

# FORUM LETTER

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## Truly a demonic power



The basic disease is *sloth*. It is that strange laziness and passivity of our entire being which always pushes us 'down' rather than 'up' – which constantly convinces us that no change is possible and therefore desirable. It is in fact a deeply rooted cynicism which to every spiritual challenge responds 'what for?' and makes our life one tremendous spiritual waste. It is the root of all sin because it poisons the spiritual energy at its very source.

The result of *sloth* is *faint-heartedness*. It is the state of despondency which all spiritual Fathers considered the greatest danger for the soul. Despondency is the impossibility for man to see anything good or positive; it is the reduction of everything to negativism and pessimism. It is truly a demonic power in us because the Devil is fundamentally a *liar*. He lies to man about God and about the world; he fills life with darkness and negation. Despondency is the suicide of the soul because when man is possessed by it he is absolutely unable to see the light and to desire it. – Alexander Schmemmann, *Great Lent* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 34-35.

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## Anglican discipline



When the Anglican Primates met in Canterbury in January, what they did was not quite what most people expected. It was widely agreed that these heads of the 38 Anglican provinces around the world would have to deal with the increasing tensions between many of the "Global South" churches and some of the European and American churches over homosexuality. The issue had been simmering for quite some time in the Anglican Communion, but it erupted into a full-scale conflict when the Episcopal Church (which, until recently, pretty much held sole title to Anglicanism in the United States) approved same-sex marriage last summer.

The Primates have no legal authority within the Anglican Communion, but they function as a kind of informal expression of unity and cooperation among the 38 independent provinces. The meetings are called by the Archbishop of Canterbury, titular head of the Communion. Since the first one in 1979, the meetings have ordinarily happened every two years or so – though the 2016 meeting came after a gap of five years. A lot has happened among Anglicans in that time.

There was considerable speculation that a number of the bishops, particularly from Africa, would boycott the meeting; such a boycott happened at the previous meeting in 2011. This time, however, the Africans came. One of them,

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Archbishop Stanley Ntigali of Uganda, quietly left after the second day. He explained that his church had authorized him to participate only if “godly order” was restored to the Communion – in other words, if the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada repented or were disciplined for their stances on homosexuality. In the end, the rest of the African Primates stayed.

### **A slap on the wrist? Or more?**

What made the headlines was the decision of the Primates to discipline the Episcopal Church. If one only read the headlines, the discipline imposed may not seem like much. For the next three years, the Episcopal Church may “no longer represent us on ecumenical and interfaith bodies, should not be appointed or elected to an internal standing committee and . . . while participating in the internal bodies of the Anglican Communion, they will not take part in decision making on any issues pertaining to doctrine or polity.” Big deal, right? That’s certainly the spin being put on it by a lot of Episcopalians.

In ecclesiastical statements, though, nuance is everything. That’s maybe not so true of denominational statements by the ELCA, LCMS, NALC and other American groups; in those statements, nuance is mostly non-existent.

For the Anglicans, though, one must read between the lines. The first thing to notice is that the whole controversy is framed in terms of doctrine. The decision of the Episcopal Church to approve same-sex marriage was not just a matter of policy. No, the Primates said, it represents “a fundamental departure from the faith and teaching held by the majority of our Provinces on the doctrine of marriage.” Furthermore, it was a “unilateral action on a matter of doctrine without Catholic unity” and was therefore “a departure from the mutual accountability and interdependence implied through being in relationship with each other in the Anglican Communion.” The Episcopal Church’s actions “impair our communion and create a deeper mistrust” leading to “a significant distance between us.”

While the Primates didn’t officially release the actual numbers (saying only that the statement was approved by a majority), sources within the meeting have indicated that the vote on the resolution was 27 in favor, 3 against, and 6 abstentions. The three negative votes apparently came from the

Episcopal Church itself, joined by the Anglican Church of Canada and the Church of Scotland – both of which are poised to follow the Episcopal Church in approving same-sex marriage in the coming months.

### **Getting their attention**

Now normally one would think that such an action would get the attention of the group being disciplined. It’s sort of a Matthew 18 situation; the Primates went to their “brother” to tell him his fault, in an honest effort to “gain their brother.” The Primates themselves suggested this by another action, which requested Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby “to appoint a Task Group to maintain conversation among ourselves with the intention of restoration of relationship, the rebuilding of mutual trust, healing the legacy of hurt, recognising the extent of our commonality and exploring our deep differences, ensuring they are held between us in the love and grace of Christ.”

The Episcopal Church’s leaders, however, have shown little interest in genuine reconciliation unless it be on their own terms – which is to say, unless the rest of the Anglican Communion simply agree to what the Episcopal Church has already decided to do. The response by these leaders has been nothing short of astonishing.

### **What did he expect?**

Michael Curry, who was installed as Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church only several weeks ago, admitted, “This is not the outcome we expected, and while we are disappointed, it’s important to remember that the Anglican Communion is not really a matter of structure and organization. The Anglican Communion is a network of relationships . . .” One might wonder, first, just what outcome he *did* expect? Did he think the Africans (and others) would just suddenly roll over and say, “Well, we guess you’re right”? Did he assume that they would just walk out and leave the Anglican Communion firmly in the hands of the more enlightened?

Or did he think that he, as an African American, would be able to sway the African bishops over to his side? Apparently he took that direction in the meeting itself. “I stand before you as a descendant of African slaves, stolen from their native land, en-

slaved in a bitter bondage, and then even after emancipation, segregated and excluded in church and society," he said. "And this conjures that up again, and brings pain." The words were quoted by Episcopal News Service, and seem to have been provided by Curry himself, since the deliberations among the Primates were not public.

And as for the Anglican Communion being a "network of relationships," wasn't that precisely the tone of the Primates' statement? That we have this relationship, the Episcopal Church has completely trashed it, and now we've all got to find some way to put it back together? Then he asserted his church's independence: "We are the Episcopal Church, and we are part of the Jesus Movement, and that Movement goes on, and our work goes on." So there.

### **The church's one vocation**

But the most remarkable part of his statement was how he conceives his church's mission. "And the truth is, it may be part of our vocation to help the Communion and to help many others to grow in a direction where we can realize and live the love that God has for all of us, and we can one day be a Church and a Communion where all of God's children are fully welcomed, where this is truly a house of prayer for all people. And maybe it's a part of our vocation to help that to happen."

There you have it. The Episcopal Church is wiser, more mature, really more *Christian*, when you get right down to it. The paternalistic attitude is certainly nothing new in the relationship between Westerners and the so-called Third World. Still, the condescension is stunning. It calls to mind the comment of Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong some years ago that the backward African bishops are just a generation removed from the jungle.

Even more remarkable was the statement from the Rev. Gay Clark Jennings, president of the House of Deputies of the Episcopal Church. The decision will be "painful for some of us," Jennings said — but not primarily for Episcopalians who feel the pain of that discipline. No, the pain to which Jennings refers is that of the "LGBT people who have been excluded too often and for too long." Oh, and maybe also for "those of us who value our mission relationships with Anglicans across the Communion." Not a word about those who might grieve because they believe that the chastisement by the

Primates was just and right.

But never mind. Jennings assured Episcopalians that "nothing about what the primates have said will change the actions of the General Convention that have . . . moved us toward full inclusion and equal marriage." In other words, "We don't give a fig what the rest of you think; we're going to keep doing what we want." Many — not all — diocesan bishops have said more or less the same thing. If the Primates thought their imposition of discipline might actually lead to repentance, the reactions of the Episcopal Church's leadership should make clear that it ain't gonna happen.

### **Kicking the can down the road**

In essence, the problem of holding the Anglican Communion together has been kicked down the road for three years. It seems unlikely that the Americans (and other Western liberals) will be able "to help many others to grow" to their stage of enlightenment within that time frame. It seems even more unlikely that the Episcopal Church will repent and rescind its recent actions. Within the next three years, the Anglican Church of Canada and a few other provinces are expected to follow the Episcopal Church, which will make for a very sticky situation come 2019.

Complicating matters is the Anglican Church in North America, a body composed of former Episcopalians who have left the Episcopal Church, largely because of the sexuality issues. Their Archbishop, Foley Beach, was present at Canterbury at the invitation of Welby; he was there as a guest, though it was understood that if the Primates moved into a more "formal meeting" he would be asked to step out, since the ACNA is not at this time an "official" member of the Anglican Communion's "instruments." That's Anglican-speak for the concept that Anglicans are held together by four entities: the Archbishop of Canterbury, the decennial Lambeth Conference (which is composed of all the Anglican bishops, and last met in 2008), the Primates Meeting, and the Anglican Consultative Council (somewhat similar to the Council of the Lutheran World Federation, with lay, clergy, and episcopal representation from the member churches).

### **Moral compromise and doctrinal error**

Beach reported that he had participated fully

in the discussions, that he was never asked to step out, that he refrained from voting on the discipline resolution, and that he left the meeting early because he saw no evidence of “repentance, restored order, and true unity.” He told his church that “the sanctions [against the Episcopal Church] are strong, but they are not strong enough, and to my deep disappointment, they didn’t include the Anglican Church of Canada as they should.”

A similar sentiment was expressed by the Chairman and General Secretary of the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON), an entity formed in 2008 by orthodox Anglicans when, as they express it on their website, “moral compromise, doctrinal error and the collapse of biblical witness in parts of the Anglican communion had reached such a level that the leaders of the majority of the world’s Anglicans felt it was necessary to take a united stand for truth.” The GAFCON leaders pulled no punches in responding to the Primates’ action. “There must . . . be doubt about the effectiveness of the sanctions that have been agreed. In particular, it must be recognized that the continuing brokenness of the Communion is not the result simply of failed relationships, but is caused by the persistent rejection of biblical and apostolic faith. . . . We are therefore disappointed that the Primates’ statement makes no reference to the need for repentance.”

### The next skirmish

Look for the next skirmish to take place in April, when the Anglican Consultative Council meets in Zambia. This fourth “instrument of Communion” is, in a sense, where the rubber meets the road in terms of carrying out the Primates’ discipline; it is the ACC which would appoint ecumenical representatives, commission members, and so forth. It is actually independent, with its own constitution. The ACNA has not applied for membership in the ACC, largely because it seems a lost cause; there is no precedent for two geographically overlapping jurisdictions both to hold membership in the ACC.

The Episcopal Church’s Presiding Bishop Curry has already suggested that the ACC doesn’t really have to enforce the Primates’ wishes. “The ACC is the only formal constitutional body of the Anglican Communion,” he said, “and it will decide what to do. Our representatives from the Episcopal

Church look forward to being there.” House of Deputies President Jennings has made the same argument. “The primates,” she wrote, “do not have authority over the Anglican Consultative Council, the worldwide body of bishops, clergy and lay people that facilitates the cooperative work of the churches of the Anglican Communion.” She noted that she is one of the Episcopal Church’s representative to ACC, and that she plans to be in Zambia and to “participate fully.”

### Methodists not far behind

Meanwhile, on another front, the United Methodist Church’s General Conference meets in May, and international dissension about homosexuality is likely to roil that session as well. The UMC is different from other American denominations in that it is organically connected to most (not all) Methodists in other countries, so that the General Conference includes international delegates from Africa, Latin America, Asia and Europe. As with other confessional families, Methodism is growing rapidly in Africa. Each time the quadrennial General Conference meets, the African delegates form a larger bloc; their presence has been the most important reason that the General Conference has not been able to undo the 1972 action which put the church on record as considering homosexuality as “incompatible with Christian teaching.”

In September 2015, fourteen United Methodist bishops in Africa released a statement that made clear their continuing opposition to same-sex marriage, ordination of partnered gays, and the rest of the LGBT agenda. “We have watched with shock and dismay the rapid drift of our denomination . . . to a warm embrace of practices that have become sources of conflict that now threatens to rip the Church apart and distract her from the mission of leading persons to faith and making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. . . . We are deeply saddened that the Holy Bible, our primary authority for faith and the practice of Christian living, and our *Book of Discipline* are being grossly ignored by some members and leaders of our Church in favor of social and cultural practices that have no scriptural basis for acceptance in Christian worship and conduct. Yet they continue to attempt to persuade members of the Church to incorporate these practices as an accepted code of con-

duct within global United Methodism.”

This was followed by an open letter from a number of UMC “caucuses” in the United States which sharply criticized the African bishops’ “harmful and offensive language, reminiscent of the past efforts to demonize homosexual persons by equating homosexuality with pedophilia.” The letter said that the “real issue” is not “diversity in belief and practice, but the mean-spirited way that those who advocate for change in the church’s traditional position have been treated.”

You can expect renewed efforts to change the UMC’s stance on marriage and sexuality, and perhaps renewed efforts to alter the denomination’s structure so that the enlightened Americans will have the ability to ignore the Africans’ concerns and go their own way.

### Parallels and differences

What has this all to do with Lutherans? Well, there are certainly both parallels and differences. The most obvious parallel is that the battle over sexuality, having been “won” at least in the ELCA, is now an international struggle. As with the Anglicans and Methodists, it is the African Lutherans who are most resistant to changes – and most insistent that what is changing is not just “belief and practice” but “a matter of doctrine.” If the conflict between Africa and the West has not been as obvious or contentious among Lutherans, that is only because there are profound differences in polity. Unlike the United Methodist situation, the ELCA is a United States body. The ELCA doesn’t have to pay much attention to what Lutherans in Africa think. (As far as that goes, the ELCA doesn’t have to, and

doesn’t, pay much attention to what other Lutherans in the United States think.)

And unlike the Anglicans, Lutherans are not really a “communion.” The Lutheran World Federation now calls itself a “communion of churches,” but it is not a “communion” in the Anglican sense. It does not include all Lutheran church bodies; it does not have a unifying figure like the Archbishop of Canterbury. What one Lutheran church says or does simply doesn’t have the same impact on fellow Lutherans around the world. And let’s be honest: Lutherans historically don’t get their jollies by thinking of themselves as a worldwide communion; we have generally been perfectly content to be divided and our favorite sport is to criticize other Lutherans – sometimes with accusations of heresy, but more often with eye-rolling condescension.

And maybe that condescension is where the current Lutheran debate over sexuality is most like similar conflicts among Anglicans and Methodists. The North American and European church bodies really do seem to think that they are the enlightened ones, and they have that confidence (common, it seems, to liberals of all varieties) that with proper education and due deference, the unenlightened can be brought to see the light. It just doesn’t occur to us that we might be wrong. At my congregation the Ash Wednesday sermon spoke about the words of Joel: “Return to the Lord your God.” The preacher noted that when one is called to return, the implication is that one is going the wrong way. But none of us really want to hear that call; we have set out in what we think is the right direction, and our minds are made up.

—by Richard O. Johnson, editor

## No Lutheran mission, no Christian vision

by Brad Everett



Lent is a sadly fitting season to be writing about Concordia University of Edmonton’s recent decision to remove references to Lutheranism and the Christian faith from its Mission and Vision statements. The decision reveals the uncomfortable truth that we are all frail and fallen people, living in a sinful world.

In the interest of full disclosure, I have a stake in this story: my son will be attending Concor-

dia this fall. One of the reasons he chose it (and his mother and I were glad of this choice) was its connection to the Lutheran Church – Canada (LCC); Concordia started out in 1921 as a junior college of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. Given all the goofiness one hears about on campuses these days, a small, faith-based school seemed ideal.

So when the editor of *Forum Letter* asked if I would write something about what was going on at

Concordia, I answered, "Sure ... but what's going on at Concordia?" He then sent the link to a story on the *Canadian Lutheran* website about the changes made by Concordia's Board of Governors at their November 27 meeting. My initial reaction was less than charitable, but after talking with Concordia's president, the Rev. Dr. Gerald Krispin, and the LCC's president, the Rev. Dr. Robert Bugbee, my initial parental outrage was replaced by a profound sadness and disappointment – not so much with individuals or institutions but with the brokenness of the situation.

### What's going on

According to Dr. Krispin, Concordia University of Edmonton has a student body of close to 1,800, but only 83 of them are declared Lutheran; there are more Roman Catholics and Muslims than Lutherans on campus. The school's annual budget of \$27 million consists of \$12.5 million received from the provincial government, with the remainder drawn from tuition, fees and ancillary services. In 2015 Concordia received less than \$30,000 in contributions from the synod, congregations and individual donors combined. While he is grateful for the gifts that come from the members of the LCC, Krispin notes that the needs of Concordia have outgrown the capacity of the LCC to support its operations.

In May 2015, Alberta elected a new provincial government, headed by the New Democratic Party (which has a decidedly socialist/liberal position). Add to that the economic crisis facing the province (the steep decline of oil prices in an oil producing province has taken its toll). "I was personally informed," Krispin said, "that 'private religious schools' in the post-secondary system should not take funding for granted going forward in a stressed Alberta economy."

While Concordia's current fiscal standing is quite good, (a recent budget meeting is anticipating a \$2 million surplus), the reality is that the future is uncertain. "It goes without saying that I as President, and the Board as a whole, need to evaluate any risk, potential or real, and make decisions that provide for Concordia's future," said Krispin.

"It is for this reason," he went on, "that the decision was made on November 27 to cease presenting Concordia to the government and the public

as a religious institution. To be blunt: this decision was made in order to maintain the funding that we are currently receiving and to establish the conditions that ensure Concordia's sustainability."

### It's what you do, not what you put on paper

Krispin noted that he was the author of the school's original Mission and Value statements (<http://tinyurl.com/jtjfoay>) and that he still stands behind them. "It's what you do, not what you put on paper, that matters," he said.

Thus for the foreseeable future very little will change. The rostered LCC pastors on the faculty (including Krispin himself) aren't going anywhere. LCC President Bugbee said that the LCC would not be hasty or harsh in sorting out the situation of rostered faculty members. The part-time LCC chaplaincy funded by the school will continue, as will daily chapel services (twice a week in conjunction with Concordia Lutheran Seminary), the pre-seminary courses, the Religious Studies classes, the M.A. in Biblical and Christian Studies (the only M.A. program offered), the school choir productions of traditional Christian music, the Institute of Christian Studies and Society, as well as the Canadian Centre for Scholarship and the Christian Faith.

### How long will it last?

Of course one can raise the question of how long this will last, given that Concordia is no longer explicitly a Christian school. Krispin acknowledged that the climate and culture of the school will likely change in the next generation or two if history is any indication. He cited the changes at Waterloo Lutheran University, now Wilfred Laurier University, and McMaster University, formerly but no more a Baptist school.

"But Concordia will be here in a generation; it will be here providing an educational environment that encourages respectful sharing, discussion and debate, including its continued engagement with the Christian faith," he said.

Some are asking how is it that Concordia even got to the point where it could do this. According to Bugbee, the beginnings of this can be traced to 1978 when the then LCMS leadership encouraged the school to create closer ties to the University of Alberta. Over the years the school gained degree-granting status. Concordia's Board of Governors

continued to be elected by the LCC in convention until 2010, when the school notified the LCC it would be changing its bylaws to allow for a self-appointing board. This was its right, it argued, under the 1978 Act of Incorporation, which instituted Concordia as an independent organization. In 2014 the LCC updated its bylaws to recognize the change that had already taken place.

Bugbee said he understood their Concordia's need for a self-appointed board, one that would allow them to bring in the people they needed, people with connections who could bring the school support and funding, and so he encouraged the flexibility this new arrangement would allow.

### Concern for the future

There was, however, always concern about the future of the school. People were asking what would prevent Concordia from becoming like Augustana University (a school of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada which over the years had become more liberal and then, due to financial and sustainability issues, in 2003 was given to the University of Alberta by the ELCIC in convention). "When Gerald [Krispin] was asked this question," Bugbee said, "he always pointed to the Mission and Values statements – but now those have changed."

While he recognizes the challenges facing Concordia in a competitive post-secondary climate, and the possible funding changes given the new provincial government, Bugbee wonders why Concordia made the changes so soon.

"If they were compelled by the province to make these changes it would be easier to understand," he said, "but they weren't. . . . These decisions are matters of judgment, and I understand

that. But it seems unbrotherly for them to be made without consultation or notification." The LCC was not consulted about the changes, nor were they officially informed; they found out via the grapevine.

When I asked Krispin about the lack of notification about the changes (thinking more about myself as the parent of a future student), he replied that he hadn't wanted to draw attention to it and make it a big issue.

### Navigating a new relationship

And truth be told, he's probably right. There'll be some discussion for a while on various websites about the matter and then it will blow over and Concordia will be left to navigate its future as an institution and, one might hope, to build a new relationship with the LCC.

In conclusion, after researching this piece, I'm confident that Concordia University of Edmonton will provide a decent education for my son, in a climate that at least supports his faith, even if it doesn't overtly encourage it. But once something as essential as an explicit Christian and Lutheran identity is surrendered, it will be extremely difficult to maintain the climate and culture that once existed. That being the case, I'm not sure what the school will look like in 12 years when my youngest son is looking for a school – which is just sad.

*The Rev. Brad Everett, STS, is our occasional correspondent on matters Canadian. He is pastor of Ascension Lutheran Church in Calgary, AB, a congregation of the NALC. To access a copy of President Krispin's "Open Letter" to members of the LCC regarding the situation, go to <http://tinyurl.com/h7o84eb>.*

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## Omnium gatherum



**The shape of the liturgy** • Yet another discussion on the ELCA Clergy Facebook page that makes me wonder what on earth is being taught to seminarians these days. Someone raised the question: "Communion on Ash Wednesday? Why/Why not?" One pastor noted that the "French Protestant Church" has "a beautiful Ash Weds practice" in which ashes are imposed ear-

ly in the service and then "congregants" are invited for communion "remembering they are forgiven thru their baptism." What a wonderful idea, wish we Lutherans had thought of it – oh, wait; we did. Another pastor agreed that the service should include communion, because "it's not that much more" (I guess he meant time). Another – and I'm hoping this was tongue in cheek, though I'm afraid

it wasn't—wrote, "Why don't we combine all rituals and symbols together and impose ashes at every communion?" Yeah, those rituals and symbols are wonderfully adaptable.

**Oops!** • Last time we noted that the ELCA seminaries in Gettysburg and Philadelphia are planning to, let's say, "join forces," noting that they aren't calling it a "merger" since, in the words of the two Presidents, "mergers are created out of past realities." Apparently this present reality wasn't communicated adequately to the ELCA News Service. A news release dated January 19 was sent out at 6:51 a.m. January 20 with the headline, "2 ELCA seminaries to merge." At 9:29 a.m. a second release was issued, identical except for the headline: "Pennsylvania Lutheran seminaries declare intent to form 'new school of theology.'" Didn't Shakespeare say something about roses and smelling?

**Speaking of which** • One colleague observed that the "new school of theology" seems to be specifically eschewing the word "seminary," which currently appears in both their names. It's a symbolic affirmation that these "schools of theology" aren't really primarily about forming Lutheran pastors anymore. This is not a new trend, of course. I was recently reading a 1965 issue of the now defunct publication *Una Sancta*, and I came upon an interesting article about so-called "seminary" campuses being built without a chapel. The piece lambasted the proposed new campuses for Maywood and Philadelphia which did not include chapels; it also chided the LCMS for not yet having a chapel at the St. Louis seminary some thirty years after the campus was

built. (As an aside, it also noted in passing the "possible merger" of Philadelphia and Gettysburg seminaries!) The trend over decades now has been to move away from any serious thought of "pastoral formation" in order to be seen as academically respectable—hence a "school of theology" rather than a "seminary." "Pastoral formation" means a lot more than introducing the New Testament and offering courses in parish administration. Of course formation and academic rigor aren't really mutually exclusive, but it seems they might as well be.

**A follow up** • A few months ago we ran a piece on Immanuel Lutheran Church in Manhattan ("An Episcopal visit in Manhattan," *FL* Nov. 2015), which was contemplating leaving the ELCA for the NALC. Just a follow-up note: They voted to make that change by 64% in November, and a second vote in February agreed to do so by 69%.

**Everybody's a comedian** • My wife was going to be in Houston on Valentine's Day weekend visiting our granddaughter (oh, and her parents), so we decided to celebrate Valentine's Day on February 7 (known in some quarters as "Superbowl Sunday"). I called the New Moon, our favorite restaurant for special occasions. The owner, Buzz, answered. "Can you get us in this evening?" I asked. "Well," says he, "I could if we were open. But we're closed for Quinquagesima. We always close for one of the "gesima" Sundays—different one each year. Business is always really slow that night." He did conclude the conversation by saying how nice it was that he could use that line on somebody that didn't stare at him blankly. Oh, and we ended up grilling. —roj

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