

Renewing conviviality: an interview with Peter Stockland

By C.S. Morrissey
Special to The B.C. Catholic

Peter Stockland, the publisher of *Convivium* magazine, talks here about the new initiative from Cardus.

C.S. Morrissey: In Latin, “convivium” means “banquet.” The Greek equivalent would be “symposium,” as in the title of the philosopher Plato’s famous masterpiece.

Peter Stockland: On our *Convivium* website, Father Raymond J. de Souza has written about “convivium.” He points out, as I’m sure you already know, that it literally means “living together.”

“It implies a certain good cheer and hospitable spirit, as found at a festive banquet, a convivium,” he writes.

CSM: So what can we expect from your magazine, *Convivium*? When I submitted you my movie review of *Tree of Life* (which I think deserved the Best Picture Oscar), I was pleased to see that Father de Souza is the editor of *Convivium*.

PS: Father writes that our project “brings together citizens, Canadians of differing convictions and



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Peter Stockland (left), the publisher of *Convivium* magazine, explains to C.S. Morrissey how the publication, edited by Father Raymond J. de Souza, got its name.

religious confessions, to advance [convivial] conversation and to contend for the role of faith in our common life.”

Indeed, “religious faith is critical to our Canadian common life”; but “that is a contested position today.”

CSM: What does he mean? That the odds are against a movie like *Tree of Life*, for example, because people think it is “too religious,” and therefore of

marginal interest?

PS: In Father’s words: “formidable forces seek to drive religion to the margins of public life. That’s not good for religion, but neither is it good for our common life.”

Therefore we need “to defend the role of religion in public life,” because “a faithful citizen is not a contradiction in terms.” As you know, we need “to encourage university students

to challenge the secularist myths they are regularly taught.”

CSM: Lovely words from Father de Souza! But why call the magazine *Convivium*?

PS: As always happens with a project like this, we spent months listing and debating potential titles.

I have worked at magazine companies where title choice is driven by the marketing department as much

as, or more than, by editorial considerations, and where there is a whole process of title testing on a mathematical basis.

We did not do that. We did it by conversation over pizza, and by just walking around thinking about it.

CSM: Before becoming director of the Cardus Centre for Cultural Renewal you were the vice-president of English-language magazines for *Readers’ Digest Magazines Canada*. You have also been an editor-in-chief of *The Gazette* newspaper in Montreal and an editorial page editor of the *Calgary Herald* newspaper.

So how does a Canadian journalist with a 30-year media career wind up naming a new magazine with a Latin word?

PS: Our first in-house nickname for it was “Frost Things,” a play on the idea of it being a winterized Canadian version of *First Things*. At one point we started calling it the “Cathlantic,” shorthand for the vision of the magazine as a kind of *Catholic Atlantic Monthly*.

CSM: That’s hilarious. Ivan Illich has a book called

Tools for Conviviality. Did that inspire you?

PS: Father de Souza came up with the name out of the blue. As soon as he said it, we knew it was right. It just “sounds” like a great magazine name when you say it out loud: that hard, jump-start “c” at the beginning, and then the warm and festive “uuuumm” to round it off.

But even before getting to the meaning, it truly conveys what we want the magazine to be: an unabashed invitation to join us in forming a community that celebrates a joyful, vigorous, perhaps at times even raucous, exchange of ideas, information, opinion, debate, and civil disagreement.

CSM: Is it true that subscribers to the magazine (www.cardus.ca/convivium) will receive special invitations to various *Convivium* events with speakers and stimulating conversation?

PS: Yes, the magazine is one part of the larger Convivium Project, which will involve lectures, student programs, perhaps debates. Father de Souza’s events in Vancouver, Calgary, and Edmonton at the beginning of March represent the type of events we have in mind right now.

Read the complete interview on *The B.C. Catholic* website.

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