

## PROFILE

# W. John Patterson



John Patterson is Co-Director, along with his wife Thea, of Abbey North, Haliburton, a place of depth conversation and action on issues related to environment, HIV-AIDS in Africa and the delegitimation of war. Together with an Australian and an Indian colleague, he co-founded the Kanbay Group of Companies. Prior to his years with Kanbay, the Pattersons were fulltime staff members of the ICA for some 18 years, serving mainly in India, the UK and on the global oversight team of the ICA.

Mr Patterson began his adult working career as a United Church of Canada pastor in Hearst and Hornepayne, Ontario. Thea and John were married in 1970 and then moved to Chicago for John's post-graduate studies in 1972.

Then as part of the staff of the ICA, Pattersons were asked to relocate to India in 1974 to work as part of the team that was launching the ICA's extensive village development work there. Thereafter they served in the UK and Chicago before re-

turning to India in 1985 where they continued training and facilitation services work until 1991.

There followed 13 years in Hong Kong where John worked to build up Kanbay, the IT services firm that he had co-founded. Thea taught at the Hong Kong International School.

In 2004, the Pattersons returned to Canada and established Abbey North in Haliburton Highlands where they lead and host spirit retreats and planning sessions for aspects of work they deem important in the world today. Their linkages to the work of the United Church of Canada remain strong.

John holds a bachelor's degree in Philosophy from the University of Toronto, a theology degree from Queens Theological College in Kingston, Canada and a Master's degree in Theology from McCormick Seminary in Chicago. John also successfully completed a year of postgraduate studies at the University of St. Andrews (Scotland).

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# EDGES

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# EDGES

N E W P L A N E T A R Y P A T T E R N S

## Working with Consensus

### **When you are in a hurry, slow down!**

by Sr. Elizabeth Ann Eckert, SSJD

Slowing down a decision-making process for greater effectiveness is not advice one normally hears. Usually people are more concerned with saving time and increasing efficiency, but at what cost? An old proverb says: "Take time to do it right the first time." I believe it's vitally important to take time in our decision-making processes to get it right the first time and to bring everyone along when we are making changes.

A change in leadership inevitably involves changes in the organization. At least that has been our experience in the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine, an Anglican religious community founded in Toronto, Ontario, in 1884. We have been fortunate in the leaders we have elected over the years in moving us forward in our decision-making processes. It was Sr. Constance Joanna Gefvert, SSJD, our Reverend Mother (elected leader) from 1994 to 2005 who first introduced the ORID process to our Community. This moved us from a democratic style of leadership which involved voting on every issue, to a more collegial style of leadership through making decisions by consensus. We seldom vote now except when absolutely necessary according to our Constitution. As the most recently elected leader of our Community, I continue to use the ORID process for decision making in our Community as a means to bring us to consensus.



*a force for positive social change*

So what is consensus? Consensus, derived from its Latin roots con, meaning with or together with, and sentire meaning to think or to feel, literally means to think or to feel together. Consensus does not mean unanimity, but having the group come to one mind about a decision, like the Quakers. We come to a point where not only can we live with the decision being considered, but because we've taken the time to talk things through thoroughly, we can embrace the decision made because our input has been actively sought, heard and taken into account.

We now seek to move together as a group involving everyone in the process and allowing time for each person to be heard. Decisions are no longer made by a hierarchy or by the tyranny of the majority as can happen in the democratic process and then just accepted by the rest.

### **Building Consensus**

Reaching consensus takes time, however. It takes longer for a group to come to consensus than it does to simply discuss the relevant facts and details of an issue and then take a vote. Consensus requires us to talk it all out: to hear from everyone; to compromise on some points; to find ways of maximizing the positives and minimizing or mitigating the negatives, so that we can all move forward on a decision. The ORID process has been a tremendous help to us in our decision-making process because the process itself slows down the decision-making and provides us with way to come to consensus.

### **This issue's Theme:** Working with Consensus

We believe decisions are best made by consensus that includes the perspectives of all.

*Gabby Resch*  
Editor

*Gabby Resch is...Interested in writing an article for Edges? Contact Gabby at gresch@icacan.ca*



*We may also bring to awareness any elephants which are in the room but which no one is talking about!*

As in any group, there are some who think out loud and seem to have already come to a conclusion; they simply need time to hear their own thoughts and bounce their ideas off other people. Others in the group process what they are hearing internally before they can come to a conclusion. The ORID process provides for both of these styles and gives everyone a chance to air their thoughts and feelings. Allowing people to express their feelings freely and being willing to listen to other people's feelings is the key to building consensus. Many people are glad to move on a decision by the group as long as they feel that they've been heard.

But there is more to it than that. In the book, *SpiritLinking Leadership*, by Donna Markham, OP, we learn how valuable it is in group dynamics to hear the dissent-

ing and angry voice. Sometimes it is the dissenting voice which is able to help others to articulate an uneasy feeling within them that they have not yet been either conscious of or able to put into words. Hearing an angry or dissenting voice is a signal to pay attention for it can reveal passionate energy available for significant change. Knowing that they've been heard and having the group work at mitigating the negatives, helps those with a dissenting voice come around to the mind of the group because what they have said has been heard and taken into account.

### **The ORID Process for Decision-making**

The ORID process has four steps in the decision-making process. We start first with the Objective step, that is, collecting and recording all the facts about the issue

at hand. Making the facts explicit helps everyone to be working on the same page with the same data. The historical context for the issue at hand is helpful especially for newer members of a group to understand why a decision is necessary.

What comes next is the Reflective step. Reflection is examining our thinking, our feelings and our emotions about the issue and any associations that come to mind. When we take time as a Community to reflect, we are able to surface assumptions and the paradigms we are operating under in order to see how they influence our actions. We may also bring to awareness any elephants which are in the room but which no one is talking about! Often we take time to reflect only when something goes wrong or fails. Even then, our reflection may only be about how we might fix it or make adjustments, not about the thinking behind the action. Reflection is so necessary in building consensus but is often seen as soft stuff and gets left out of the decision-making process for the sake of efficiency.

The Interpretive step in the ORID process lets us take time to talk about the values, meaning and purpose behind the issue leading to the decision. We need to address various questions to move the discussion along and make sense out of both the Objective facts and the Reflection done by the group. What does this mean? What is happening here? What is this all about? What new insights are we have gained from this discussion? What are the disadvantages? What can we do to minimize the disadvantages? What are the advantages? What can we do to maximize the advantages? How are we feeling? Can we go forward? Once we've addressed these questions, then we are ready to move to the final stage of the ORID process.

Only after working through the first three steps are we ready for the fourth, the Decisional stage. We consider various solutions or resolution of the issue at hand, and their implications for the group, as well as implementation of the decision reached. Although we tend to avoid voting in this process, sometimes, in order to read the mind of the group, we take a straw vote as a way of moving the group towards a decision. To avoid making a decision would not only be a waste of time, but would weaken the

group's ability to use this process in the future. Coming up with concrete solutions, knowing the accountability in the decision of who is doing what, having a time-line, and agreeing on a time in the future for evaluation are all positive outcomes of the decision-making process.

We have found that having the whole group involved in the process takes longer, but better decisions are made and

the whole group then moves together. Coming to consensus is time well spent. So next time you are in a hurry to make a decision, slow down. ❖

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*Sources: Towards the Learning Organization, by Ginny Belden, Marcia Hyatt and Deb Ackley, 1993 (on the ORID process).*

*The Quaker Reader, selected and introduced by Jessamyn West, 2nd ed. 1990, Pendle Hill Publications.*

## Young Community Leaders Project Set to Kick Off in Northern Ontario

The YFL Program is set to launch a new and exciting initiative called The Young Community Leaders (YCL) project in Northern Ontario this fall. The project is being run concurrently in North Bay and Sudbury with Regional Coordinators Brian Finner and Stephanie Chevrette hitting the ground in their respective communities September 2nd, 2008.

The idea behind the 3-year, 8-month project is to harness the intelligence, enthusiasm and perspectives of young people and bring them to forefront in building vibrant, sustainable communities.

YCL will be carried out in two phases over the length of the project. Phase I will begin with the training of a group of young people from diverse backgrounds in concrete leadership skills. These youth will then conduct thorough community consultations to develop a complete picture of the current strengths and weaknesses of each community in terms of youth engagement as well as the involvement of young people in community development and leadership.

Phase II of the project involves developing comprehensive and community-specific youth leadership engagement plans informed by the findings from Phase I that will include developing youth-driven projects in North Bay and Sudbury that directly address the identified needs of young people as well target community issues.

Recruitment of 5-10 youth ages 15-25 from each community is taking place now and will continue until

September 10th at which point the young people who will take part in the project's founding year will be chosen. Community presentations are taking place throughout North Bay, Sudbury and surrounding areas to introduce the project and to inform the public of YCL's local presence. Outreach has been ongoing and extensive in both communities in order to reach those youth and community members who may not have had similar engagement opportunities in the past.

YFL is partnering with the YMCAs in North Bay and Sudbury to ensure strong community ties and a well-developed network of local stakeholders to act as an advisory committee for the youth involved, particularly during the project development and sustainability planning stages.

ICA Canada is proud to see the project moving forward as it represents a very positive step in the development and evolution of the Youth as Facilitative Leaders program. Also exciting is the fact that the project is expanding YFL's reach to beyond the GTA and into other areas of Ontario where there is also a need for youth engagement and leadership training programs. ❖

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*Staci is currently the Director of the Youth as Facilitative Leaders program at ICA Canada. She's been active in the field of youth engagement for the last 2 years as a Project Leader for Katimavik on the East Coast and most recently as a Youth Engagement Coordinator for TakingITGlobal and as the Youth Outreach Coordinator for local MP Charlie Angus in her hometown of Timmins, ON. She holds a BA in English and French, as well as an MA in French Literature.*