

BROCK'S BANTER: A Flock in Flux

By Brock Weir

Organized religion is not something that has been an active part of my life.

My family background has provided me with a mix of Christian denominations to lay claim to, from the mainstream United, Anglican and Presbyterian churches, to the slightly less mainstream Christadelphian Church. I have never felt personally beholden to any one of these denominations ? after all, how can you choose one over the other without offending someone within your immediate circle? The best course of action, in my book, was to forge ahead, keeping my beliefs to myself.

This belief has never evolved into a disinterest in religion. Indeed, I find it a very fascinating subject. There are far too many similarities between so many religions around the world for me to discount them. Each provides a viable path to a higher power, if one has the faith to believe in such, and each brings a valuable voice to the table. Some might have their advantages and disadvantages as far as social justice is concerned, but that is a different discussion for a different day.

Working in this position, I have had the opportunity to attend services in most of Aurora's churches at one time or another, whether it was in the late lamented Aurora United Church building, or the beautiful modernity of the newer section of Trinity Anglican Church, the retrofitted Romanian church at Mosley and Victoria, or the myriad of good works done by St. Andrew's Presbyterian across the road, as well as Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church (OLG).

As far as Our Lady of Grace is concerned, the first time I had the opportunity to attend a mass was one lead by Father Tim as the congregation celebrated the appointment of the newly minted Pope Francis. As a non-Catholic ? a fact I made sure Fr. Tim was well aware of before the fact ? I wasn't sure what to expect, and I was welcomed with open arms. In fact, I was reserved a snappy little pew near the front, directly behind an Aurora family originally hailing from Argentina who were guests of honour, of sorts, as the congregation celebrated the former Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio as the new pontiff.

The next time was the final mass led by Fr. Tim at the church before Fr. Joe took his place.

Both times I left feeling relaxed and uplifted, and I don't think it was from all the standing and sitting one had to do for admission! What I observed was a devoted congregation. I hadn't anticipated the changes Pope Francis was going to bring to the Papacy, but before that I perhaps dismissively assumed members of the church were content to trust the judgement of those going up the ecclesiastic hierarchy. Events over the past week, however, have proven the old adage of ?You know what they say about people who assume?? and I am just about ready to hop on my donkey and apologise.

While I am not here to side in favour of the actions of Fr. Joe Gorman or the Archdiocese of Toronto, I am more than willing to applaud the hundreds of members of the Our Lady of Grace Church who brought their voices together to speak out collectively about what they perceived to be an injustice levied on their pastor by those higher up the pecking order.

The actions of Cardinal Thomas Collins were not necessarily taken as gospel (sorry) and OLG members were quite vocal in how they would have preferred to see things progress.

Perhaps this spirit can be attributed to Pope Francis himself, who has breathed new life into the Catholic Church with his forthright demeanor and refreshing views on society as a whole that has stimulated this spirit. Some in online petitions to bring Fr. Gorman back

as soon as possible to the church ascribed this feeling to the pastor himself. Whatever the source, something is working.

There has been a growing sense expressed by the signatories that change is afoot and some involved with the situation might not be keeping pace.

Some have praised Fr. Gorman for his

?out of the box? thinking and not necessarily sticking to the letter of the law, as far as church doctrine is concerned, to make a difference within the community. Were ?holier than thou? views getting in the way? That can only be adequately judged by members of that particular church, but that was the view expressed by at least two individuals.

When it comes to doing what is right for the community, the congregants are clear. Aside from simply wanting their pastor back, the Our Lady of Grace community wants a say in the decisions that directly affect them, as well as ?transparency, due process, and clear communication.?

On this front, both sides, in my view, dropped the ball.

In the original statement offered by the Archdiocese of Toronto, the reasons for Fr. Gorman's current leave were described as follows: ?pastoral irregularities relating to the financial administration of the parish, and serious civil and ecclesiastical irregularities concerning the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony.?

That was it. The vague nature of these reasons created more questions than answers amongst the congregation and members of the public alike, allowing the imagination to run wild and draw their own conclusions. Some might have seen financial irregularities as something on which Fr. Gorman may have had personal gain. In the event, that was not the case. And irregularities concerning the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony? I think we can all agree there was one obvious conclusion to be drawn from that statement, but apparently that is not the case.

On the other hand, the Archdiocese says Fr. Gorman was asked to 'communicate' on the matter with his parishioners, as directed by the Archbishop. He, they say, chose not to do this ' and here we are.

Regardless of the outcome of this clash, a bigger question has emerged.

Does the congregation of Our Lady of Grace want their church governed strictly by the book, or are they looking for something different? Are they looking for 'out of the box' thinking no matter who is providing it? It seems that they are, and chances are they are not alone. It is now up to the Archdiocese to take these concerns and figure out ways to reconcile the way things are done with the way their parishioners apparently want them to be.