

BROCK'S BANTER: The Shop Around the Corner

By Brock Weir

After Aurora United Church burnt down in April 2013 just before Palm Sunday, we heard time and time again that a church is not a building but rather the community that has formed within it.

In the months since then, we have seen this continually demonstrated, whether it was the immediate efforts of the surrounding churches to come to Aurora United's aid well before the flames burst through its weathered roof, or seeing the community remain united under the welcoming beams of Trinity Anglican just down the street.

In recent weeks, we have seen this ably demonstrated once again as these two faith groups ? still working together under one roof, settled in nicely to the realities and struggles that come with any blended family ? taking on one more partner in the Newmarket Islamic Centre to settle a Syrian refugee family in Aurora.

For me, this first demonstration was underscored once again earlier this month at a special gathering held at King Richard's English Pub when one former parishioner of the now-former Father Joe Gorman relayed his admiration for Mr. Gorman's effort, while still able to tend his flock at Our Lady of Grace, to offer any resources at his disposal to help Aurora United find its feet ? again, before the flames broke through to the dull spring sun.

I left the pub buoyed by this memory. After all, I too had been on the scene that day and had seen this intense and immediate outpouring from all directions firsthand.

Despite the tragic circumstances it was, in a strange way, a nice memory to relive as it provided my perception of humanity a great shot in the arm and I was ready to take the holidays on full force with a renewed sense of merry and good will toward man.

Inevitably, with the commercialization of the season, these feelings ? however warm and fuzzy ? were pushed to the back as I tackled the task at hand: finishing that dreadful ordeal of ticking the last few boxes off the dastardly Christmas shopping list.

This year, our family finally instituted a new, overdue rule in that each adult picks the name of their giftee out of a hat with a budget established well in advance. As luck would have it, this year I drew my younger cousin and he seems to have his heart set on a ukulele.

Not only a ukulele, but a good quality ukulele. I can't blame the guy. Go big or go home.

It would be a challenge to get a decent one within the budget provided (it should be noted at this point that we younger family members did not have a say in establishing the gift giving budget, but that is really neither here nor there? but it feels like it needs to be said), but this particular cousin is a budding chef and is in charge of cooking the Christmas dinner, so the reasonable thing to do was consider the ukulele purchase an investment in after-dinner entertainment.

Hell, I might even throw in a few additional instruction books to better our chances of a great floorshow at Fam Jam '16.

By Thursday morning, I finally tracked down a place that seemed to have just what was required, within budget, and an ample selection of music and tutorials available to leaf through.

Glad to have one last thing to worry about, I finished my lunch and headed a few doors down from our office to Aurora's First Baptist Church, where I was warmly greeted by a long-time parishioner who you will read more about in this week's issue if you have not done so already.

It was an emotional meeting as she shared her thoughts on this being the last Christmas service she will attend within the confines of what has become an integral part of an alarmingly dwindling group of Aurorans.

?I'm church shopping,? she said, with a distinct crack in her voice, her eyes welling up visibly, all the while maintaining a warm yet determined smile.

It was clear this was a veneer of adventure, but the sorrow of all but being cast adrift could not be ignored.

Although Aurora United Church is currently without a home to call their own, their core remains strong, their church remains as one, and they have lived up to the adage that a church is not a building. Unfortunately for long-time congregants of Aurora's First Baptist Church, they have had to face up to the cold fact that, sadly, they are now an exception to the rule.

The people were the church but when their numbers dwindled they were able to take solace in having a spiritual home to call their own. Now, come December 27, that spiritual home will be lost and the remains of the congregation as a whole will join this one particular parishioner in ?church shopping.?

I have never been a religious person. I've never been drawn to one religion over another. In my experience, each one has something incredibly valuable to offer the individual and the world around it and, when you get down to the basics, all operate on a remarkably similar set of core values and principles.

Although I might take comfort by hedging my bets as an agnostic, I do admire those who have the strength of conviction to make that firm commitment.

Considering those who have made that firm commitment are now being tasked with going out ?church shopping? is a moving prospect.

It is certainly going to be a more daunting and difficult task than tracking down that damn ukulele.

But, for those in our community preparing to embark on this spiritual quest, perhaps a thing or two can be learned from the consumerist side of Christmas:

You're under no time constraints to find that perfect fit before a certain day.

If one particular church, church leader or church community doesn't fit, you don't have to battle through the Boxing Week lineups to make an exchange.

If you find your new church just isn't right for you in six to 12 months, you don't have to hunt around for that elusive gift receipt to find something that better suits your spiritual décor.

Do some window shopping, have fun in the process, and try something new!

If, by this time next year, you're still browsing, come together again and hold a post-Christmas potluck. If this ukulele thing really takes off, chances are I will have a bounty of Hawaiian-inspired leftovers to bring. Don't get your taste buds ready for Spam though; even I have my limits.

We here at The Auroran are taking next week off to mark the Holiday Season. We wish you and yours the very best at this special time of year and will reconvene the week of January 7. Have a very Happy New Year!