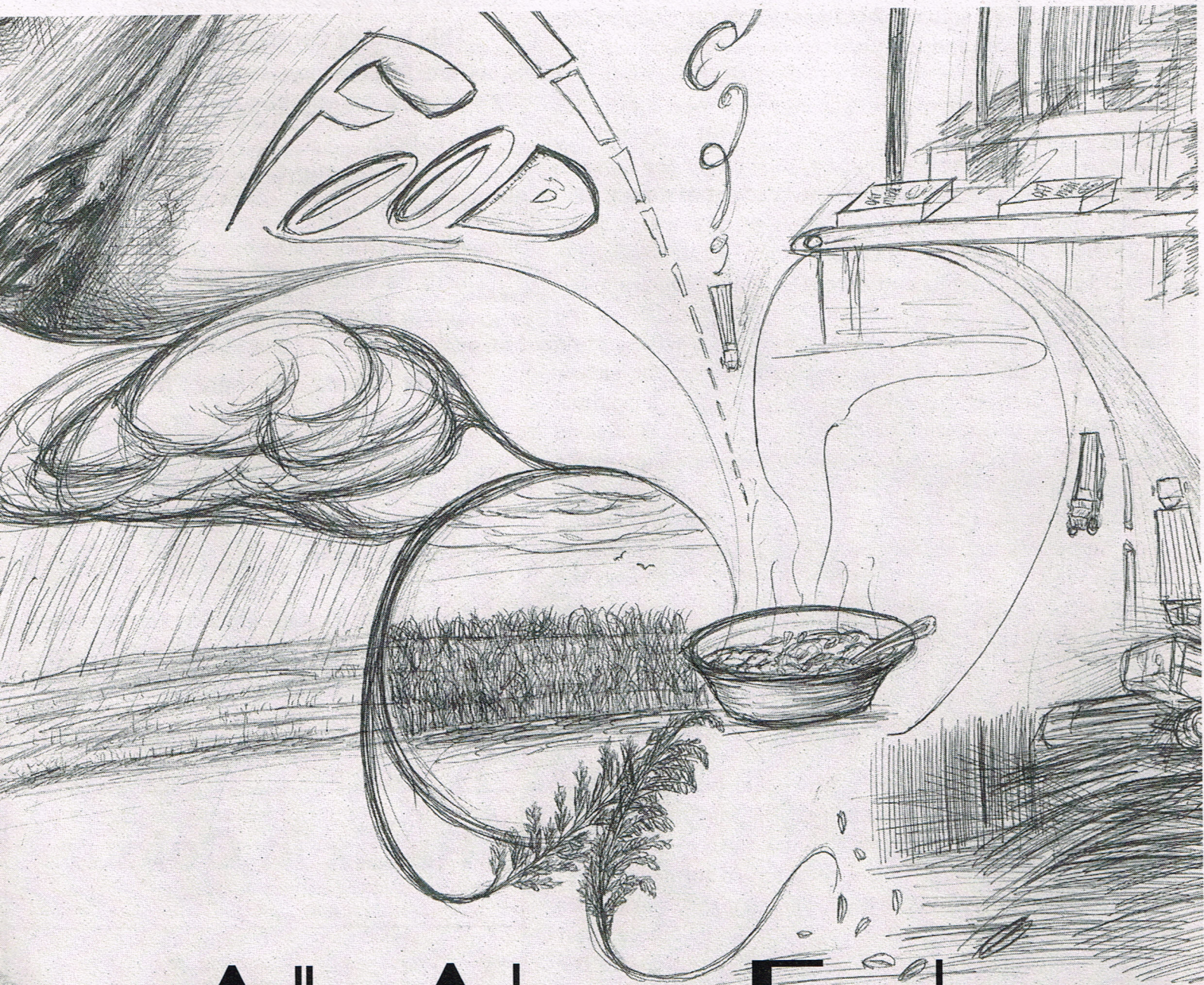


Radix

December, 2008

McGill's Spirituality Magazine



All About Food

Co-Editors: Eric Bolo and Simca Simpson

Graphic Arts Board Director: Joy Ding

EDITOR'S MESSAGE

Whether we like it fried, baked or mashed, for most, a complicated relationship with food is part of being human. What we put on our dinner tables is reflective not only of our culture, tastes and family traditions, but increasingly our political ideology, moral stance and spiritual convictions.

This issue provides us with insight into how food transcends simple physical nourishment, making the meal a social, spiritual and even charitable institution. In *Food for the Community*, Britt Parsons associates the nourishment of a meal with justice, making the point that the simple act of making a vat of chili can be a practical act of Christian faith. Sarah Bellefeuille-Reid describes the sights and sounds of *The Restaurant* in her short and captivating piece. Mahtab Firuz addresses the beauty of the Sikh concept of community meal in *Langar: An Institution of Equality*. Katie Chowdhury shares her experiences with denying herself food and the fruit of spiritual strengthening that such practice can bear in *Fasting: Beyond Hunger*. Eric Bolo describes how he saw the cosmos in a single *Glistening Grain*. The issue also introduces McGill's new Ecumenical Christian Chaplain Rev. Jeff Barlow. Himself a former chef, he contributes his perspective and exemplifies how to keep the zest in our lives. Our cover, by Joy Ding, reveals the complex reality of the modern food distribution system, and the voyage of simple oats, from their harvest to their consumption. Finally, in an excerpt of *Wining and Dining: An Epicurial Perusal of Histories Banquet*, Allison Gill gives a historical perspective into the eating habits of the Western world.

As the upcoming weeks will be a time of celebration for many people of faith, there will undoubtedly be many meals to be shared. As we ring in 2009, and many make resolutions to change their food habits, I have been forced to realize that I am what I eat to a certain extent, and changing diet can be more complex than will power alone. On that note, best make a new years resolution to send in submissions to the Radix. Bon appétit et bonne année!

Simca Simpson
Radix Co-Editor

Radix is produced by McGill students for McGill students, with support from **McGill Chaplaincy Services**. The views expressed are those of our contributors and are not necessarily shared by Chaplaincy.

This Issue's Contributors:

Rev. Jeff Barlow
Sarah Bellefeuille-Reid
Eric Bolo
Katie Chowdhury
Mahtab Firuz
Allison Gill
Britt Parsons
Simca Simpson

Radix wants to hear from you! Whatever your faith or non-faith perspective, send in your writing, blurbs, art, etc. Submissions are subject to editing for length, content, and style.

Email us if you would like to be added to our mailing list. Also, we'd love your ideas and feedback.

Radix in Colour

Check it out on our
uber-cool blog:

mcgillradix.blogspot.com

Food for the Community: Service Projects

By Britt Parsons

SERVING others practically by providing a hot meal is a simple yet powerful expression of believers who have a heart for the poor. The Benedict Labre House – a shelter, meal and independent community centre was founded precisely for that purpose. The founder, Tony Walsh was oriented towards getting a house and living with the poor, to give food and shelter to those experiencing difficult times in Montreal. In late 1952 a house of hospitality was established on the upper level of 418 Lagauchetière. One of the early hallmarks of the house was the Tuesday evening talks given by committed Christians which were followed by lively discussions.

Parallel to this young believers in the McGill community also meet together on Tuesday nights in a group open to all to read scripture, study social justice issues and discuss how they can bring their faith and passionate into action in their communities. This past month the group led by McGill Christian Fellowship Social Justice Coordinator, Britt Parsons joined with students in the Newman Centre and their VP Social Justice, Andrea D'Mello in assisting with their planned meal team for the Benedict Labre House. They decided join together to serve the men and women of this once predominately Irish ghetto know affectionately as "Griffintown". This small band of volunteers extended invitations to other students, gathered together with chili ingredients provided by the Newman Centre and set to work on a Sunday morning in the kitchen - filling pots, setting

tables and preparing for the 150 people they were to feed. As the aroma of chili filled the air and the pots were near overflowing men and women began streaming in the door to share in the meal together. When they finished many would pop their heads into the kitchen to thank the team personally. Different from many soup kitchen initiatives, the Labre House Meal team program provides the opportunity for interested groups to be part of a meal for start to finish – including all of the planning, preparation, serving and clean up in a very personal atmosphere.

"I enjoyed cooking the meal as I felt both part of the preparation and serving processes and I would definitely get involved again" said U1 Earth, Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences major Laura Bryson.

For more information about becoming a Meal Team or to book a future date you can call Kat Gray from the Benedict Labre House at (514)937-5973. Also if you're interested in potentially joining the team next semester or checking out the Social Justice Small Group on Tuesday's you can email Britt Parsons at britt@mcgillcf.com.

The Restaurant

By Sarah Bellefeuille-Reid

The maestro, in a long white coat
Directs the traffic of his team
Each one knows his duty
So quickly the nimble fingers work,
Like Korsakov's flight
Subtle nuance, lingering and provocative,
Tonight the kitchen will captivate.

Percussive clangs of pots and pans,
The clink of glasses
Polished spoons against teacups
The buzz of anticipation

Upfront sits the man named jazz
Glass of scotch in hand
As ivories trade four with lips that sip
Champagne from crystal flutes
Gazes shift as his muted signature soars across the tables
Blending with the most magnificent aromas

A slight tremolo passes through the room
The maestro holds his breath
Not a single person moves
For fear of ending
This moment of divine creation.



Justice Jam 2009 will be hosted by McGill Christian Fellowship and Impact Church. They seek the feed those who hunger for justice by raising about sex trafficking.

Wining and Dining: An Epicurial Perusal of History's Banquet

By Allison Gill

The following text is an excerpt of an essay on food and culture. You can find the whole version on mcgillradix.blogspot.com

RIGHTLY or wrongly, the Greeks are attributed with the start of Western civilization, and by consequence, the birthplace of Western eating. This legacy manifests itself in many ways, from intellectual feasting in symposiums to the performance of ceremonial burial rites.

A "symposion", or private drinking party, was an all-male, aristocratic ritual, where citizen intellectuals wine and dined in pursuit of intellectual nirvana. The goal was not to become inebriated, but to become intellectually freer; the idea being that "wine does away with the inhibitions to expose truths." Think of Plato's *Symposium*, a philosophical dialogue on love and the soul that begins, and presumably ends, with drinking.

Aside from inebriating philosophers, wine played a unifying role in Ancient Greece. Composed of dispersed islands throughout the Peloponnese, Ancient Greece was far from a completely unified nation-state. But all insular communities shared the custom of ritual drinking. Unifying ethnically distant peoples, the symposium enabled a shared Greek identity.

Island communities of Ancient Greece also shared metaphysical beliefs on food. Storytellers relayed this collective Greek heritage through epic tales; founded primarily on the value of honor; a facet of their collective identity. Their

value system functioned as an expression of their conception of the relationship between life and death. Food and drink were believed to be the material bridge between the realm of the living and the dead.

This belief spurred the notion that the departed persons required nourishment from their survivors in the earthly world. Mourners customarily never actually participated in the eating at the funerary banquets, for fear of passing under the influence of the spirit world. The Greek's concern for the spiritual welfare of the dead manifested itself through the material comfort of food.

"At the tomb the mourner would traditionally dedicate a lock of hair together with *choai*, libations of wine, oils and perfumes, accompanied by a prayer. This stage in ritual was followed by offerings (*enagismata*) which included milk, honey, water, wine, celery, *penanon* (meal, honey and oil) and *kollyba* (first fruits of the crops, dried and fresh)."

In this Ancient world, it was believed that the most malevolent form of punishment was the denial of proper burial, i.e. one not accompanied by food and ceremony. Improperly buried souls would be consigned to Hades and could not cross into the elysian fields of paradise.

Glistening Grain

Eric Bolo

AT Plum Village Monastery in France, monks say that every piece of food contains the whole cosmos. When I first heard this, at a month long summer retreat, I thought this was just the typical Zen 'non-sense', like the enigmas (*koans*) posed by famous meditation masters to their disciples—What was your face before you were born? What is the sound of one hand clapping?

Forced into unknown territory, my feeble imagination struggled

at picturing galaxies twirling inside potatoes and chick peas, with no avail. I came to the conclusion that I would never understand, and so brought my desperate attempts to a halt. Potatoes are down here, the cosmos is up there. That's just the way it goes, right?

But learning works in mysterious ways. One bright evening—the sun shone bright on the monks' bare heads—I found myself looking at my bowl of rice with an unusual sense of wonder. I

thought of paddy fields and farmers gleaning seeds across the flooded land and bending over at harvest, of truck drivers moving the rice across borders, and of workers in processing factories. I also thought of the rain, the sun, and the nurturing soil with its millions of micro-organisms. I saw that the whole universe had contributed to the existence of my bowl of rice. As if the cosmos and all its creatures had been folded into each glistening grain.



Langar: An Institution of Equality

By Mahtab Firuz

"Recognize the Lord's Light within all, and do not consider social class or status; there are no classes or castes in the world hereafter." -Guru Granth Sahib, 329

Langar is free kitchen institution started by the first Sikh Guru, Gura Nanak Dev Ji, which upholds the principle of equality between all people of the world regardless of religion, caste, colour, creed, age, gender or social status. It also expresses the ethics of sharing, community, inclusiveness and oneness of all humankind. It is here that all people high or low, rich or poor, male or female, all sit in the same *pangat* (row) to share and enjoy the food together. Before the establishment of *langar*, a Brahmin would not eat in the presence of a low caste person and was thought a bad omen if a low caste person was to enter a room where the high caste Brahmin was eating. Thus, the institution of *langar* removed all these barriers in Northern Indian culture.



THE visit to the Gurdwara Sahib Quebec was certainly a very interesting and enlightening experience. Although approaching the Gurdwara from the outside

one would expect to enter a typical Christian (Baptist) religious institution, the interior provides an undoubtedly different atmosphere. To the exception of a couple remaining stained-glass windows, the rest of the Gurdwara provides a complete Sikh-oriented feast for the senses from the moment of entry.

From the colorful mosaic of scarves, tassels, and fabric, the inside of the Gurdwara is extremely visually stimulating. The canopy and platform on which the Guru Granth Sahib is situated is a wonder in itself. In fact, the fan that was motioned above the Guru Granth Sahib throughout the service was very hypnotic and beautiful. The mix of colorful garlands, cloth and gold outline both overhead and underneath the Guru Granth Sahib truly symbolize the great respect and honor which is placed upon the manifested word of the Gurus.

The idea of the *langar*, I will admit, is one that I was looking forward to during the visit to Gurdwara. I was surprised however, at how efficiently the *langar* is run. There is a great deal of team-

work among the members and everyone volunteers to do something, whether that be cook, serve, clean, or distribute; *sewa* is truly highly regarded in the Sikh faith. What I enjoyed most about the *langar* was that I saw how the teachings from the Guru Granth Sahib are actually taken to heart and acted upon the community. There is also no expectation of specific groups of people who should do specific tasks, such as the women alone are not expected to cook or clean while the men serve. Everyone is able and capable of working in every area of *langar*. Even the individuals who appear to not be working have done so at a different point, and have also contributed monetary donations in order for the food to be bought and the facilities to be paid for.

Moreover, I enjoyed that the idea of *langar* was not just after the service. Upon initial entry to the Gurdwara, one is welcomed downstairs in order to eat, drink, and mingle with the members before the start of the Prayer Service. In addition, the *halva* distributed during the service brings the entire congregation together in their connection with God. I believe that these continual actions of dining and socializing definitely bring together the Sikhs as a united society regardless of anyone's gender or societal standing. This not only helps to strengthen the bond between people, but directly strengthens the Gurdwara and its role in the community. Although it was difficult for me to sit and eat on the floor after the service, I still really

appreciate the genuine manner in which it is all executed.

The concept of *langar* and *sewa* are also highly prevalent in many Christian churches. As I attended a United Church for several years, *langar* was also an important part of the service (of course it was not referred to as *langar*). After each service and receiving Communion, the entire congregation would gather in the upstairs hall to enjoy coffee, juice, and snacks together. Although it was not an entire meal served, the idea is basically the same. There were several times a month, however, where special breakfast or dinner services would be held for the members, the homeless and troubled youth. The donations collected during these times would similarly go towards funding the needed supplies.

The only difference that I would mention is that there was a distinct kitchen committee that would make, serve, and clean the food. The rest of the congregation would donate to ensure the continuation of the services. However, there were many committees that were designated for various community projects such as feeding the needy, organizing charity events, sponsoring families from around the world, and much more. It is evident that the concept of *sewa* is highly operational in the Christian churches as well, just in a different approach.

Fasting: Beyond Hunger

BY Katie Chowdhury

O you who have attained to faith! Fasting is ordained for you as it was ordained for those before you, so that you might remain conscious of God. (Qur'an, 2:183)

"Many people who fast get nothing from their fast except hunger and thirst, and many people who pray at night get nothing from it except wakefulness." (Saying of the Prophet Muhammad)

FASTING in the month of Ramadan is the fourth pillar of Islam. If you ask a Muslim to describe the fast for you, you are likely to receive wildly different answers, ranging from "it's so easy" to "it's the most intense spiritual experience ever."

What does fasting really mean? Let's find out.

The following conversation—compiled from actual exchanges I have heard of taken part in, and embellished only slightly by my imagination—is typical: Wide-eyed Friend or Classmate: I heard it's Ramadan! Wow, do you guys really not eat anything for 30 days? How do you survive?

Muslim: Actually, we eat every day, just at different times. We have a meal before dawn and one or two meals in the evening. No problem.

Classmate: Oh. Well, at least you can drink water during the day. You couldn't go long without that.

Muslim: No, we drink no water during daylight hours. Neither do we engage in intimate relations!

Classmate (a little creeped out and wondering if the Muslim misinterpreted her intentions): Oh, that must be really hard. Can't you just give up chocolate?...

Muslim: No, fasting is no problem at all. I personally don't feel hungry or thirsty. But we could never give up fasting. The intense hunger we feel during Ramadan is good not only for the body, but for the soul.

Classmate: But I thought you said you didn't—

The Muslim proceeds to describe his grandmother who fasted through all ten of her pregnancies, his friend who was cured of diabetes by fasting, and possibly something about regenerating limbs. The classmate walks away with a vague sense of admiration and confusion. Is fasting easy or hard? Nothing or something most important?

Before I converted to Islam, Muslims often told me that they felt mentally sharper and physically healthier while fasting. "You don't even feel it!" was the general consensus.

As a pale, fainting kind of person who had to eat every few hours or feel dizzy and nauseated, I needed these grand tales of encouragement.

Maybe it's true, I thought. Maybe I can do this.

The night before my first fast, I prayed that I would be able to do this for God, to experience this part of my new religion and learn from it.

The next morning, I woke early to eat a snack and drink as much water as I could hold—just in case they were wrong.

Then I stopped. An hour and a half later, the sun rose.

As the morning went on, I attended classes, feeling hungry and a little out-of-it but not nauseated or dizzy. I was elated.

Instead of going to lunch, I took a little walk, read the Qur'an, studied. Still good. Only four more hours and it looked like I would make it.

Suddenly, there was a knock. Not at the door, though—at my head.

A tight blackness that had been growing quietly inside me merged itself into a mighty arm, swung back, and pounded into my skull.

We had just learned about Phineas Gage in psychology class. In 1848, Gage was at work when a metal spike was accidentally driven through his head. Miraculously he survived, though with mysterious personality changes.

I recalled the drawings of Gage with the rod through his skull and thought that anyone looking at me with pain-seeking goggles might see the same thing. I hoped I would also escape unscathed, but would my personality change, too?

The afternoon wore slowly on, with the jackhammer still blasting away at the

back of my head. I tried to nap, but couldn't sleep. I tried to study, but couldn't focus.

Finally, as the clock ticked sunset, I mustered my strength, and, in a stupor, drank some juice and began eating. The room spun at first, but soon settled down. The headache eventually dissolved. I was left with a great sense of accomplishment.

I disagree with those who say fasting is easy. I guess it is for some people, but not for everyone. For in addition to not eating, drinking, or being "intimate," fasting requires abstaining from gossip, angry words and actions, and other unethical behaviors. Fasting teaches us more about ourselves as we dig deeper, and more about what others face whose hunger is not voluntary.

Put simply, the experience of fasting—like many religious practices—is what you make of it. Apart from future rewards given by God for this act of faith, fasting yields different results for different people, depending on their aims and intentions. Joking aside (and I made up the one about regenerating limbs), there are people who have improved their health through this practice, using the fast as an opportunity to cleanse their bodies of unhealthy habits, to add healthy food, exercise, and relaxing prayer to their daily lives. In fact, my headaches—which had been frequent even while not fasting—decreased drastically when I took the hint and reduced my consumption of sugar. For some, Ramadan brings a fulfilling month of family closeness and joyous evening feasts. For others, it means solidarity with the wider Muslim community around the world. While some focus on new clothes at holiday sales, others memorize new parts of the Qur'an, seeking their Lord. Many do both, take the best of both worlds.

For me, the lessons of Ramadan continue to grow. From my first experience of being hungry, I have realized the importance of taking only what I need and not wasting anything, whether it be food or clothes or electricity. I have resources that others don't and should not use them irresponsibly. I also enjoy the community solidarity, passing other Muslims and knowing what they are going through—unless they are the ones who don't feel hunger!

Most of all, though, fasting makes me feel the

reality of God. Depriving myself of food on purpose reminds me that at any time, I might be denied food, things, people, or life. When I take a sip of water and eat a bite of food at the end of a day of fasting, I know it is a gift. I remember that every day is a gift, every breath from my Sustainer a wonder.

So how do we answer the question of what fasting means? Is it nothing, or is it everything? For my part, I've decided that fasting can be a hardship, and it must be an even greater hardship for those who have moved

beyond being hungry; for those who must force themselves to remember to be kind and not get angry, to remember God without hunger pangs. Yes, fasting can be a hardship and it can be training to experience a fuller life. I know for me, it may always be both. And I accept the challenge.

Introducing Ecumenical Chaplain Jeff Barlow

BY Simca Simpson

AFTER a few minutes engaged in discussion with Rev. Jeff Barlow, it was clear that he is anything but your typical Christian Minister. His stories testify to the beauty of getting “a kick out of life”. Only recently ordained, he has been a soldier, author, teacher, and chef. Originally from the industrial cotton town of Blackburn in Lancashire, England, Rev. Barlow remembers the women weavers walking to the cotton mills with iron-clad clogs on their feet, waking him up before six in the morning. He grew up Christian in a Christian family and attended services at a Congregational Church, now part of the United Reformed Church in England. Here, Congregationalists have been part of the United Church of Canada since it was formed in 1925. He served two years of obligatory military service in his youth before attending London University and beginning to teach in Southern England. He taught all of his professional life in the United Kingdom, before coming to Canada in 1972, where he studied for an MA in applied linguistics at Concordia University and also co-wrote a series of textbooks for Teaching English as a Second Language. He then moved to Florida where he

was the chef-owner of a French restaurant for ten years.

After selling the restaurant and residing briefly in the South of France, he returned to Quebec, and decided to formally join the United Church of Canada at St. James United Church in Montreal. He was attracted to the United Church because of its theology, which is firmly grounded in the Bible, and its strong emphasis on social justice. The denomination is proud of its inclusiveness, being among the first to ordain women and also being open to queer members, to the ordination of gay and lesbian ministers, and to the marriage of same sex couples.

Eventually, he returned to University at McGill to study at United Theological College and later at the Montreal School of Theology, where he received his Master of Divinity before accepting a pastoral position at St. Andrew's United Church in Lachine. He has also served as a part-time Minister at Westmount Park United Church, and currently is the Ecumenical Chaplain working with McGill's Chaplaincy Service.

Q&A with Rev. Barlow

Do you have any advice for students who are trying to achieve Balance in their lives?

Certainly not to worry about things. Avoid procrastination and to get enjoyment in what they are doing. Don't allow things to become tedious, but see the bright side of things. It is not always easy when you've got deadlines, papers to get in and exams to pass. It is important to be on top of your work but equally important to be on top of your recreation. Get a kick out of life.

What does it mean to you to be a Christian?

Personally, it means continuing the tradition in which I was raised. That is probably true for most of us. For me, Christianity is the most meaningful expression of God's way of working in the world. This doesn't mean to say that I think that other religions and forms of awareness of God can not be equally valid for others.

What are your current projects as a Chaplain?

One is the regular weekly meeting of St. Martha's in the Basement, which is undergoing some revision at the moment. It also means being available for discussion, advice or just simply a chat with anyone who would like to approach me. I am not in this position to proselytize, pushing forward any specific aspect of Christianity, or Christianity itself. But, of course if someone wants ad-

vice about where they can worship I will provide it. I will not push any particular denomination. My job is to represent the Anglican, Presbyterian and United Church of Canada denominations, but I am open to all who wish to talk with me about any concerns they may have.

Newman Centre
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 www.newmancentre.org

*Did you know that
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The Muslim Students Association of McGill

We offer: weekly study circles, free Islamic
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3460 McTavish Street, Rm. 14
 ssmu.mcgill.ca/msa

The Montreal Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

welcomes all for silent worship at 11 am every Sun-
 day at the Greene Centre in Westmount (1090
 Greene).

Directions are on our website.

<http://montreal.quaker.ca>

St. Martha's in the Basement



McGill Ecumenical Chaplaincy's St.
 Martha's shares a weekly informal
 worship and discussion, followed by
 a vegetarian supper. It is a welcom-
 ing place to form meaningful friend-
 ships, explore faith in an inclusive way, and bring
 sacredness to our lives. Friends of Christians very
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Thursdays from 5-7pm in the basement of the
 United Theological College, 3521 University.
 For details call: 398-4104.

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(SY)



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McGill Chaplaincy
3600 McTavish, #4400
Wednesday 1-2 pm
(Discussion, Instruction, and
Q&A at 12:45)

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The MSPN provides support to
 McGill students who are parents.

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 McGill students: in-home babysit-
 ting, support group meetings, study
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 ting for children.

Interested families should contact
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mcgillspn@gmail.com
 or at (514) 398-4104

Sikh Chaplaincy Open Meeting



Social get-togethers
 Newman Centre, 3484 Peel
 Contact Manjit Singh,
 Chaplain
manjit.singh@mcgill.ca

Share a **HOT VEGAN LUNCH** at the

RABBIT HOLE CAFÉ,

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3625 Aylmer, downstairs

Fridays, 1-4 pm

Donations of \$1 or
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(SY)

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Food depot and nutritional
 tips and support.

3625 Aylmer, 1st floor

Fridays, 1-5 pm

Email: food4thought.yd@gmail.com

(SY)

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 cussions on Jewish topics, Jewish feminist
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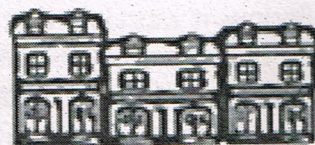


International Students! (SY)

Are you freezing?

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 to work with seniors living in and around the McGill
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If you would like to become
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3473 University Ave.

Daily Christian worship--all are welcome!

Morning Prayer, Mon.-Thurs.: 8:00 am

Evening Prayer, Mon.-Thurs.: 4:30 pm

Eucharist Wed. 11:30 am (followed by lunch),
 Fri. 7:30 am

All are welcome!

Want fair-traded/fair-priced coffee, or warm, fresh-of-the-day
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 ing in Room G6. Join "Save Architecture Cafe" on Facebook.

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Note: Services marked (SY) are only available during the school year.