

Outreach Alphabet Soup

August 11th, 2013 Sunday Service

Today's homily is one in which we invite your participation. We will be talking about the many outreach activities of our church and when we get to one you are involved with, please stand up for a moment – don't be shy – your contribution is worthy of celebration.

A is for action – our Environmental Action Team. This hard working team is busy inside and outside our church, promoting environmental education and action on a huge range of topics. You can find them at many rallies and educational activities, including the Prospect Lake Community Food Fair, GMO protests in Metchosin and they fly our colours during Earth Day events.

B is for book sale. Each Fall we hold a massive, gigantic, incredibly well organized book sale that brings people from far and wide to our church. It is a popular event for booklovers and bargain hunters alike. Last year we raised \$3,242. Supporting our church financially is an essential first step. The church is the platform from which we launch all of our works of compassion

C is for Choices in Dying. This is a fledgling local organization with significant church membership at the moment, determined to be an added voice in an international movement. It's objective: to see that the laws of Canada are changed to give people who are terminally ill and in great pain the right and the help to end their lives in a timely, compassionate and respectful way.

D is for dividing our Sunday collection with the Share the Plate program. Each month the Social Responsibility Committee picks a charity to share the money collected on Sunday mornings. This has proven to be a popular idea and helped out many great organizations like the BC Sustainable Energy Assoc., R.A.V.E.N. (Respecting Aboriginal Values and Environmental Needs), Victoria Human Exchange Society, Council of Canadians, the Dogwood Initiative, Victoria Interfaith Refugee Assistance Committee and many others.

E is for the Ethel May Fund. The Ethel May Fund is like the 7th cavalry before the Little Bighorn, ready to gallop to the rescue of local people,

usually single parents, who have had major problems dumped on them. The fund has helped seven families this year. This fund is the compassionate response of one of our church members and is named in honor of his mother, who raised five children on her own.

F is for The First Unitarian Church of Victoria Foundation. It was established to promote the principles and values of our church. Currently the Foundation has contributions invested with the Victoria Foundation totalling approximately \$55,000. Income from these funds is dedicated to supporting First Nations education at Camosun College and the music and social responsibility programmes of the church.

G is groceries at the local food banks we support. People who go to bed hungry are not only hurting; they are a lost resource in this country. They are a living tragedy because properly nourished, they can be community builders. Children who go to bed hungry are a crime against humanity. BC has the highest rate of child poverty in Canada. This church community supports six local food banks. Food banks are a scandal; food banks are essential.

H is for Healing Our World, or HOW for short. This is the 8th year of our church members and friends selecting and funding great projects that help to heal our world. In that time, we have funded 18 projects and raised \$117,000 in the process. In the past we have:

- We have helped to rebuilt a school in Sierra Leone,
- provided four single-parent, working poor, local families with rent subsidies for a whole year
- guaranteed 10 orphaned children 10 years of education in Ghana
- we funded the building of 100 communal toilets in Kenya.
- we fed 100 orphans, in South Africa, for one year, children whose parents have died from AIDS.
- We helped subsidize young teens attending ‘The Power of Hope’ summer camp here in BC.
- We paid the school fees for Burmese children living in refugee camps in Thailand.
- Fixed a roof for a library at a school in Sierra Leone
- Funded riverbank restoration for farmers in Nepal
- Fed injured animals at Victoria’s Wild ARC

- Fed breakfast to 30 kids at Brown's Town Primary School in Jamaica, every school day for a year
- Supplied Rev. Al Tysick with the goods he needs to care for members of our street community afflicted with addictions or mental illness.
- Covered the cost of the host Drum and Emcee for the Yellow Wolf Powwow on the peninsula.

This year, we provided money to get homeless people into interim housing, we helped Rwandan widows and youth improve housing and helped the BC Schizophrenia Society update their computers – well almost - as we have still to finish funding this, our third project. Donations from the pancake breakfast this morning totaled \$750. That means we still need about \$2,000, in the next three weeks.

I is for the interesting things found in a school kid's backpack. The Back-to-School Backpack program is an investment in the future of local native children. And of Canada. It provides school supplies for them which their families cannot afford. The Backpack program is underway this month. Just imagine! Your donation may help to educate a great future First Nations leader. But if it just gives some native children an even start in school, that's something to celebrate

J is for Jammers – the Joyful Association of Music Makers. This dedicated ensemble takes music to rest homes and senior care facilities, once or twice a month.

K is for kids raising money for projects that help others. The Junior youth had fundraisers that saw \$83 go to Woodwynn farms and \$45 to the USC Seeds of Survival program

L is for the Lifeline List Project. The Lifeline List is this church community ready on short notice to help local families on marginal incomes who get in a financial bind, usually through not fault of their own. With about 80 people supporting this project, we have helped more than 200 families over some very rough patches in their lives.

M is for micro loans. For one of the 2009 HOW projects, we made 138 loans to women entrepreneurs in the developing world. Each month money is paid back and we make more loans – to date 1,117 loans have been made with more every month! Our Youth have been involved with micro lending for a

couple years - 60 loans so far. This year they produced an amazing Coffee house to raise funds for more loans!

N is for notes – musical notes - and the amazing generosity of our music program. Each year, the Christmas concert raises money and goods to support food banks. As a group, they have raised money for the Single Parents Resource Centre, hosted very popular singing and hand bell workshops and exchanged resources with other choirs and churches.

O is for Out of the Rain Youth Shelter. The work we did for OOTR was varied. We provided 870 meals of a hot, protein rich main dish, buns, fruit and cookies and augmented 333 more with buns, fruit and cookies. We also provided socks, gloves, jackets, toques, gift cards, hats, blankets, towels, a vast amount of toiletries and other goodies – including Christmas ‘toques’ stuffed with holiday gifts.

To accomplish all this, we had two huge cooking bees, dedicated and creative cookie makers, scarf knitters and donations of every type – so much so that we had enough resources to share with PEERS - Prostitutes Empowerment Education & Recovery Society, The Rainbow Kitchen, CARTS -Christian Actions Reflecting The Spirit., The Dandelion Society, Our Place and the Sidney Food Bank

P is for protest, parades and participation. Our SRC banner attends a wide range of protests every year – rain or shine. Our rainbow banner is the largest in Canada and we walk it proudly in the annual Pride Parade – as well as having a booth at the celebration afterwards. 13 of our church members presented their concerns passionately and eloquently at the hearings on the Northern Gateway pipeline proposal. Seven of our church members got out and pounded the pavement in support of USC Canada and farmers in Honduras, by running or walking various distances as part of the USC charity team at the Victoria Marathon.

Q is for q tips, toothbrushes, shampoo and the many other items we buy for the Sandy Merriman Women’s shelter, using the money you put in the little red box on the SRC shelf. As well, once a month, the Casserole Express team makes 90 meals for Sandy Merriman House – nutritious and yummy.

R is for Robbie Burns Night, Spaghetti Night, Fiesta Night, An Enchanted Evening and all the other wonderful food events we host for anyone who wishes to attend. Outreach can build community

S is for the Social Responsibility Committee. The Social Responsibility Committee is a passionate core group of church members which meets each month to assess social justice issues and devise ways and means for the compassion in this community to be expressed. This committee is our group conscience. It's also the place to come if you have a social justice issue you believe needs more attention.

T is for Transylvania, Romania, the location of our Partner church. This year's fund raiser joined with the Children's Mad Hatter programme and the local Hungarian dance team raising \$1,170.

U is for UU UNO. As members of the UU UNO each year we have a service to celebrate the work they do and raise money to support it.

V is for the Victoria Interfaith Refugee Assistance Committee . Members of our church joined with Cadboro Bay United Church, the Victoria Quakers and some other individuals to raise \$38,000 to cover all expenses for a Palestinian refugee family for a year. When Abul, the father of this family, spoke at our church, he told us that living in a Syrian refugee camp was like being a dark hole - and the help we gave them was like a rope to the light.

W is weddings, baby dedications and memorial services. Last year our lay chaplains performed 32 weddings, four memorial services, one child dedication and one vow renewal for non-members. They also presented a workshop on planning a meaningful memorial and they intend to offer this thoughtful and valuable process to the general public next year.

X is for Xmas. On Christmas Eve, when we gather for our candlelight service, we also collect supplies and money for the Out Of The Rain Youth Shelter, Our Place and the Dandelion Society. Coats, socks, toques, towels, hygiene supplies and much more: \$1,600 and six huge bags full of much needed supplies!

Y is for Yarning – Mindful Yarning. This group of knitters, made up of people from within and outside our congregation, make comfort shawls from

donated materials. The shawls are made with the intent of sharing positive energy, supportive thoughts, and caring for people in need.

Z is for zip - the zip you get with our fair trade coffee from Level Ground. You can buy this wonderful coffee in the church office for \$8. That's a competitive price. But if you buy your coffee at the church office, \$1.30 of each package sold goes to fund our HOW projects. That has meant hundreds of dollars over the years

That's the soup today. Many flavours! What we do to live that part of our mission statement which invites compassion is considerable. But today, this occasion, is not for bragging. It is simply for acknowledging and celebrating our achievements, because they deserve to be celebrated, even as we know that the needs of people around us and among us will continue - and that we will be there for them. It is who we are - and who we want to be.