

32963 – 3-25-09

By Revs. Casey and Robert Baggott  
Community Church of Vero Beach

### *The Wisdom of Geese*

Isn't it fascinating to watch the way animals sense and respond to their own inner clocks and calendars? We've seen monarch butterflies cluster and fly away together, driven and guided by some age-old internal wisdom. Squirrels busily stockpile provisions for leaner days. But perhaps the most fascinating responders to seasonal change are the migrating geese. How do they know how to form their beautiful, fluid, flying V's?

We recently read that geese must practice long and hard before their synchronized, long-distance flight is possible. The geese behind the leader, who takes the central pivot point, all honk their encouragement for his leadership in flight. They know first-hand the stress of the job, because the tiring flight leadership position is rotated among them.

When in transit, if a goose becomes ill or injured, at least one other goose remains on the ground with the injured one until it recovers or dies. Geese do not abandon their own.

Now it seems that a number of important lessons are available for us in contemplating the migrating habits of geese. First, our lives in community, like those of the geese, require practice to be well-coordinated. We can't expect to move ahead without a willingness to work together long and hard. We'll need to make some practice runs at our biggest projects before we can expect them to get off the ground. But with concerted, joint effort, surprising progress is possible.

Secondly, leadership is tough. To step out in front of any formation is often to take the most strenuous and exhausting role. So leadership in human community, as among the geese, probably ought to be rotated, or at least shared. We all need to take an active, interested role. When we're following, we ought to speak out our encouragement for the one in the lead. Knowing the difficulty of the leadership role, and that we all need to depend on one another for our ultimate success, we need to be constructive in our comments and critiques of the leader.

When we lead, we know we'll be more effective if we can count on the support and well-wishes of those we lead. When leadership has exhausted us, it's perfectly permissible to ask another to step into the leadership role for awhile.

Finally, when one is unable to keep up with the rest, some must pause to offer help. This is not to be done out of a sense of dreary self-sacrifice, or because of a grudging sense of inescapable duty. Rather, we are to offer help to the injured, or aching, or weary, simply because life can be hard. When some among us need assistance, shouldn't they be able to count on their companions to understand and to help? If we've built a community that prizes individual members, group effort, the strivings of both those who lead and those who follow, and the contributions of each to the whole, then caring, supportive companionship becomes not so extraordinary, but simply our natural way of living life together.

If we work at it, we believe we can see ourselves as members of one, amazing, complex, interdependent community that moves forward and works in harmony – a human V. After all, can we be satisfied with a shared existence any less cooperative and respectful than the geese?