

The Morning Star

Wycliffe College Community Newsletter



Why it's never too late to study theology: ministry at a deathbed

By Judy Paulsen

I was a newly minted MDiv grad only a few months into my first pastoral setting when I received a call from a priest in another city asking me to visit the daughter of one of his parishioners. Emily (not her real name) had moved to Toronto, was recently divorced, and raising two teenagers. She had also just been diagnosed with an aggressive form of lung cancer and had been told it was terminal. She was 41-years-old.

I visited Emily often over the next year. At first our visits consisted mostly of us getting to know each other and praying together. But after a few visits we moved beyond the surface talk about her treatments and how she was balancing hospital visits with caring for her kids. She started asking difficult questions. Questions like: Was there no fairness in life? Why did she (a non-smoker) get this disease when her sister (a heavy smoker) was healthy? Why did she feel like such a horrid person for even asking that question? What would it be like to die? How would her kids handle life without a mom? Why was God doing this to her? Did He care about her and her kids?

These questions taxed every ounce of my theological, biblical, and pastoral training. Although often feeling like I was in over my head, I nevertheless found that I had been given many important tools at seminary that enabled me to walk with and support Emily as the awful disease progressed. What I had learned in the course of my studies was being tested; I found it held and deepened.

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WHAT'S HAPPENING AT WYCLIFFE?

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Then, just over a year after our initial visit, I got a late-night call from Emily's sister informing me that Emily had died. She wondered if I could come over to the house. I got dressed and drove over. After a brief exchange at the door I asked to see Emily and we all went up to her bedroom. I pulled up a chair beside her bed and prayed, including that beautiful commendation that is part of the prayers for Ministry at Death.

God of mercy,

Into whose hands your Son Jesus Christ
commended his spirit at his last hour,
into those same hands

we now commend your servant Emily,
that death may be for her the gate to life
and to eternal fellowship with you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Then, mostly because I didn't want to leave but also because I didn't know what to do next, I sang.

I sang a poignant version of the 23rd Psalm. Written in a minor key, it's a version that asks to be sung slowly. Gently.

*The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want
He makes me down to lie.*

*In pastures green He leadeth me
the quiet waters by.*

*My soul He doth restore again
and me to walk doth make,
within the paths of righteousness,
e'en for His own name's sake.*

Then, mostly because I didn't want to leave but also because I didn't know what to do next, I sang.

As I sang, Emily's daughter drew close and then lay down beside her mom on the bed, wrapping her arms around her mother's already cooling body. It was a beautiful and holistic honouring. It was also a painful goodbye. When the Psalm ended she got up from the bed and we all went downstairs. A few minutes later the funeral directors arrived to remove Emily's body. After they left we sat together until dawn drinking copious amounts of tea. We spoke about Emily's life. We spoke about her funeral. We spoke to God.

This is the sort of on-the-ground ministry that is a key part of every good pastor's life. We walk with people through the joys and sorrows, and help them interpret the events and times of their lives through the lens of Scripture and theology. What we say about God and what it means to be one of His children will often be completely counter-cultural. And it will be true and life-giving.

Why study theology (at any stage of life)? Because it will help you to live and share the message of good news that is found in Jesus Christ. Even beside a deathbed.

About the Author

[Judy Paulsen](#) came to seminary relatively late in life, after she had already established a career as a speech and language pathologist. You can read more about her decision to begin theological studies at Wycliffe College (and the impact that decision had on her family) on page 3 of the Winter 2017 edition of [Insight magazine](#).

This blog post is also featured on wycliffecollege.ca/blog.



Upcoming Events

Hermeneutics of the Feminine: Recovering the Value of Women's Religious Writings in the Long Reformation — Mar 19 Tuesday, 4 p.m.—5:30 p.m. at Sheraton Hall

This lecture, given by Carme Font, a specialist in 17th-century literature, examines the methodology of textual recovery and interpretation of women's religious writings in the Long Reformation. Taking 17th-century women's prophecy in Britain as a case study within the dominant linguistic culture of the Reformation, we will look into the practice of recovering, interpreting and retrieving the value of women's intellectual contributions in their contemporary theological debates.

The Role of the Bible in Theological Studies — Mar 21-22

Dr. Ephraim Radner and Dr. Marion Taylor will speak along with other scholars at this annual conference organized by the TST Graduate Students Association. It will take place at the Toronto School of Theology building, from Thursday, March 21 beginning at 9 a.m. to Friday, March 22 at 5:00 p.m. Register at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-role-of-the-bible-in-theological-studies-tgsas-2019-conference-tickets-56601594894>

The Changing Role of the Brethren "Love Feast" — Mar 27

Coming up March 27, 3:15 pm at #TST, the first 2019 TST Liturgy Seminar. Jeremy McClung, a PhD student at @Wycliffe_UofT, will speak on The Changing Role of the Brethren 'Love Feast'. Register at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-role-of-the-bible-in-theological-studies-tgsas-2019-conference-tickets-56601594894>

Poetry for the Journey with Malcolm Guite — April 1

An event brought to you by Wycliffe College in partnership with IMAGO. Malcolm will read some selected poetry and discuss the role of imagination in the journey of faith. There will also be special music with Celtic harp musician Esther-Ruth Teel. Sign up: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/poetry-for-the-journey-tickets-57549887262>

The Plight of the Middle Eastern Church: A Lunch with Rev Dr Canon White — April 1

Join us for a light lunch and hear from our special guest The Rev. Dr. Canon Andrew White. This event is open to the public but space is limited. Sign up: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-plight-of-the-middle-eastern-church-a-lunch-with-rev-dr-canon-white-tickets-58655070896>

News & Announcements

From the Registrar

Featured Summer Course:

Children's, Youth, and Family Ministry taught by Val Michealson will be offered as a week-long intensive May 6 – May 10. This course will look to the bible, to Christian theology, to historical trends, and to social science research including child development and family systems theories to cast a robust, biblical, dynamic and evidence-based vision of nurturing children, youth and families in the Christian life.

Registration for summer courses opens April 1, 2019. All courses in the summer session are now available on the website. Learn more at: www.wycliffecollege.ca/summer.

April 29th—TST Language Exams and Registration

Please note that TST Language exams will take place on April 29th. Please register by April 19th. See details here: <https://www.tst.edu/academic/language-exams-courses>

Chapel Services

Morning Prayer
Mon-Fri, 8:30 a.m.

Wine Before Breakfast
Tue, 7:22 a.m.

Taize Evening Prayer
Mon, 5:30 p.m.

Sung Evensong
Tue, 5:30 p.m.

Community Eucharist
Wed, 4:45 p.m.

Prayer & Praise
Thu, 5:00 p.m.

Informal Evening Prayer
Fri, 5:30 p.m.

More Events Coming Up

Theology Pub — April 15, Friday

Our guest will be David Reed, Professor Emeritus of Pastoral Theology. See you on Friday in Leonard Hall at 7 p.m.! No registration is required.



The poster features a stylized black and white illustration of a pub sign with the words 'THEOLOGY PUB' in bold, white, sans-serif font. The sign is topped with a crown of white foam. To the right of the sign, the text 'WHEN: Last Friday of every month, 7:00pm' is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font. Below this, 'WHERE: Leonard Hall, Wycliffe College' is written in a smaller, black, sans-serif font. At the bottom right, there is a black rectangular box containing the 'the meeting house' logo and the Wycliffe College logo.

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