

GROWING *Together*

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COMPLEX SIMPLICITY

It's called KISS: Keep It Simple, Smartypants. Sometimes it seems like the world, so full of headlines and slogans and 5-second sound bites, is bent on oversimplifying everything from shopping to voting to making war. At the same time, we often hear how fast-paced and complex our world has become. It's enough to make a person dizzy. How can we keep it simple without acting and feeling like simpletons?

We don't always find the answer at church. So many questions, so few simple answers – the mystery of the Trinity, of the Incarnation, of the sacraments. It all sounds so ... well, complicated. As for ministers, they all seem to have learned from Jesus – every time someone asked him a question, he answered with another question! It may be no accident that the churches that seem to be growing most quickly are the ones that keep their message simple and discourage too much inquiry.

It doesn't have to be this way. Certainly, some of the world's greatest intellects have been stimulated as well as stymied by the mysteries of faith. In addition, many ordinary people of faith are delighted to find that their faith has depths they have not plumbed. Nevertheless, many among Jesus' enemies used their knowledge of the complexities of their faith to use and abuse their power. It was often the poor and illiterate who took his message to heart. "Love your neighbour as yourself." "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." These are not always easy words to live by, but they are simple enough for everyone to understand.

The Apostle Paul, although fiercely intellectual by nature, also had moments when he managed to keep his message simple: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice." (Philippians 4:4) On another occasion, he wrote that the life of faith is shown in "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." (Galatians 5:22) Surely, these are the same virtues that our parents taught us when we were children.

Yes, the Christian faith offers enough depth and complexity to keep any brainiac from getting bored and to challenge the rest of us for a lifetime, if that's what we want. But when it all seems a little too much, take a deep breath and relax. As Robert Fulghum's book puts it, everything we need to know about life, we already learned in kindergarten.

Too much simplicity, of course, reduces our faith to the kind of one-dimensional slogans that make good bumper stickers (Jesus Saves!) but offer little help as we seek to live faithfully in a complex world. What we need is a faith message that is simple without being simplistic.

The prophet Micah asks the question we all ask at some point: What does the Lord require of me? The answer is immediate and refreshingly simple: "Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

We already know how to do this. Just remember to KISS – Keep It Simple, Smartypants.



2011 Writing Team: Rev. Dr. Jan Bigland-Pritchard (Anglican), Rev. Paul Matheson (Baptist), Leah Perrault (Roman Catholic), Vern Ratzlaff (Mennonite), Rev. Michael Webster (United Church). Our editor is Frank Roy.

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Prairie Centre for Ecumenism
600 - 45th Street West
Saskatoon, SK S7L 5W9
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phone: (306)-653-1633
fax: (306) 653-1821
email: pce@ecumenism.net
www.ecumenism.net