



The site of Christ's manger in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, Palestinian West Bank, has been honoured since at least the 2nd century

*Merry
Christmas*

Welcome to our Christmas breakfast meeting

'Tis the season to be merry, we are told, but it seems to me that being merry is, for many, simply a commercial thing, an excuse for excess in spending, eating and drinking, with little or no concern for the reason behind the celebration. The day after Remembrance Day advertisements started appearing on television urging us to buy Christmas gifts, stores started putting up their Christmas displays and we seem to roll from one so-called celebration to the next. Sometimes, in the middle of November, deliberately turning off the TV sound so as to avoid listening to another Christmas advertisement, this one giving a teenager an \$800 X-box present, I have to think of Scrooge and mutter to myself "Bah humbug!"

Thought-provoking survey results

In a 2008 Nielsen survey conducted in the U.S. there were a couple of interesting results. When asked to choose between spending time with their fathers or watching television—54 percent of American 4-6 year-olds chose television. American parents spend an average of 3.5 minutes per week in "meaningful conversation" with their children, while children themselves watch 28 hours of television a week.

And we are told over and over again that television and computer games do not influence children – they see them for what they are games and entertainment.

If you believe that I have a piece of land in Florida to sell you!!!



Donation

Father O'Malley answers his phone at home.

"Hello, is this Father O'Malley?"

"It is!" replies the priest

"Father, this is Revenue Canada. I wonder if you can assist us?"

Being a man of few words, the priest replies "I can!"

The voice on the phone asks "Do you know a Ted Houlihan?"

The priest again responds succinctly "I do!"

"Is he by any chance a member of your congregation?"

Again laconically the priest replies "He is!"

Coming to the point the caller asks "Did he donate \$10,000 to the church?"

The priest responds "He will!"

Obituary

Bev Mageau/Jay passed away on November 29, 2010. During her career Bev taught for the St. Albert Protestant School District at Elmer S. Gish, Leo Nickerson and Keenooshayo Elementary Schools. She had suffered for many years from ALS, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, a motor neuron disease.

Meetings past and future

Our October breakfast meeting was a great success. Our guest speaker was Petty Officer Carla Penney who gave the crowd of 118 a soldier's eye view of Afghanistan. The Petty Officer gave a very succinct and enlightening explanation of what was happening in that distant country. Her presentation was very well received and we thank her for taking the time to speak to us.

Past-president Jack Flaherty donated two Eskimos' tickets to be raffled off at the meeting. The raffle raised \$160 and the winner of the tickets was Sister Jean Elder. The money will be donated to the Kinettes for their Christmas Hamper program. The book sale collected \$100.

Donations to the St. Albert Kinette's Christmas Hamper program will be accepted at the December breakfast. Donations of non-perishable food items or unwrapped toys for children or teens are both acceptable, as well as gift cards, movie passes, gift toiletry or cash donations.

Entertainment at the breakfast will be provided by the STARTA choir.

Plans for the January meeting include a talk on income tax deductions for seniors and for the February meeting on quickly prepared nutritious meals for seniors. The March meeting will be the annual silent auction.

Are you interested in putting your French skills to work? Become an examiner/ marker for DELF/DALF exams!

International Credentials for Languages Services (ICLS) at Edmonton Public Schools and Alliance Française Edmonton are looking for educators who are proficient in French and who are interested in being involved in the evaluation of students' language proficiency in French programs.

ICLS offers to students the **Diplôme d'Études en Langue Française (DELF)** and the **Diplôme Approfondi en Langue Française (DALF)**, two official diplomas awarded by the Ministry of Education in France to certify foreign candidates' proficiency in the French language. DELF/DALF are recognised around the world and are considered valid for life. As an evaluation of French proficiency, the DELF and DALF officially certify the ability of students to use French in real-life situations based on six competence levels identified within the [*Common European Framework of Reference*](#). Each examination comprises sections testing the four language skills: oral production/ interaction and reception and written production and reception.

An information session for potential DELF/DALF examiners/markers will be held in December. The examiner/ marker training session will follow in January. All examiners/ markers are trained by authorized DELF/DALF instructors and are evaluated to ensure uniform standards of assessment throughout the world. All examiners/markers will be paid.

DELF/DALF testing occurs from April 11, 2011 to approximately the first week of May.

For further information, please contact Valérie Leclair at valerie.leclair@epsb.ca



Politics

Someone was asking the other day what happened to the government's **Pharmaceutical plan**. The answer is that it is still in limbo. The announcement by the Minister of Health and Wellness, Gene Zwozdesky, essentially merely postponed the introduction of the plan, he did not cancel the idea but health care continues to be an active topic for the government.

Discussion has taken place in the Legislature about Bill 17 the **Alberta Health Act**. Seniors' concerns regarding the bill were well encapsulated by Larry Wyatt, STARTA Vice-President, in a letter he sent to the Premier, the Minister of Health and Wellness and our own MLA. In the letter Larry stated:

- We didn't ask for a new AHA based on vague principles; we asked for meaningful improvement to the seniors care system.
- We didn't ask for a Health Advocate that reports to the Minister, we asked for an Independent Seniors' Advocate who would report to the legislature.

- We asked for improved coverage for all medically necessary services, not more ‘publicly funded’ but privately delivered health care.
- We are opposed to ‘shell’ legislation that allows the government to circumvent the legislature and change health care by regulations and orders-in-Council.
- We think the current Nursing Home Act and the Health Care Protection Act are already being circumvented by your government and should be strengthened, not jeopardized by a new Alberta Health Act.

It is important that our politicians understand that the vast majority of Albertans want a publicly funded and publicly delivered health care system. However much they play around with the terms, the politicians are obviously not listening to the demands of their electorate. This government was elected by only 25 percent of the people eligible to vote in the last election voted for the government and only 41 percent bothered to vote at all.

Surprise! Surprise! Dr. Raj Sherman MLA who is the assistant to the Minister of Health and Wellness apparently threatened to resign and leave the party over the Emergency Room situation. Dr. Sherman who works as an emergency room physician on weekends had, according to the *Edmonton Journal*, November 18, a long meeting with the Premier and has agreed to stay on to work on solving the problem. Then he was kicked out of the Conservative caucus – obviously caucus solidarity trumps criticism!!

It is becoming increasingly evident that there are major problems within the Health and Wellness portfolio and that the politicians are battling it out with the bureaucrats over exactly what should happen. Purely speculating it seems that those who want increased privatization of the health care system are doing whatever possible to thwart any efforts by those wanting to improve the publicly funded facility in their endeavours. There needs to be a showdown as to who is in charge, the bureaucrats or the minister – the outcome will determine the direction health care takes.



It seems that everyone is talking about health care in one form or another. The November 2010 issue of *Reader's Digest* contained the following:

Unhealthy Bonus

“Being \$885 million in the red this year didn’t stop Alberta Health Services (AHS) from giving out hundreds of thousands of dollars in bonuses to its execs. The top dog at AHS—president and CEO Stephen Duckett—was no exception. With a \$77,000 bonus and other perks, AHS supersized his measly base salary of \$595,000 to a whopping \$744,000. Weird, considering he got only 53.3 percent on his performance report card.”

Reader's Digest, November 2010. Page 32

And there is more from *Maclean's* the banner-headlined the November 8, 2010, issue with “Europe Throws a Tantrum: A pampered continent protests the rollback of its lavish welfare state.”

The editors bemoan the fact that workers protested furiously against plans by Nicolas Sarkozy’s move to reform the French government’s retirement system by raising the minimum retirement age from 60 to 62 and raising the full public pension age from 65 to 67, both by 2018. The editorial then goes on to suggest “a Canadian health care crunch seems inevitable in less than four years. Unfortunately, health care reform is arguably more toxic to Canadian politics than pension reform is to French politics. Any suggestions that this looming crisis might be solved through the logical

application of private sector efficiency and competition or other reforms to check demand are considered beyond the pale.”

My personal comments are legion on this matter but I would point out that two world wars were fought in order to arrive at a form of democracy whereby all people had access in European countries to health care and education and not just the privileged money-classes. Governments have deliberately underfunded both public education and public health care since the early 1970s to attempt to provide the corporate sector with access to two societal functions from which they could make money. Education reform has produced private schools which cater only to those who can afford them. Health care reform is a much better bet for corporations, including insurance companies, because everyone is concerned about their health. There is money (profit) to be made there and so the market should have free range. So much for the fight for equality! We have forgotten!!

“When ‘citizens’ change into ‘consumers’ political life becomes an exercise in keeping the customers happy.”

“The triumph of triviality” by John F. Schumaker, *New Internationalist*, April 2008.



Homes for Christmas Tour

This year the "Homes for Christmas Tour" Is being held December 2 to 4, 2010.

Thursday, December 2 from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Friday, December 3 from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Saturday, December 4 from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m.

This project is sponsored by the St. Albert Senior Citizens' Club. Cost is \$30.

For more information or to inquire about bus transportation call

780-459-0433 Monday to Friday.

Venting

The following was taken from the “Venting” sections of the *Edmonton Journal* in mid-November:

“The four-year prison sentence given Anne Semenovich is suitable because all her needs will be taken care of there. If the judge had sentenced her to a seniors’ residence, that would have been cruel and unusual punishment.”

Children do “say the darnedest things”

What is Sir Walter Raleigh famous for?

He is a noted figure in history because he invented cigarettes and started a craze for bicycles.

Name one measure which can be put in place to avoid river flooding in times of extensive rainfall (e.g. in Mississippi).

Flooding in areas such as the Mississippi may be avoided by placing a number of big dams into the river.

What is a vibration?

There are good vibrations and bad vibrations. Good vibrations were discovered in the 1960s.

Joanna works in an office. Her computer is a stand-alone system. What is a stand-alone computer system?

It doesn't come with a chair.

Why would living close to mobile phone mast cause ill health?

You might walk into it.

STARTA Choir

Our choir started practicing for a Christmas programme in early October. With just two months of preparation we will take to the road to present our programme at numerous venues. We will be singing at Foyer Lacombe, Northridge Lodge, Holy Family Church, River Ridge Seniors Community, Mission Hill Village Condos, Citadel Mews West, Aspen House Morinville, West Country Hearth Villeneuve and Heritage Lodge Morinville.

The members of the choir are to be commended for their loyalty, dedication, hard work and talents. The choir consists of Maurine Maslen, Margaret Romaine, Margaret Olson, Marian Oberg, Audrey Caplan, Jean Elder, Sybil Simmons, Dagmar Lietz, Maureen Glen, Ada Burzminski, Cres Estioko, Anna Eshpeter, Carol Kaup and Lorene Silvertson. Eryl Jones is pianist and director. Muriel Kuchison and Brenda Kane are unable to join us at this time.

Next spring we will present songs from a musical. If you would like to join us please contact a choir member or Eryl Jones at 780-459-8407. We practice at Visionary College at 10:30 Friday mornings.

Silent Auction

If any of you are in the process of downsizing or generally cleaning out any new or like-new articles can be delivered to Eryl Jones at any time for the March Silent Auction – contact Eryl at 780-459-8407

Congratulations again author!

Our heartiest congratulations go out to Pat Trudeau on the release of her third detective novel featuring Agnes, her amateur sleuth. The new book is entitled *Breathless at St. Bride's*. The book is available at The Studio Gallery, 11 Perron Street.

Another book worth reading

Retired teacher Elaine Cust who spent her early years in Riviere Qui Barre has authored a biography of Harold Granger entitled *On His Own Two Feet*.

When Harold Granger was sixteen, polio changed his life. He had to learn how to walk again and from being imprisoned in an iron lung, he fought his way back to being able to stand on his own two feet. A self-taught mechanic he applied that know-how to build a very successful bus line that transported the children who attended Camilla School. Copies of the book are available for \$29.50, shipping and handling included—phone 403-343-6971, e-mail info@writenow.ca, website www.writenow.ca. Audio copies of the book narrated by Dawn Curran are available for \$45.00 from dawncurran@shaw.ca.



Regime Change

Former Republican presidential candidate John McCain, and some of his hawkish friends are calling for the United States to mount an attack on Iran in order to ensure a regime change to democracy. Some of you may well remember that in all the bluster and rhetoric of Gulf Wars 1 and 2 part of the thinking was to get rid of former friend, then enemy Saddam Hussein and his Baathist party. I have to wonder where McCain and his allies have been for the last twenty years with regard to the situation in Myanmar (Burma). There in 1990 Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy in a general election won 59 percent of the popular vote and 81 percent of the Parliamentary seats. She never took power because an army junta took control and she has been in detention or under house arrest for 20 years. Here, after all, was a chance to promote democracy already approved by the local populace and how quiet have the U.S. hawks been? Why no invasion of Myanmar?

And now, of course, there is North Korea!

Merry Christmas to all!