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THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA
L'ÉGLISE UNIE DU CANADA

June 10, 2016

Last week when I was in Regina for meetings of the United Church Foundation board, and the Saskatchewan Conference, I met up with a friend who had his daughter with him. The topic of birthdays came up, and I was told that the young girl's birthday was June 10. I immediately congratulated her on sharing a birthday with The United Church of Canada.

Our beloved church celebrates its 91st birthday today (June 10)!



Maybe it's because of the anniversary being so close, or maybe it's because of the changing times we are experiencing in the United Church.... For some reason anyway, I have been thinking lately about how many of the ordinary things that we take for granted would be completely unfamiliar, (and likely unbelievable), for the founding fathers (well, they were mostly fathers...) of the United Church.

Everything from writing this letter on a computer, to sending a message with the stroke of a key to a hundred or a thousand people at once, to "chatting" with "friends" anywhere in the world, to taking and sharing immediately digital photos, to connecting with the world through a device smaller than my hand that is carried in the pocket or purse, to flying across the country for meetings or family holidays, to living in a house with heat, air conditioning, running water, electricity, microwave ovens, big screen TVs, Internet, and a dozen other things that are so "normal" to

me that I can't even name them, to navigating with a GPS, to grabbing fast food meals and eating food borrowed from the cuisines of every corner of the world, to online education, having access to digital music, movies, etc., 24 hours a day, seven days a week.... If some Rip Van Winkle-type character from 1925 woke up in a Canadian community today, you wouldn't know how to begin to explain the basics of everyday life.

If those things are part of our technical infrastructure, we might equally wonder how we would explain the topics in today's news. Physician-assisted dying. Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women. The U.S. presidential campaign. Climate change. Average house prices over \$1 million in Toronto and Vancouver. And on and on.

This week the UCW is hosting an event to mark the 80th anniversary of the ordination of women in the United Church. In other words, the ordination of women was 11 years in the future at the time of church union. I like to point out that churches were well behind other institutions in opening the professions to women, (my own aunt graduated from law school when the United Church was only five years old, and she was by no means the first to enter the legal profession). On the other hand, amongst churches, the United Church was ahead of its time when [Lydia Emelie Gruchy](#) was ordained by Saskatchewan Conference in 1936.

What was a distant and perhaps unforeseen future event in 1925, now seems like an obvious thing from the distant past.

All of which makes me wonder:

Is the church slower in adapting to change than the rest of society is? And if so, why?

What things that seem to us today to be distant and unlikely future events, will be commonplace assumptions to people 91 years from now?

And further, beyond these wonderings, and beyond the recognition of the overwhelming change that our world has experienced, lies the understanding that there are certain things that have not changed in these past 91 years or the past 900 years. The teachings from our scriptures, and the themes of love, mercy, justice, and grace that we gain from them, have meaning that is deep and enduring.

We have lived through so much change and we look ahead to so much more, and yet when we turn to the ancient texts of our faith, we find the guidance we need to navigate through new waters.

Peace and blessings,

Nora

[Photo: Lydia Emelie Gruchy, Courtesy of the Deconness History of The United Church of Canada, <http://uccdeaconesshistory.ca>]

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