

GROWING *Together*

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THE HERESY CLUB: ARE YOU A MEMBER?

A university student knocks on his pastor's door. "I'm sorry. I just don't buy this stuff any more. The ark, miracles, virgin birth – they sound like fairy tales to me. And how can the God of the Bible be so violent ...?!" The pastor invites him in. The student has grown up in church, but now, as an adult, struggles to understand. Seems the answers he learned back in Sunday School don't work so well any more.

What do we do when life pushes us into new and uncharted territory? Does our faith grow with us? The pastor listens patiently. She does not judge. Nor is she quick to offer easy solutions. She sits with her young parishioner and gently helps him probe new possibilities.

They agree to meet again. Others join, seeking out this space where matters of faith can be explored. Beginning with the latest headlines, books, movies and scientific discoveries, they turn to the scriptures for understanding. Questions are raised and new insights shared. They decide to call themselves the "Heresy Club".



Is there a place in your congregation for people who "think outside the box"?

We sometimes think of heretics as those who contradict the church's teachings. Jesus himself was accused of not adhering to the traditions of his ancestors. His respect for women, his association with people on the edges of life, his willingness to heal on the Sabbath, all brought him into conflict with religious authorities.

Today's reality is marked by rapid change. The latest technologies bring many benefits to humanity. But they also raise new ethical dilemmas. As the world gets smaller we encounter a rich diversity of neighbours. But this can also lead to a clash of cultures and outbursts of violence.

Many among us feel bewildered, disoriented and afraid. This is especially true when we discover changes in our church: new faces, new music, new ways of expressing our faith. For some these changes represent a painful loss. For others, they are the very breath of life.

The church today is presented with many opportunities for growth. These arise from encounters with Christians from the developing world and believers from other religious traditions; women, young people and persons of differing sexual orientation; scientists and theologians who are not content to sit silently in the pew. Their voices can open us up to a deeper appreciation of our scriptures and of God. Those we call "heretics" may in fact be God's prophets!

How can we learn from new perspectives yet retain what is valued in our own systems of belief? Here are some suggestions:

1. Read the Bible in the company of others who see with different eyes. Form a study group. Pay special attention to those you may not have listened to before.
2. Identify what is best in your tradition. What would others say? What has enduring worth? What may need to be transformed?
3. Listen to your heart. Trust your own experience. Does your understanding really work in the world of today?

True faith always leads us to a deeper love for God and for other people. If change helps us grow in these ways, we need not fear it. Rather, change should be welcomed and encouraged.

Go ahead – ask your questions, test the limits, explore your faith! Far from being a threat to the church, your searching is a gift to be treasured.



GROWING TOGETHER is a series of five Sunday bulletin inserts for the ecumenical education of Christ's faithful.

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