

Morar's Musings! Rev. Dr. Morar Murray-Hayes



Curating Church

Several years ago, my husband was approached in his role as the Director of the Toronto School of Theology at U of T to join a rather interesting group. Under the leadership of Katherine Lochlan, then Curator of International Exhibits at the Art Gallery of Ontario, this small group was involved in the creation of the tremendously successful *Mystical Landscapes* exhibit. Katherine had a spiritual awakening, just before she was about to retire, which led to this exhibit. In the five years it took to create, she relied on professors from the Toronto School of Theology to assist with the development of the theme, the choice of pieces from the great trove of the Impressionists and the writing of many of the articles for the catalogue. I was able, vicariously, to peek into the world of curating and I was fascinated.

One task of a curator is to select paintings and then to travel to the galleries that own them and convert the directors to the idea of the exhibit so that they will loan the paintings for it. Steve Martin thought that he had 'discovered' Lawren Harris, so when he was asked to curate an exhibit for the AGO, he was surprised that he would be travelling across Canada to meet and 'convert' many Harris owners.

As we continue to explore the challenging, exciting world of building a new church, we all have the possibility of becoming 'curators.' In the church world, there are many diverse selections for how to be church. The history of Christian worship offers up many, many traditions, practices, and rituals from the present right back to the year 1200 (as we discovered the medieval tradition of Holy Humour recently) and even earlier.

How we worship, who we welcome for baptism or burial, how we govern, how individuals move into activities and leadership, how we function as church on a daily basis, what we give our energy to and why, how we practice hospitality to one another and to our neighbours: all these are topics to be thought about, talked about. And in the process we will move towards selecting those practices and ways of being and doing church to which most members are drawn. Selections may be made that attract you; others maybe not so much. We may mostly go one way but occasionally go another to meet the needs of those who may be in the minority. One of the great freedoms in the United Church is that we are not bound to conform to rules about how we worship, what words we say, etc.

It was in the crucible of Katherine's group of wise guides that selections were made. It will be in small group conversation, tempered by love and prayer, not individuals' wants, that will bring us to the best version of church that we can be. Look for discussion opportunities as they are offered in the coming months under the heading, 'Curating Church.'

Once decisions get made, it is with humility and grace that we all have the possibility of converting others to their benefits, to helping others to see how positive results may be worth the sacrifice of always getting one's way. Backed by her committee, Katharine Lochlan was so convincing in converting the director of the Musee d'Orsay, that the exhibit travelled to a very secular Paris and was tremendously successful there.

So this process of choosing, selecting, *curating* actually will lead us to unexpected results. At the opening party for *Mystical Landscapes*, held in our home, an innocent question led to the formation of a team to teach a course on spirituality and art, a course which Katherine Lochlan teaches in her retirement. Even for the experts, curating can lead one into new pathways and adventures