



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

Ann Arbor, Michigan

November 28, 2007

Pastors' Reflections

by Paul Simpson Duke

Some of you may get a little tired of your pastors talking about their boys. I was taught not to do it, because (a) no one finds your child nearly as fascinating as you do; and (b) a preacher's kid used as sermon fodder tends to become a preacher's kid in the worst sense of the term. But sometimes, honestly, I can't help myself, and here is why: a pastor should be able to speak knowledgeably and compellingly about "the human condition" -- and little kids are walking, talking human-condition hand-books. Life with a young child - or better, two of them the same age - is like living in an anthropology lab. The little dudes are unending demonstrations of fundamental human nature. They are cartoon caricatures of the rest of us. So here I go again.

The Christmas catalogs for children's toys began arriving weeks ago. Corporate computers clearly know we're harboring a couple of three-year-olds, so the cheery propaganda pours in. Rob doesn't seem to care much, but Charlie is enthralled; he was an instant fanatic. It's not just that he flips through them constantly. It's not just that he no longer wants to hear stories at bedtime but wants us to tuck him in by reading catalogs to him. It's the conversations he has with himself as he turns the pages. He points to almost every item and, and after each one says, "I like to play with that!" It's like a litany in a worship service: (1) index finger on the next picture; (2) pause for wide-eyed examination; (3) exclaim, "I like to play with that!"; (4) repeat sequence endlessly. For the full effect, you have to hear the intonation. The word *like* zooms nearly an octave higher than the word *I*; and the word *that* is given two notes. So it's "I *like* to play with *tha-at!*" "I *like* to play with *tha-at!*" - world without end. And here's another thing: if this is a ritual, it is most definitely not a hypnotic, sing-songy ritual. Every single item he points to is like a life-changing discovery - and each repetition of his line is preceded by a sharp inhale of ecstatic astonishment.

I'm not at all inclined to call it greed. Greed cannot possess this innocence or purity of joy. I think it means that we are made for gleeful wanting. We are shaped for startled exhilaration over wonders we do not yet possess. We are blessed with imaginative desire - and the pleasures of happy desiring may sometimes exceed the pleasures of possessing. Like every good gift, this impulse in most of us becomes corrupted; in time it slouches toward greed. But in this little boy, I have seen it, I believe, in an un-fallen form. He isn't saying, "Give me this stuff!" or dropping hints that we should give it to him. We never even told him what such catalogs are for. We've never asked him what he wants for Christmas. He's just exulting in what is *there* that isn't his and in how good it would be to experience for himself.

More than one person has already asked me, "What do you want for Christmas?" I have no idea; and at my age, that seems about right. Still, what a shame if any of us has ceased altogether to know what we want. To envision our truest desire, to let the imagination savor how good it would be somehow to experience it - this is part of what it would mean to live an awakened life and to see, with the thrilled heart of a child, the good that might yet be.

We now enter Advent, the season of longing. It's a good time to let our deepest longings well up. With some of us, it will have less to do with ourselves than with what others around us may need, or with what is too lacking in the larger world. With others, like our Charlie, the truest longing will be purely and simply personal. The season tells us that whatever the shape of our deepest desire, the best answer will be the gift of Christ. We won't find this in catalogs. But certain carols will sing it to us. Certain faces may show it to us. Candle-light and silences may turn the pages for us. And there will be the Child; and if our hearts are wise, we will exclaim our gladdest wanting - and our most awed and grateful finding.

The Christian Education schedule for Children, Youth and Adults changes during the month of December due to special Advent and Christmas events.

Children and Youth Christian Education

Nursery childcare and Children's Worship remains the same during the month of December.

Nursery: 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m., room 307

All children are welcome to worship with their families. After the Time as Children portion of the worship service children in preschool - 3rd grade are invited to Children's Worship until 11:00 a.m. or the end of the adult worship.

December 2—regular church school schedule:

3 and 4 year olds

10:00 - 11:15 Childcare in nursery

11:15 - 12:30 Church School (room 306)

K - 2nd grade

10:00 - 10:30 Worship

10:30 - 11:00 Children's Worship (room 202A)

11:00 - 12:00 Church School (room 202B)

12:00 - 12:30 Grace Notes Choir (room 202A)

3rd - 6th grades and Youth (7th - High School)

10:00 - 11:00 Worship

11:00 - 11:50 Church School (3rd-6th: room 304; Youth: room 107)

11:50 - 12:30 Jr. Choir (room 102)

December 9:

NO second hour church school classes. Parents should pick up children from the Nursery or Children's Worship by 11:15. (There will be a special schedule for Jr. Handbells and Jr. Choir during Second Hour.)

Adult Christian Education (Sundays, 11:30 - 12:30)

These classes will meet for the last time this fall on December 2, then resume on January 6:

The Jesus Class (Memorial Lounge)

Ron Gregg & Sue Ellen Glover, leaders

In recent decades there have been new conversations, speculations, questions, and convictions -- among scholars and in churches -- about Jesus. There has been new dialogue about his identity and his mission, a re-visioning of traditional understandings of what we mean when we say "God is in Christ." This class is examining the issues and questions that are currently being raised. It is a safe place to think, ask questions, and exchange views about important theological and spiritual issues. We don't expect everyone to agree on one theological position, but we will thoughtfully engage each other on the issues.

Young Adult Bible Study (Campus Center Living Room)

Marlene & Arthur Francis, leaders

We are undertaking a study of the books of the Hebrew Bible known as "The Minor Prophets." The name speaks to the relative length of the books and not to their importance. In these often-overlooked writings are to be found some of the earliest articulations of the principles of justice and compassion which today are essential elements of the Christian Gospel. We will begin by considering how the moral and ethical decay which began soon after Solomon's kingdom was divided led not only to the prophetic calls for repentance, but also to the eventual conquest and exile of the peoples of both Israel and Judah. A brief manual, giving dates, some historical and biographical background and a summary of the basic message of each book will be available.

Other Adult Learning Opportunities

Wednesday Bible Study (Memorial Lounge, 1:30—2:30 p.m.)

Rev. Paul Simpson Duke leads an in-depth study of the Gospel of John, chapters 12-21. Join us each week for fellowship, learning and great snacks!

Small Groups (ChristCare) - Centered on Bible study, fellowship, mission, prayer and worship, we currently have two groups: one which meets monthly and the other which meets every other week. See Stacey, Paul or Sue Ellen for more information about joining a group.



FBCA2 News & Happenings

Children's Choirs Carol Sing

On Sunday, December 16, from 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m., all ages are invited to join in a carol sing, led by the Grace Notes and Jr. Choir in the Sanctuary. Each choir will perform special pieces and lead the group in singing of favorite carols.

2007 Christmas Celebration

Bazaar items for the Christmas Celebration, which will take place Sunday, December 9th, can be brought to the Information Counter Sunday mornings or to the church office during the week (9-5 Mon-Thurs, 9-1 Fridays). Please be sure to have your name and suggested price on the items. The baked goods can be brought to the Fellowship Hall or kitchen Saturday morning, December 8th, between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. or on Sunday morning (December 9th) before church. Again, please have your name and suggested price on the baked goods. Also, do not bring in any items which need refrigeration.

Advent Resources

The Board of Christian Education offers Advent resources for all ages, available now through the first Sunday of Advent, December 2. Included in these materials are fun activities, calendars and devotions for children and families in which to count down the days to Jesus' birthday. There are also daily devotionals for youth and adults. Find time during this sometimes stressful month to slow down as a family and as an individual - focus on the holiness of the Advent season and reflect on the true meanings of Christmas.

Calendar Sale

Once more, the children and youth church school classes are selling *God's Creation calendars* to raise funds for school scholarships for the children in Nandasmö. These heavyweight and beautifully photographed calendars include a scripture verse for inspiration. At \$7 they are great gifts! The children will sell them before and after worship, or you may call Sue Ellen and we will mail you a calendar (or two or three)!

Annabel Erskine & Elizabeth Lee's New Addresses:

Annabel's new address is: 1684 Coburn Dr., Ann Arbor 48108-9627. (same phone #)

Elizabeth's new address is: University Living, 2865 S. Main, Ann Arbor 48103 (different phone #, but we don't have it yet)

December MacGregor-Stitt Circle Meeting

The MacGregor-Stitt Circle will meet Thursday, December 13* at 1:00 p.m. at the home of Doris George. (* Please note special date). The program is "Sharing of Holiday Traditions and Christmas Songs with Maria Pierantozzi at the Piano."

Website Survey

The Board of Evangelism is undergoing a thorough review of our church website and has put together a survey that is intended for non-church members/non-attendees who have never visited our website before. The surveys may be picked up at the Information Counter. Please feel free to share them with your friends and neighbors and return them to church by Sunday, December 2.

Readers' Digest Article

The church office has received some calls about an article in the current issue of *Readers' Digest*. The article tells of a boy who was rescued after having been buried in a collapsed sand-hole at the beach. His last name is not given, but his first name is Rob. Some have asked if this is Rob Duke; others have remarked that it's quite a coincidence. So to clear things up: yes, it is our Rob. The story is told from the perspective of Erika Orlando, the young woman who found him. Thanks for asking.

Please join us for
A Special Christmas Eve Service
" A Festival of Lessons and Carols "
Monday, December 24 at 7:30 p.m.

Based upon the annual presentation at King's College, Cambridge.
Readings from the Christmas Story are alternated with choral and
congregational singing of carols.

* Childcare provided for infants & toddlers *

Have you discovered [GoodSearch.com](http://www.goodsearch.com) yet? It's a search engine that contributes about one penny to your favorite charity every time you use it. Not only that, it's powered by Yahoo and it automatically filters out objectionable adult material. Just click on the link below, select **Friendship House** (Hamtramck, MI) as your charity and save it as one of your favorites. You'll be helping those in need and it will cost you nothing. Such a deal! <http://www.goodsearch.com/>

This is a Thanksgiving prayer that the Children's Worship group wrote:

" We give thanks to God for:

*Family and friends who are fun to be with, fun to play with
Mom and Dad - help us learn, take care of us and lots of hugs and kisses!
Sports that keep us strong and healthy
Pets - furry, cuddly, playful and fun to watch!
Happy times like birthdays and Christmas, going to the zoo and going to see football and
baseball games
All the good and tasty food - yummy and delicious - I love food!
School and teachers and friends
My house which is warm and cozy
Music - soft and pretty, loud and fun
The world with wolves, trees, mountains, flowers, water, animals, sun, snow, rain,
clouds, grass - it's amazing, terrific and cool!*

Thank you God for helping us and the world. God is awesome!"

~ The Children's Worship group - Paul, Irina, Calvin, Vivian, Ahnon, Isaac and Max ~



Advent and Christmas: Anticipation and Celebration with Children



*By The Rev. Wilda K.W. Morris, Ph.D.,
managing editor of The Children's Corner.
(excerpts from an article taken from The Children's Corner,
a quarterly newsletter published by ABC-USA, National Ministries,
Children's and Intergenerational Ministries, November 2007)*

Even before Thanksgiving, shops display Christmas merchandise. Hollywood previews a new movie starring some offbeat Santa. Children's television hypes new toys. And children are asked, "What do you want for Christmas?"

I recently asked several children from Christian homes if they had read the Dr. Seuss book, "How the Grinch Stole Christmas," or if they'd seen the movie. I asked how they would feel if the Grinch stole all their Christmas decorations, gifts, and special food, and if they could still celebrate. A four year-old girl thought she would be too sad to celebrate, but added, "I'd like him to steal my brother's stuff!" An eight-year-old boy was adamant that there would be nothing to celebrate. He added that if the Grinch stole everything, Santa couldn't have any cookies and milk. Nine-year-old Tracey and six-year-old Jeff both told me that the most important thing about Christmas was that Jesus was born. Tracey said she would be "kinda disappointed" if the Grinch stole everything, but she could still celebrate. "I'd read the Bible like we do every Christmas." Jeff told me that the second most important thing about Christmas was "my getting presents and singing Christmas carols." Yet, he said he would still be happy and sing, even if his gifts were stolen. "We'd go to my grandparents'," he said, "and spend time with them." He added that the birth of Jesus and spending time with family are more important than presents.

How can we help more children develop the attitude exhibited by Tracey and Jeff? How can we help children look forward to celebrating the Incarnation, not the receipt of expensive gifts?

Here are some suggestions:

- Discuss Christmas from the beginning of Advent. Begin discussion of Christmas early, in order to impact the way children anticipate the holiday. It is important not to "lay a guilt trip" on children for wanting things for Christmas. We can help children analyze the appeal of media advertising. In addition to the biblical texts, the Dr. Seuss story mentioned above can jump-start conversations. Instead of asking children what they want, we can ask how they would feel if the Grinch stole their Christmas gifts, and why they think the Whos in Whoville (in the story) were still able to sing and celebrate. Adults should model approaching Christmas as a sacred time.
- Do we talk to one another about what we are buying and what we hope to receive? Or do we find opportunities to express our gratitude for God's great gift of love and our anticipation of celebrating the birth of our Savior? Involve children in ministry. Children can make gifts for shut-ins, nursing home residents, or children who are hospitalized, or help deliver Christmas gift baskets. They can sing at a nursing home or children's hospital.

REMEMBER with **LOVE**
GIVE with **GRATITUDE**

Retired Ministers and Missionaries Offering
Administered by The Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board

The RMMO is an annual ABCUSA offering that provides (1) Thank You checks to over 3,000 retired ABC ministers and missionaries and their widowed spouses, based on 15 or more years of ABC service, and (2) emergency and other financial assistance based on need.

~ RMMO will be received throughout the month of December. Please give generously. ~



The First Baptist Church of Ypsilanti is presenting a *Living Nativity* on their east lawn (1110 West Cross St., between Oakwood and Wallace) on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday, December 16-18. There will be three presentations each evening at 6:30, 7:00 and 7:30. The 6:30 performance is designed especially for children, with revised text and music performed by children. This pageant is their gift to the community and is therefore free of charge. Everyone is also invited to enjoy refreshments in their social hall throughout the evening. Please call Janis Riley at 485-4699 for further information.



*Interfaith Council
for Peace & Justice*

Dinner and a Movie

On Thursday, December 13 at 6:30 p.m. there will be a potluck meal followed by a 7:00 viewing of the movie "Encounter Point" at Memorial Christian Church, 730 Tappan in Ann Arbor. "'Encounter Point' traces the trajectory of eight Palestinians and Israelis who strive for reconciliation and coexistence in their societies. The documentary follows members of the Bereaved Families Forum as they strive to persuade others to stop the cycle of killing. The film offers unique glimpses into the hearts and minds of those who have turned reasons for hatred into a crusade for tolerance." For more information & to RSVP: info@icpj.net or 734-663-1870, www.icpj.net.



December 2007



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1
2 Communion 2:00 Alternative Fair	3	4 5:30 Vespers 7:00 Budget Meeting	5 1:30 Bible Study 5:30 The Gathering 7:30 Executive Council	6 6:15 Handbell Practice 7:30 Choir Practice	7	8 10:30 ABWM set-up for Christmas Celebration
9 11:30 ABWM Christmas Celebration Newsletter Deadline	10	11 5:30 Vespers	12 1:30 Bible Study	13 7:30 Choir Practice	14	15
16 11:30 Carol Sing with Children's Choirs	17	18 11:30 ABWM lunch at Ypsi FBC 5:30 Vespers	19	20 6:15 Handbell Practice 7:30 Choir Practice	21	22
23	24 7:30 Festival of Lessons & Carols	25 <i>Merry Christmas!</i> 5:30 Vespers	26	27	28	29
30	31 <i>New Year's Eve</i>					



Happy Birthday!



Bill Foster	1	Larry Dicks	9	Elizabeth Counsell	25
Craig Redinger	1	Ray Fullerton, Jr.	10	Bob Kidd	25
Becky Miller	2	John Reed	11	David Bowen	26
Gerald Hodge	3	Mervyn Juchartz	16	Marissa Alaniz	27
Maria Pierantozzi	5	Merilee Magnuson	16	Shelly Alton	28
Zoë McLaren	7	Omer Robbins, Jr.	18	Grace Crowe	29
David Heidt	8	Erica Diels	20	Bob MacGregor	29
Ron Tipton	8	Sam Kidd	21	Cameron Fortune	30
Kendall Rushton	8	Karen Perkett	22	Barbara Wilkins	30

First Baptist Church
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The Reverends Paul & Stacey Simpson Duke, Co-Pastors

Next Newsletter Deadline:
Sunday, December 9, 2007

Poinsettia Order Form

Please order _____ poinsettia(s) for the Christmas services at \$15 each,
and list as such in the bulletin:

In honor of: _____

In memory of: _____

From: _____

I have enclosed \$_____ as payment for the poinsettia(s).

Please have paid orders to the office by Sunday, December 16.

Thank you!