From the Editor: To be or not to be?

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Shakespeare’s Hamlet was a procrastinator. He spent much of his time mulling things over — this or that? Or maybe the other?

“To be or not to be? To die, to sleep; To sleep, perchance to dream… The dread of something after death… puzzles the will/ And makes us rather bear those ills we have/ Than fly to others that we know not of… And enterprises of great pith and moment… lose the name of action.”

On the one hand … on the other hand. Hamlet stands for those of us unable to make up our minds. The road goes two ways — which will we choose? Maybe we’ll go back the way we came? Or maybe we’ll just stand still, stay where we are?

The TransCanada Spiritans spent a week together in Niagara Falls this past July. We needed to attend to in-house issues: the decreasing number of active members, the influx of recently arrived members from overseas, especially from West Africa. We needed to attend to future commitments. We arrived at great consensus regarding many aspects of our way of life. But we also left unfinished our Planning for the Future. With diminished numbers we cannot continue everything we have been doing. That being so, what will we drop?

Were we, in fact, a microcosm of the wider European and North American church? Greatly diminished in number, parishes amalgamating, debating what to hold on to and what to give up, over-stretching the available human resources, unwilling to admit that more of the same will probably get us nowhere.

But if not more of the same, then what? Has the time come to ask the so far unaskable. Can only men be priests? Only single men? Must leadership be limited to the ordained? Is churchgoing all that matters? Are the ethnic newcomers being served? Is bringing their priests here from overseas a viable long-term answer? Can they instantaneously take on the role of community leaders? Can they import their way of being church without alienating a great part of the current congregation? Or can their life-giving energy resurrect a dormant western church?

Is the Spirit of the living God nudging those of us who have been here for quite some time to accept other insights, other ways of being useful? Are we the ones who have to adapt, or disengage, so that church can be done differently?

Are we hearing women’s voices? Do today’s wives, mothers, aunts, grandmothers, daughters and sisters find church a congenial place, a place in which they feel welcome and at home? If not, is there a future for our church without them?

Not all of these questions were asked in Niagara Falls last July. But the beginning of a different approach was heard loud and clear. Priests as classroom teachers and administrators are a thing of the past. High school chaplains maybe — the necessary paper qualifications make this a slim possibility. And the readiness of overseas Spiritans to take on this ministry is not evident.

Yes, Niagara became the crossroads of to be or not to be: to be this or that or maybe the other? What direction will we take? Which road leads on to fuller life? Maybe Robert Frost can direct our steps:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.