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Ottawa*Watch* 229: A civil community

By Lloyd Mackey

Two points worth noting in 2022:

- *The former leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, Erin O'Toole, deposed so quickly a few months ago, made a striking comment in his resignation speech. "Hear the other side," he said. "Listen to all voices, not just the echoes from your own tribe. Realize that our country is divided and people are worried." It was that stance which caused O'Toole trouble, particularly with militant social conservatives. But, I would gently suggest he is right.*
- *Marianne Mead Ward, the former editor of Faith Today magazine, did, indeed, get into politics and is now a pretty colorful mayor of Burlington, a city of 200,000 just east of Hamilton, on the shores of Lake Ontario. She is a staunch Liberal but claims also to be a serious fiscal conservative. I do not, at this point, know the echoes of which tribe she listens to.*

A bit of Ottawa-centric trivia:

Singer Michael Jackson, the avowed "king of pop" died suddenly last week at 50 – the same age as Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

Just a few days previously, Actor Farrah Fawcett died at 62 – the same age as Opposition Leader Michael Ignatieff.

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And, two more stories drawn from participation, in mid-June, in the 25th anniversary celebrations of Write! Canada, the popular Christian writers' conference staged each year in Guelph.

One plenary session included comments from several writers, editors and publishers in the Canadian Christian communication field. Each of us was given four minutes to express our particular perspectives on the state of the Christian publishing field in Canada. Each had four minutes to state our case: I took three, much to the surprise of some of my critics who periodically chide me for my alleged verbosity.

I wanted to encourage Christian writers and editors to build a respect in their own mindsets for the opinions of others, with whom they might strongly differ. Further, I expressed the hope that writers encountering those opposite to them would prod those opposites to show the same respect.

I have to say I was knocked off my mark a bit by some surprise unexpected support for a position I took preliminary to making my main point.

I spoke about the need for free speech and a free press, along with the need for Christian writers to stand up for their right to free expression. When I suggested that human rights commissions and other state-sanctioned bodies have no legitimate role in causing people to alter the way they think or express themselves, I was met with considerable applause.

I realized that, led by such luminaries as Mark Steyn of *Macleans Magazine* and Ezra Levant of *Western Standard*, many Christian journalists and other writers had been feeling strongly about the subject of free speech.

I have avoided writing extensively about the subject, hoping that there would be an opportunity to apply some conflict management concepts to a periodically-more-civil approach to contentious issues.

My sense was that many in the group to which I was speaking are not yet quite ready for a “civil society” approach. Understandably, they want to be more pointed and direct than “diplomatic” expression would permit.

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Which brings me to Marianne Meed Ward.

A former editor of *Faith Today* magazine and, as a consequence, a former director of the conference we were attending, Meed Ward has, for some years, been a columnist at the Toronto Sun.

For some time, her “beat” was religion and her column was called “In your Faith”.

Then, her editor, Lorrie Goldstein, suggested that, since she, her husband (a World Vision executive) and her three children, were living and active in Burlington, that she might want to try her hand at articulating on suburban, “905” belt, community life.

At Write! Canada, Meed Ward talked about her switch in beats, and her efforts to continue to express strong opinions in a setting where she was also attempting to communicate community values.

It has been interesting to watch her evolve into community-focused journalism. (She also has aspirations for political office and has run a couple of times already, albeit not quite successfully enough to win.) If you read her columns carefully, you will also sense that she has carried with her, many of the spiritual values she nurtured and developed at *Faith Today*.

You can see the results of her work each Sunday at www.canoe.ca. Click on “columnists”. (I always read her column before Edna and I head off for church. You know what they say: The better the day, the better the deed.)