

WITNESS STATEMENT OF REV. JOHN BUTTARS

I moved to Guelph in 1976 and in these almost thirty years have been one of the ministers at Harcourt Memorial United Church. Within months of moving to Guelph I began to develop a relationship with the Jesuits at Ignatius College, Loyola House Retreat Centre and the hermitages on the farm property. For the first years, it was a totally unexpected and mind-boggling experience. Gradually I became more deeply connected. I have done the Ignatian Exercises, taken many 5 to 8 day silent retreats there, worked to translate the 'Ignatian spirit' into my Protestant congregation, and been trained at Loyola House in spiritual direction. I continue to value my relationships and sense of partnership with those who work on the property. At the present time, I sit on the Ignatian Farm Advisory Committee as well as a number of community organizations that have a direct or indirect Ignatian connection, most importantly the Guelph Ecumenical Guild of Ignatian Spiritual Direction of which I am the chair of the Coordinating Committee.

I found the retreats at Loyola House different from anything I had ever experienced in my own Protestant life. I felt, and still feel, almost incapable of expressing the profundity of those experiences. They have been deeply transforming and those experiences have blessed not only my personal life but the life of my marriage as well as my professional life.

A previous administrator of Harcourt Church decided to take a weekend retreat at Loyola House. When she returned her first sentence to me was, "Never again will I say, 'Have a good time,' when you go on retreat. That was the most difficult thing I have ever done." Indeed, the dynamic of the Ignatian Exercises and the experience of being in silence (which is not quiet per

se), has the potential of stripping off all pretensions and masks and bringing one into the utter grandeur of Holy Mystery. We humans have a huge ability to deceive ourselves and the Ignatian experience teaches one profound honesty with oneself, others and God.

At one level the building of a major shopping centre will not prevent such profound experiences from continuing to happen. In truth, one can 'practice one's religion' anywhere. For me, that is not quite the issue. I would liken it to viewing the stars. You can view the stars in the middle of the city. But as the illumination of the urban area increases the possibility and joy of star gazing decreases. As commercial enterprises increase around the Ignatian property the possibility and joy of encountering that Holy Mystery decreases.

How much light is too much light for star gazing? How much commercial development is too much? Even a little may be too much. Certainly there is loads already in Canadian Tire, Staples and the Home Depot. More is definitely too much. If a major development happens at the corner of Woodlawn Rd. and highway 6 the pressure of commerce will only increase to continue in the development of the remaining land along Woodlawn Rd. and up highway 6.

Finally, I have conducted many burials in Woodlawn Cemetery. On more than one occasion I have waited for the noise of traffic to subside before either starting or carrying on with a committal service. Those times bring to mind the first wedding I conducted in southern Manitoba where, in the middle of a farm backyard ceremony in rural south-western Manitoba, the service was interrupted by a low flying B-28 bomber on a training run. One can never quite recover the sense of sanctity for a wedding ceremony in those circumstances.

Since I am a minister, see people who are dying and conduct funerals, I can assure you that no one ever talks about their shopping habits at the end of their life. They talk about the

kinds of things that the Ignatian community offers each and every day that people find themselves on retreat.