4.

The soon-coming day of the Lord will be

a shocking wake-up call for all nations. For those who are resurrected, it will be a special and spectacular time when their dreams and hopes the return of Jesus Christ will be materialized.

Does this vision motivate, inspire, encourage, and drive us deeper into the truth and service of God? If it does, then our celebration of these Fall Festivals will be one of the fullest and most meaningful ever. -UNC

# Practicing What We Preach

BY DAVID PALMER • VANCOUVER

A subscriber to our flagship publication, the *Good News* magazine, recently sent a letter to the United Church of God Home Office acknowledging that the Church preaches the doctrine of keeping the Feasts of God, but asked, “While you teach them, do you actually keep them?”

Are these Feasts of the Lord still relevant today? And if so, why do we keep them? Are they just “religious trappings,” or are we instructed to observe them for a specific reason?

There is a scripture in the Old Testament book of Leviticus that admonished the nation of Israel to observe the Feasts of God. “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them, concerning the Feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are My Feasts” (Leviticus 23:2). The entire chapter then gives instructions from God as to the observation of these special Feasts, and when we look closely at the Festivals outlined, we learn a number of lessons. One of those lessons is particularly important in answering the question as to why we continue to observe them today.

While many of Canada’s mainstream churches simply neglect or ignore these festivals, the United Church of God continues to observe all of the Feast days, including the Feast of Tabernacles. But why?

Three specific words are used each time God reminds us that the Feasts, *His* Feasts are to be observed. So let’s take a close look at God’s instructions. “These are the Feasts of the LORD, even holy convocations, which you shall proclaim in their seasons” (Leviticus 23:4). The word *holy* in this verse refers to “a sacred place” or “thing.” The Hebrew is *Quodesh*, from the prime root meaning “to observe as ceremonially or morally clean.” Convocation refers to “a calling out, as in a public meeting.” In other words, *holy*

*convocation* is a God-commanded sacred assembly of God’s people. But the word convocation means much more than that. It also means “a rehearsal.” The Hebrew is *Miqra*, taken from the prime root of the word *qara*. Why is that important? Because in a word it means the Feast days involve “rehearsal.”

Each week on the Sabbath, and each year as we observe God’s annual Feast days we are rehearsing the plan of Salvation.

These Feasts of the Lord, including Tabernacles, are a blueprint of God’s plan for His entire creation, and as we continue to rehearse God’s way, God’s plan, we are in effect, “practicing what we preach.” We are rehearsing for the Kingdom of God!

It’s interesting to note that the first scripture that uses the phrase *holy convocation* is found in Exodus 12:16. It refers to the keeping of the seven-day Feast, the Days of Unleavened Bread. The last use of the phrase *holy convocation* is found in Numbers 29:12, referring to the Feast of Tabernacles.

Jesus made it clear that He came to do the will of His Father (John 5:30; 12:49-50). When we understand that Christ is the central character of God’s plan, we recognize that the Messiah observed and kept all of God’s commands, including the Feast days. The apostles also observed them, even after Christ’s death and resurrection. The apostle Paul wrote that the Old Testament scriptures were given for our learning (Romans 15:4). The word *learning* refers to both knowledge and function, the concept of not just acquiring information, but acting on that as well.



“We are rehearsing for the kingdom of God.”

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# Practicing What We Preach

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“One day all this rehearsal will be over.”

So whether we are looking at Old Testament scripture, or bringing Jesus into the picture, we still have the commandment to keep the Feasts. And each is a portion of the overall rehearsal program that God laid out, so that we might be better equipped as kings and priests in His kingdom.

God tells us to keep these holy convocations, these rehearsals of His plan of salvation in their season. We are to observe, to rehearse, to practice, and to continue to do so year in year out. The fall harvest is the season designated by God for us to step back from our busy world for a brief period of time, and once again

rehearse His marvelous plan of salvation, by observing the wonderful, spiritually uplifting Feast of Tabernacles.

One day all this rehearsal will be over. Jesus Christ will be here and it will be time to implement all those things we learned at rehearsal. That's why a holy convocation, a commanded assembly of God's people is to be proclaimed, observed, and rehearsed. It's why we have the command to "preach the gospel," but not only to preach the gospel, but to practice what we preach, and that includes rehearsing God's Kingdom at the Feast of Tabernacles! -UNC

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## Thy Kingdom Come!

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

As Christians, we can be repulsed by many of the things that we see and hear. We can cry and sigh to our Creator God through prayer, venting our frustrations as we see our beloved country hammered from all directions. It is almost like the situation of Job, where so much happened to him in such a short period of time, as Satan released his wrath on him.

What we see can tear at our heartstrings. It can cause us to feel great empathy for those who suffer the most from what is termed in Psalm 91:5-6 as the "terror by night," "the arrow that flies by day," "the pestilence that walks in darkness," or "the destruction that lays waste at noonday."

I recently gave a sermon on prayer. A part of the model outline that Christ gave is found in what some call "The sermon on the Mount." In it, He wants us to pray, "Thy Kingdom come!" Certainly, especially at times of crisis, many do exactly that.

The beauty of the Fall Festival Season is that it portrays the answer to that prayer. Christ will return. He will set up His kingdom. Satan will be restrained. The world will be a much better place. The sick will be healed. Sickness, wasting and disease will be no more. The poor, the destitute and the lonely will be showered with love and concern. Justice will prevail. Ignorance will be abolished. Suffering will cease. Righteousness will replace wickedness. The Kingdom of God will be on this earth. The poor in spirit will inherit it. So will those who mourn. Also, those who are meek, who hunger and thirst for righteousness. So will those who are merciful, pure in heart and peacemakers. Theirs is the kingdom of God!

Please take time from your busy schedules to read some of the articles in this issue on these themes. -UNC

# Announcements

NEWS OF THE CANADIAN BRETHREN



## Convocation

*Kristin Elaine Yahn*

Kristin Elaine Yahn, eldest child of Boyd and Donna Yahn, convocated from the College of Nursing at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon on May 29, 2003.

Kristin was born and raised in North Battleford and grew up in God's Church. She has lived in Saskatoon for the past four years and has been an enthusiastic part of UCG there. Kristin, now an RN, is employed at Saskatoon City Hospital.

Kristin has two younger siblings, Drew and Karin.



photo by Adeline Sanoy

## Convocation

*Michelle Anderson*

Michelle Anderson was also raised in the North Battleford area. She has been attending UCG since late fall 2002, and has been a friendly addition to the congregation. She has successfully obtained her Diploma in Massage Therapy. Michelle is presently employed with a massage clinic in Battleford, Saskatchewan.

Kristin Yahn and Michelle Anderson were high school friends and were roommates while taking their respective training in Saskatoon. -UNC

—Dorothy Kostyna, Darlene Buck, Adeline Sanoy

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## 50th Wedding Anniversary

*Dan and Jean Strathern*

Dan and Jean Strathern, members of the Edmonton congregation, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary this year on June 27. Their son, Iain and his wife, Gloria, hosted a dinner in their honour and invited some of their close friends to help them celebrate.

Dan and Jean have been members of God's Church since it began in Edmonton in October, 1964.

Both Dan and Jean are talented entertainers. They performed a wonderful duet, "I Remember it Well," from the movie, *Gigi*, starring Maurice Chevalier. We all think Dan does a better job than Maurice. Jean's lovely voice compliments the scene beautifully.



Dan and Jean Strathern on their anniversary cruise to Alaska.

Dan is also a splendid poet (see page 19). He also writes music.

We wish Dan and Jean many more happy years together. -UNC

—Lynne Broschak, Edmonton

# Winnipeg Says Goodbye to Pastor

MARIANA SIMONS • WINNIPEG



Mr. and Mrs. Luecke

On 28 June, 2003, the Winnipeg, Manitoba (Canada) congregation bid a sad farewell to Mr. and Mrs. Paul Luecke. Mr. Luecke pastored the Winnipeg congregation from 1996 until July, 2003.

Even though he lived eight hours away

in Bismark, North Dakota, he was more than willing to serve the Winnipeg brethren. This was in addition to pastoring the churches in Bismarck and Fargo (ND).

After the Sabbath service on June 28, Mr. and Mrs. Luecke were presented with a painting by Hubert Theroux, a well-known Canadian artist. Following that, everyone had their last visit with the Luecke-family at the barbeque that evening.

The Winnipeg brethren are all very thankful to have had Mr. Luecke as their pastor for the past eight years. He is an excellent teacher and we appreciated his calm, positive and patient approach. We wish him and his family all the best in Pennsylvania, where he will pastor the Bethlehem, Harrisburg and Lewistown congregations. -UNC

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## Send Us Your News!



Is your congregation hosting a special event?

Is someone in your congregation celebrating a special anniversary?

Send us your story and a photo, and we'll publish it in *United News Canada*.

For details contact Rainer Salomaa, editor, at [ray\\_salomaa@msn.com](mailto:ray_salomaa@msn.com).

# What If God Did Not Exist?

BY MIKE CAPUTO • TORONTO



*Editor's Note: The following article by Mike Caputo, an elder in Toronto, is the first of a series that we hope to publish. Mr. Caputo says, "For the past three or so years I have been compiling reflections which I hope to publish in the near future.... I have to retain the copyright, though. The title of the work is 'What if God...?' and it deals with difficult issues from a hypothetical standpoint." We thank him for his efforts, which we hope will prove to be encouraging and stimulating for our readers.*

**G**od is; God is supreme ruler of all; God is Creator and Sustainer of life; God is actively involved in human affairs; God has a great plan of salvation for all of humanity. This is the heart and core of the Christian religion.

This is the sure foundation on which millions of Christians have based their faith for almost two thousand years. This is the driving force that led countless thousands to offer their very lives by refusing to compromise with their faith and abandon their God. This is what empowers millions today as they tackle

painful challenges, suffer persecutions and confront death.

But what if God did not exist? What if God were simply an illusion? What if atheists were correct in believing that the only thing that exists is an eternal universe that expands and contracts forever and ever, from which life emerged accidentally?

If atheists were to be correct, the cherished Christian belief in a loving God who reveals His will through the Bible and who created everything would be a grand illusion. Consequently, Christianity would be just a fraud; there would be no God-determined right and wrong; everything would be, indeed, relative.

Within a godless society each individual could choose his own set of principles that he/she could modify according to his/her convenience. The atheist philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre, expressed this disturbing reality quite eloquently when he wrote the

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# What If God Did Not Exist?

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“Miracles have been a trademark of the Judeo-Christian God since the beginning.”

following: “On a shattered and deserted stage, without script, director, prompter, or audience, the actor is free to improvise his own part” (Killinger, 1960, p.64). The improvisation Sartre refers to would be, for many, rampant immorality, unbridled narcissism and raging competition. The French philosopher Voltaire adds in the same vein that, “If God would not exist, then all things would be allowed” (Pomeau, 1995, p.660).

Unfortunately, this reality has already prevailed in our world during the past century with horrific consequences. Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini, Pol Pot and others have proven that human beings without God can turn into ferocious beasts bent on conquering, plundering and destroying. History has shown that man, without God, can bring about the enslavement of countless millions under futile ideologies that will ultimately bring about oppression, cruelty and national and international disasters.

Fortunately for all of humanity, God does exist. Proofs of God’s existence abound for those who are open minded and who want to look at the evidence with a spirit of humility. What follows is a brief list of most of the arguments that have been offered by theologians and philosophers for thousands of years to prove God’s existence.

## God is the First Cause

Everything is in motion, from the galaxies in the heavens, to our earth and moon. All around us everything reveals energy, dynamism, and changeability – that is motion. All this motion, back in time had a beginning.

Science tells us that there was a beginning referred to as “The Big Bang.”

The beginning of matter, energy and motion is the Prime Mover. That is the First Cause: God.

## Order and Design in Nature

Order abounds in creation. This implies that there is an “Orderer,” someone who is behind the amazing and wonderful order we see everywhere in nature.

Nature abounds in design and purpose. The multitudes of systems that operate and co-operate in the universe imply a Creator. Design abounds in the smallest of organisms. Human organs are designed to perform certain functions and to cooperate with all other organs in incredible harmony.

There is beauty even in the strangest of creatures. Animals are born with instinct, and they have an innate ability to adapt to different environments. All order and design points in the direction of Someone who willed it and who maintains it all.

## Miracles

Miracles have been a trademark of the Judeo-Christian God since the beginning. Countless witnesses have testified and written about God’s mighty works as they are recorded in the Bible. In the New Testament, Christ witnessed to God’s power by performing great healings and by bringing people back from the dead. Later, His followers continued manifesting God’s power by doing other mighty works as recorded by faithful and truthful witnesses.

Countless Christians throughout the ages have received wonderful answers to their prayers that no physical explanation could explain away.

## Fulfilled Prophecies

The Bible abounds in prophecies and in opportunities to test God’s existence. For instance, God enunciated many prophecies relating to Israel and Judah and many other nations. The warnings that finally led to the captivities and punishments of both nations came to pass

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# What If God Did Not Exist?

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each time. The punishments prophesied against other nations such as Babylon and Assyria came to pass as well. Judah's was to return from exile and it occurred as well, as described in Ezra and Nehemiah. After two thousand years of Diaspora, the Jews are back in the Promised Land as prophesied in the Old and New Testament. A thorough study of countless fulfilled prophecies points strongly in the direction of the existence of an all-knowing Sovereign God.

## Jesus Christ's First Coming

Many Old Testament scriptures foretold in detail the coming of Christ and many of the events surrounding his coming. All the prophecies were fulfilled in astonishing detail as is discussed in a later entry. Christ was indeed the Messiah and God in the flesh. Not only does that prove that God exists but that He lived among men and manifested His great power at times before thousands of witnesses.

## The Ten Commandments

Up to Sinai, humans were slaves to oppressive gods that demanded blind submission and offered no guiding moral law. Elohim revolutionized the ancient world with Ten Laws that could heal minds, human relations and societies. While the Canaanites and other Middle Eastern societies decayed in their self-abandonment, Israel flourished, for as long as they submitted to the Great Code. The God of Israel was not just interested in being worshipped, as were the other demonic gods, He wanted the best for His people as well. Thus, He offered them a set of laws that would bring about mental peace, social harmony and freedom from the disastrous consequences from sin. No human mind could have ever conceived such a brilliant package.

The Ten Commandments are from God.

## The Greatest Minds Believed

Unlike what many atheists propagate,



most of the greatest intellects of the past reached the same conclusion: God exists. The fathers of Science such as Newton, Galileo, Kepler, Gilbert, Copernicus and lastly Einstein held a firm belief in God and openly professed their belief. The 20th century's greatest scientist, Einstein declared that, "...the harmony of natural law...reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection" (Albert Einstein, in Iain, 1982, p. 57). The greatest writers, philosophers, artists and musicians also expressed total assurance in the existence of a higher power and many lived very devout Christian lives. Great human minds looked at the evidence and concluded that there is a Mind greater than their own who created and sustains all.

"Great human minds looked at the evidence and concluded that there is a Mind greater than their own...."

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# Mad Cow Disease

BY LAURIE NYHUS • EDMONTON



Every cattle rancher's nightmare came true in Canada on May 20 of this year. BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) or "Mad Cow" disease was discovered in northern Alberta. Immediately the United States border and subsequently borders of a number of other countries were closed to Canadian beef, effectively erasing a 1.8 billion dollar industry. Suddenly the third-largest exporter of beef in the world was without markets. Canadian exports to the U.S. had reached 1.7 million cattle in 2002 so the closing of the border spells disaster for Canadian producers.

Losses have been approximately 11 million dollars per day in export sales, and a further seven million dollars per day because of depressed prices. Though much scientific research has been done and the Canadian authorities have determined it was an isolated case, the borders remain closed.

The main obstacle is the rule that has been laid down when there is a discovery of BSE. The World Organization for Animal Health Guidelines recommends no imports from countries that are considered to be provisionally free of BSE. The international practice (which Canada has abided by) when cases are found has been to close your border to that country for seven years. In practice Canada has never lifted a ban on a country with BSE, and doesn't import beef or cattle from countries, like itself, considered to have a minimal risk for the disease. To lift a ban, a BSE-infected country must ask Canada to do an investigation of its BSE risk and meat inspection practices. Other countries are going to apply to you the policies you applied to them so we have a very difficult situation.

The policies have been designed to avoid the disaster that occurred in Britain. More than 180,000 infected cows, a 1.15 billion dollar export industry eliminated, plus 132 human deaths and counting.

The U.S. may even want to open its border to Canada but Japan remains a huge obstacle. Japan is a large importer of American beef and has threatened to cease imports from the U.S. if the Americans allow Canadian beef into the States. The Japanese ministry is demanding that all Canadian cattle be tested before the U.S. opens its border and all beef must be labeled with the country of origin.

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# Mad Cow Disease

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Japan itself had seven cases of mad cow disease in September, 2001 and has since adopted strict rules. They incinerate all high-risk tissues from cattle; test all cattle slaughtered for human consumption; have a tag and trace system for its cattle; and have banned the use of domestic cattle to manufacture pharmaceuticals and cosmetics. It seems little can be done at this time to persuade the Japanese to soften their stand and the Americans don't want to risk the loss of a critical market. Canada and the U.S. have had such an integrated system of meat trade that it has been almost impossible to track meat once it has crossed the border. Hence, the concern that contaminated Canadian beef can get mixed into the product that is being imported.

Israelite countries are coming into difficult times, with blessings being removed and curses replacing them.

Canada has been hit with many problems in the last couple of years. One of the teachers I worked with last year said reading about our problems sounds like a page out of Revelation. He mentioned the drought last year, SARS, West Nile Virus (now in Alberta and Saskatchewan), AIDS, antibiotic resistant diseases and now Mad Cow. One sad part of this whole scenario is that our people don't associate wrong behaviour with the curses that are coming upon our nation. History teaches lessons, but who is listening?

Hosea 4:1-3 says, "Hear the word of the LORD, you children of Israel, for the LORD brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery they break all restraint with bloodshed upon

bloodshed. Therefore the land will mourn" (drought); "and everyone who dwells there will waste away" (diseases) "with the beasts of the field" (Mad Cow) "and the birds of the air" (West Nile); "the fish of the sea will be taken away" (ask the Newfoundlanders if this has come to pass). "Cursed you will be in the field."

Who would've thought one sick cow would cause all this damage? But when our countries' ways do not please God we are extremely vulnerable. On the other hand when man's ways please God, He will bless! There is a time in the future when this will occur and there won't be Mad Cow disease, West Nile, AIDS, and so on.

Deuteronomy 28:1-8 tells us, "Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God: Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country. Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out. The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways. The LORD will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you."

God speed that day! -UNC

"Israelite countries are coming into difficult times, with blessings being removed and curses replacing them."

# Cherishing the Sabbath

BY HECTOR M. EARLE • NEWFOUNDLAND



It's a late Sabbath evening in mid-July and I'm looking out my patio door feeling a little melancholy. It's nearing the end of another Sabbath and my special time with God is almost over.

Don't get me wrong, I enjoy the other days of the week too. As Christians, we should appreciate all the days of our physical lives. This life is our window of opportunity to work

diligently the other six days of the week to prepare for God's Kingdom to come. But the Sabbath is a time to renew our mind, body and spirit. It's no wonder that Jesus said that the Sabbath was "made for man." God knew the importance of this slow-down period of the week for renewal and reflection.

I must admit though, I have to celebrate the Sabbath in a little different way than people in areas living close to a Church. I live in an area of Canada where there is no UCG congregation anywhere near me. The closest congregation is 450 km away in St. John's, Newfoundland. My area is a Sunday-keeping world. But I'm not deterred. The Sabbath is my rest that allows me that time of refreshment and enables me to face the challenges in my job as a school principal.

What sort of things do you do, one might ask, when there is no congregation with whom to fellowship?

A typical Sabbath day for me starts with prayer and Bible reading. (I particularly like the new Bible Reading Program on the UCG's website.) The rest of the day may see

me spending time with the family by going for a drive along a country road or a walk in the woods. It's the walk through the forest that I get opportunities for "teachable moments" with my daughter about the wonders of God's great creation. The rest of the day may include a afternoon nap after listening to Gary Petty on one of UCG's sermon broadcast on the internet. Some Sabbaths I may visit a friend or the elders in my community. (It's amazing how much seniors can teach us and how much wisdom they can offer.) Sometimes my wife and I take this opportunity to spend some quality time together. This summer we've had some lovely picnics on the beach where we sit and talk and appreciate each other's company.

However, on this day in mid-July, I just finished a wonderful Sabbath hike along the beach, and as I stare across the bay from my patio, I'm reflecting on a wonderful day I've had with my Creator. Earlier in the day I packed a lunch and rode my bike about five kilometres along a rough path to the seashore. From there I walked about an hour to my favourite spot on the rocks and ate my dinner.

After doing a little sightseeing through my binoculars (today I spotted a humpback whale), I settled in for a time of reading. I brought an issue of the *Good News* magazine. The blessed sunshine forces me to seek shade and my afternoon low called for a nap on the cool sand. I woke up at the sound of seagulls, feeling refreshed and grateful. I spent some time in prayer and meditation before heading back home feeling uplifted and rejuvenated on this wonderful Sabbath day.

I take another sip of my iced tea and glance at my watch. I still have another hour or so to go before sunset. I think I will finish reading another article and really "top off" this glorious Sabbath. -UNC



# World News Watch *"Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." (Matt. 24:42)*

COMPILED BY DAVID PALMER • VANCOUVER

## Canadians Believe Mobsters at Work

Most Canadians believe that terrorists, drug pushers and mobsters are laundering money in Canada, a newly-released government survey shows.

But the Ipsos Reid survey, conducted earlier this year, showed a decline in the number of Canadians who believe the practice is a serious problem: More than two in five – 44 per cent – of the respondents who had heard of money laundering saw it as a serious problem, down from the high mark of 52 per cent in March, 2002.

Most Canadians (86 per cent) had heard of money laundering and nearly 80 per cent believe that money is being raised or moved through Canada to finance terrorist activity.

While nine out of 10 Canadians say they have heard of money laundering, fewer than half said they had a good understanding of how it works.

The most common method of money laundering mentioned by respondents was "high cash-flow business" such as bars and restaurants, with 15 per cent giving that response.

When asked about the effects of money laundering, about 80 per cent said its greatest impact is on Canada's economy and other financial institutions. Two-thirds believe it has an impact on their community and six out of 10 say it has a negative effect on the country's political stability.

The poll was performed for Financial Transactions and

Reports Analysis Centre of Canada.

The agency was set up as part of the federal government's response to international terrorism and the attacks of September 11, 2001. (*Ottawa Citizen*)

## Worldwide Laws Recognizing Homosexual Unions

The recent document published by the Vatican concerning homosexual unions responds to laws approved on this matter in countries around the world or of draft laws currently under study.

The following is a summary of such laws as found in countries throughout the world.

- *Scandinavia:* Denmark was the first Nordic country (1989) which allowed the registration of the civil union of two persons of the same sex. Norway (1993), Sweden (1994), Iceland (1996), and Finland (2002) then adopted this decision. Homosexual couples have the same rights as married heterosexual couples, but they cannot adopt a child or take recourse to artificial insemination, with the exception of Sweden, where adoptions have been possible since 2002.
- *France:* Since October of 1999, according to the law regulating civil unions (PACS), homosexual couples benefit from fiscal (joint tax returns, rights of inheritance), and social (work permits, housing) dispositions just like married couples.
- *Germany:* Since August of 2001, a "contract of common life" gives similar rights to homosexual couples as those of matrimony, although it does not grant the

fiscal regime proper to married heterosexual couples nor the possibility to adopt children.

- *Belgium:* Since June of 2003, the law authorizes homosexual "matrimony" with the same rights as heterosexual matrimony, with the exception of adoption.
- *Croatia:* Since July, 2003, homosexual couples have the same rights as heterosexual couples who live in free union.
- *Great Britain:* A "civil union" draft for England and Wales was published by the government on June 30. This new juridical statute would give homosexual couples the rights of the heterosexual. It must be submitted to Parliament before the end of the year.
- *Italy:* Since 1998, the cities of Pisa and Florence have opened a Registry of homosexual unions.
- *Switzerland:* The cantons of Zurich and Geneva have adopted a "civil pact of solidarity."
- *Spain:* The autonomies of the Basque Nation, Navarre, Andalusia, and Catalonia have adopted laws on "unions of persons of the same sex."
- *United States:* The state of Vermont recognizes the civil union of homosexual couples. The state of New Jersey (December, 1997), and the city of San Francisco authorize the joint adoption of a child by a homosexual couple. (*Zenit.org*)
- *Canada:* Homosexual couples are recognized since April of 2000. A draft law on homosexual "matrimony" has also been debated. -UNC