

Ideas from brainstorming re St Gerard's 40th anniversary celebration

Date: August 14th, 2011. Venue: Church Annex/Rectory.

In attendance: Cecelia Bay, Warwick Bay, Sheila Hunter, George Hunter, Pat Mitts, Roger Mitts, Michel Paré, Jim Wright, Father Rey.

Purpose: The brainstorming was intended to gather ideas from the church community, "using as a springboard" the St. Gerard's 40th Anniversary handout distributed by Jim Wright at the end of Mass on August 14 after introductions by Fr. Rey and Jim.

This document consists of Michel's notes, filled out with input from Jim and Fr. Rey.

Context: Michel raised the fact that Archbishop Michael Miller was aware of the anniversary, was excited that we were celebrating it, and expects to see signs of it.

Suggested: Invite all Bowen Island churches to an ecumenical event right after their services, and include L'Abrie, the Buddhists, the Quakers.

- Mentioned: 40 years ago many non-Catholics attended St. Gerard's opening so ecumenical celebration is fitting.
- The best Sunday would be in September *after* Labour Day due to holidays, etc.
- Could do a wider invitation as an ad in *Undercurrent*, perhaps along with a press release or article.
- Include some refreshment. (Example: Sheila willing to make cake.)
- Try to find out how many people could be expected in order to enable planning, including for any food preparations. Ask pastors to estimate numbers to at least get a sense of interest. Estimates of attendance cannot be reliable but will give an idea of interest and commitment. Keep it simple enough to not have to worry about shortage or waste.

Suggested: Find ways for the anniversary celebration to take place over a period of up to a year. The fact that the first Mass in the church building was said in September of 1971 but that the church building was consecrated in June of 1972 is consistent with that.

An ecumenically focused event, primarily (but *not* exclusively) for the wide Bowen Island community, could kick off the year of celebratory events. An event more for the wide Catholic community (e.g., inviting past priests/parishioners, a new blessing) could happen in June 2012 at the beginning of a final stage. The exact anniversary date, Monday, June 18, could be a good day for it because the archbishop and priests are likely to be most available on a Monday.

Discussion ensued as to the possibilities for other events that our church could host during this year. Examples: an organ recital, guest choir, Christmas celebration, Stations of the Cross during Lent, Holy Week, ecumenical day of world prayer at Easter or Christmas held at School Gym ("there's an official day of world prayer already out there"). It was evident (and commented on) that there are many possibilities to choose from to get high impact for a year of renewal without straining a small church community if choices are made on the basis of impact for the goals.

An energetic discussion evolved re the lack of young people at church and what could be done to rectify this. This discussion was sparked by the low profile that Christianity holds on the Island, and it reminded participants about the effort that some ideas would require. A lawn games day at the Mitts large property in the summer would be the type of event young people would come to (Pat Mitts). Discussion led to reiterating that ongoing efforts and particular events in the year will be related to renewal aims, which could include the aim of having more young people in the church community. This seemed almost impossible but also too important to overlook.

Preliminary thinking about the proposed September event continued after some participants had to leave at the scheduled end time. Points of agreement:

- *Keep it simple, brief, and powerful.*
- Invite people to our church after the 10:30 services at St. Gerard's, the United Church, the Bowen Island Christian Church (at Bowen Court), and Cates Hill Chapel.
- Keep within a total of half an hour (not including an informal period when guests are made welcome as they arrive): fifteen minutes for the program, plus time to chat over refreshments.
- Starting with the official welcome at approximately 11:50 (precise time to be refined), the event would finish by 12:20. (Participants wanting to catch the 12:45 ferry could do so.)
- The food would have to be easy to eat while standing and chatting—not lunch, but essentially hors d'oeuvres. Appetizingly edible without crumbling, sticky fingers, awkward chewing (re talking while eating), etc.
- The notion of simply breaking bread emerged because it is something all Christians do. However, that led to concerns about whether approach meant to be unifying could backfire because of doctrinal differences that we wouldn't want to get into at such a time.
- That led to another criterion beyond simple, brief, and powerful: *sensitive* in every way (sensitive to the guests' feelings so as to be warmly welcoming without awkwardness).
- Beyond setup (10:20) and initial welcoming, the event could include:
 - Display of Opening Mass memento (on a table or lectern) as a central conversation piece. (Michel and Juliette Paré are progressing well with the memento, similar in design to the Agneta Wright memento, which features restored sign-in sheets from the Opening Mass of Sept. 5, 1971, with approx. 130 attending, largely non-Catholic Bowen Islanders.)
 - Signing of a new sign-in sheet near the memento.
 - A formal welcome (Fr. Rey and a female St. Gerard's leader).
 - Opening hymn as an opening prayer. (Fr. Rey suggested getting ideas about a suitable hymn from the protestant pastors.)
 - A brief version of the story of the cooperative founding of St. Gerard's.
 - A few words by a few guests, such as each pastor and the mayor.
 - Installation of the memento on the back wall of the body of the church.
 - Social time with refreshments.
 - Quick final announcements (e.g., upcoming events).
 - Concluding prayer led by Fr. Rey.

Possible invitees: Mayor, Legion, Bowen Historians, former St. Gerard's people, islanders interested in honouring the occasion (invited via *Undercurrent* ad).

Photos would be taken and perhaps used in articles for *B.C. Catholic* and *Undercurrent*.

There is still a need to name the probable September event and express the theme. Some ideas about name/theme were a need to share with all Christians again, as before; sharing our bread, our blessings; how we came together; welcoming because we are welcomed; standing on shoulders...recognizing all who contributed, regardless of creed.

Make a Go/No-Go decision about the September event. If it's a Go (as seems very likely):

- Determine date and title.
- Plan practical logistics. (Add space in the back of the church for the installation step? Gather in the church or on the lawn or in a temporary open tent for protection from sun or rain? Etc.)
- Refine the event plan so that a good draft is ready for sharing.
- Approach other pastors so they can provide input to the plan, get the word out, prep something to say, and indicate approximate numbers.
- Ensure that there is a committed leader for each aspect of the September event.
- In particular, find someone willing to take full responsibility for the food aspect.
- Also in particular, find someone willing to take responsibility for communications strategy for at least the Sept event and ideally for the anniversary/renewal year. Include ads and/or articles for papers (Undercurrent and perhaps B.C. Catholic).
- Complete the memento (essentially the restored sign-in sheets from Sept. 5, 1971).
- Enjoy a wonderful September event that sets a positive cycle in motion.
- Keep revisiting the aims/goals/objectives for the anniversary/renewal year.
- Keep filling out, revising, and refining a year-long plan.

Example of an anniversary year-of-renewal schedule (explicitly NOT a plan):

- September (Sun, Sep 18?): event related to Opening Mass.
- October (Sun, Oct 16): St. Gerard (learning about/from the patron saint—feast day Oct. 16).
- November: Remembrance.
- December: pre-Christmas, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day
- January: New Year's
- Feb: Ash Wednesday, Feb 22.
- Feb 29 to April 4: weekly Stations of Cross, maybe on Wednesday evening, with Fr. Rey sometimes staying overnight (Thursday being his day off).
- April 6-8: Good Friday, Easter at St. Gerard's and Bowen sunrise service.
- April –August: Promoting visits to Bowen and St. Gerard's with website (with wonderful Bowen photos taken by a former parishioner who has moved) and contact with all parishes.
- June 18: "Rededication" event.
- August: Uganda-Kenya outreach (since Sister Jo hopes to be here next summer).

Note: Fr. Rey's comment about the above example is "Really encouraging and if pursued might lead to our objective of reinvigorating the community life of St. Gerard's." However, it is included to generate discussion and is *not* a draft schedule.