



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

Ann Arbor, Michigan

December 13, 2006

Pastors' Reflections

by Paul Simpson Duke

It is no secret that for a great many people the holidays are the hardest time of year. I am speaking of those who grieve - those who have lost loved ones, or who suffer strained or broken relationships, or who live with loneliness, or with a sense of failure, or of unfulfilled longing.

It is not difficult to understand why the holidays are so painful for so many. In the first place, these are the days when vivid memories flood us. We recall our families in former times, the traditions we shared, all that we experienced, bitter or beautiful. Wished for or not, our minds fill up with old family snapshots. In the second place, there is so much brightness and festivity in the air that those who cannot be festive may feel all the more alone. Music, laughter, excited children, happy gatherings - these are everywhere and, for many, may deepen a sense of isolation. And third, there is the more primal reality that at Christmas most of us, to a degree, become like children again. Long ago, we were wide-eyed children, wrapped in all these sights and sounds and smells and sweet anticipations. Now it all comes washing back onto our broken, not-so-innocent lives; we feel small again, exposed, and so very vulnerable to it all. So the carols now can be heartbreaking, for reasons we can't even fully explain. We may fall into lonely silence. Tears may overtake us.

Of course many of us will not experience Christmas that way. Some will sing "Joy to the World" with full-throated gladness, as they should. Christmas is certainly a fitting time for them. But what I want to suggest is that Christmas may well be an even more fitting time for those who find themselves unable to join in.

Ultimately, I believe that Christmas is news for our loneliness, and so for our grief in all its forms. Why else do the Scriptures refer to this Child as Emmanuel, "God with us?"

Isn't this the central human problem - that we are, or feel, alone? No one, not even those who love us best, can fully comprehend us or touch our deepest selves. No one can satisfy every dimension of our longing to be known - a longing that we ourselves cannot fully express. Our sense of isolation is complicated by all that is wrong with us - our guilt, our failures and fears. And there is the devastation that comes from other people who fail us or hurt us or leave us, or die. Other calamities play a part: illness, accidents, wars, random cruelties, the disappointing systems in which we live. All of this spells isolation and grief. It is largely the human condition. But there are many who, for now at least, must feel their grief acutely. Their losses are painfully near. They pointedly know what we all will know.

The news of the season is Emmanuel, *God is with us*. Perhaps people whom we've loved cannot be with us. Maybe life as we wish it were cannot be with us. But with the tenderest mercy, God has entered our lonely world - for all of us and each of us - to be *with us* fully. The Child entered the world as all of us did, traumatized and crying. He spent his life joining outsiders, sufferers, and mourners, to be healingly present to their pain. In the end, the loneliness he himself carried was unbearable, but giving it to God he was made fiercely alive again, to be always Emmanuel, always with those who are in most need of the healing Presence.

I suspect that what I've written here will have no effect on the feelings of you who struggle through the holidays. Feelings are often the last to change. Still, the truth is worth tenderly telling. In the birth of this Child and forever after, *God is with us*. O tidings of *comfort* and joy!

Christian Education for Children and Youth

(Nursery: 9:30 -11:30 a.m., room 307)

All children are welcome to worship with their families. After the Time as Children portion of the service, preschool - 3rd grade are invited to Children's Worship in room 202A until 11:00 a.m.

December 17:

No church school classes. Children and youth participating in the Children's Music and Arts programs (choirs or handbells) will meet in the choir rooms after worship to warm up for their part in the Christmas Celebration. Parents of children not participating in the music program should pick up their children from the Children's Worship room immediately following worship.

December 24 and 31:

Children's Worship will meet after Time as Children until the end of worship. No second hour classes.

Children's Music & Arts Ministry will resume on January 7. Programs offered include Jr. Handbells (9:15 - 9:45), Tiny Grace Notes (preschool; 11:00 - 11:15), Grace Notes (K - 3rd grade, 12:00 - 12:30), Jr. Choir (4th grade and older, 11:50 - 12:30). All groups meet on Sunday mornings.

Christian Education for Adults

~ There will be no adult classes December 17, 24 or 31 ~

Sunday, January 7: Pastor Stacey will report about her three years with the Women Touched by Grace program and share her experiences from her recent retreat in Italy.

The following two adult classes will resume Sunday, January 14:

Addressing Contemporary Issues in the Study of Women in the Bible (Lounge) led by Astrid Beck
Women are some of the most distinctive, unforgettable, and diverse characters in the Bible. Women, led by their faith in God, used their wits to defeat their circumstances. They were spunky, smart, and assertive. It is important for our understanding of the Bible, and for our faith, to study the women who speak so eloquently, to note their implications for the masculine and feminine paradigms, to hear their voices. They comprise the foundation of the early society in the Bible, the time of Abraham, Moses, and the prophets, a reference point for Jesus in His ministry in the New Testament as the foundation of faith.

Share and Prayer Group (room 108)

facilitated by Stacey Simpson Duke

A time for sharing, singing, silence, centering, and group prayer. Together we will engage in a ministry of prayer for our church, for other members, for specific concerns, and for local and world events, as well as having time to become more connected to one another and more personally grounded and rooted in God. This is not a class about prayer, but a time for actually engaging in prayer together (no one will be obligated to pray aloud, but anyone who wants to will be welcome to).

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Second Sunday Series: Living the Questions

January 14, 5:30 - 7:30

Following a simple potluck and time of fellowship, we gather in the Memorial Lounge for a time of engagement with some of the most challenging issues of the Christian faith. After viewing a 30-minute DVD of clips of leading theologians, biblical scholars, sociologists, and church leaders, we will have time for in-depth discussions of the issues they raise. Topics will include such things as biblical authority, the divinity of Christ, and the relevance of Christianity in a contemporary world. Childcare will be provided. Plan to join us January 14 for dinner, dialogue, and discovery!



FBC NEWS & EVENTS

Christmas Stories for Children

The Family Resource Center and the Board of Christian Education have a wonderful collection of Christmas story books and videos available now through the end of the month. These resources may be found near the children's classrooms on the middle level and borrowed - great for bedtime stories during Advent and the Christmas season!

Christmas Eve Service Childcare

Childcare will be provided for children in kindergarten and younger during the Christmas Eve service. If you have children who will use this childcare or if you have invited guests with small children, please let Sue Ellen know ahead of time so that an appropriate number of care-givers will be present.

Rob Snyder's New Address & Phone #:

3067 Wood Manor , Ann Arbor , MI 48108; 734.369.2679

Operation Christmas Child – Thank You!

The Gathering would like to thank the congregation for its very generous support of our Christmas mission project, Operation Christmas Child. On November 20th, we delivered 32 Christmas gifts from our congregation, to be distributed to needy children for Christmas. Thank you for your generosity!

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 Nandasmoo. 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)!

CROP Walk Success

The Mission Action Board would like to thank everyone who helped to make the 2006 CROP Walk a success. Trish Baldwin, Mary Davis, Scott Diels, Beverly Inbody, Helen Johnson, David Moehring and Sid Zell were involved in the walking and the collecting of contributions. Of course, this could not have happened if the members of First Baptist had not been so generous. A total of \$1,055 was collected. Thank you!

To the congregation of the First Baptist Church:

My thanks go out to all of you for your kindness, consideration, and concern during the years of my husband's illness and especially in the days following his death. Your cards and prayers, your gifts of food, and your offers of help have eased the sorrows and difficulties of this time.

*Sincerely,
Esther Floyd*

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

"Dear American Baptist Congregations . . .

Thank you so much for the RMMO Thank You check. It was more than welcome because we've had more expenses this year than usual. In August, for example, Karin wrote a check for \$3,560 to cover a three-month supply of medicine. We fear it will continue that way through the year. We are more than grateful to American Baptists."

Reidar & Karin Bjornard
Decatur, Georgia

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



Report from the Budget Committee

The 2007 Budget committee has now completed its assignment, and will be forwarding to the Executive Council for its approval a record budget which makes provision for every aspect of our church's ministry. The total of \$381,288, the highest ever for our congregation, does not include endowment income that covers some expenses, or amounts raised each year by special offerings for specific purposes. Combined with the general church budget, these offerings and endeavors would mean that our total investment in ministry, to the congregation, to the community and to the world, would be over \$400,000.

The new budget provides for some necessary and some discretionary increases in our operating expenses. Although it was not possible to recognize the services of our professional staff to the extent we would have liked, their compensation has been increased to keep pace with the advancing cost of living. More money is being provided to meet the continually rising cost of building maintenance and additional provision has been made for our outreach programs.

The Budget Committee's task was assisted once again by a highly successful financial campaign. Each year that I have been privileged to participate in the budget process I have been impressed by the way this congregation has risen to the challenge of ever-increasing operating costs. This year was no exception. Although we had suffered significant membership losses by death, removal or other causes the response to the Campaign reached and exceeded the stated goal. Two thirds of renewed pledges reflected increases and, most encouraging of all, the response included eleven first-time commitments.

Although, like many traditional mainline churches, First Baptist Church faces the challenge of a graying and declining membership, the results of this year's campaign provide hope for the years ahead. If the contribution of resources provided by members, new and not-so-new, young and not-so-young, are combined with an equally generous contribution of time, energy and intellect much will be accomplished for the sake of the Gospel.

For the Budget Committee,

Arthur B. Francis
Chair

Please join us for
A Special Christmas Eve Service
" A Festival of Lessons and Carols "

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 *



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 Wednesday, December 20. Thank you!



Hello Church Family!

I wanted to let all of you know that thanks to some prayers I have been offered a position as intern leading to a full time position with Hantz Financial Group here in Ann Arbor. I will be a financial consultant after finishing my internship, hopefully in May. Thank you all for your support and love while I have grown up. This is huge for me and I couldn't have done it without the help from everyone over the years. I will be back to Ann Arbor for good in the middle of December, as I am finishing at Alma this semester. However, it doesn't feel like I've been to school long enough to be done already. Again, thank you for raising me to be a young lady that you can be proud of.

Always,
Missy Snyder



Men's Book Group: Sunday, January 7

The Men's Book Group has met every two months since spring. Each discussion has focused on a book chosen by the host, and the participants can attest that the discussions have been lively and rewarding. Perhaps we should mention there have been hors d'oeuvres and wine.

Henry Griffin will host the next meeting; he has selected *American Speeches; Political Oratory from Abraham Lincoln to Bill Clinton*. The book is quite new (edited by Ted Widmer and published in October of 2006 by The Library of America) and may not be in libraries yet, but it is available from Borders (\$35 list), Amazon (\$20-24, used or new), and perhaps other places. The companion book (*American Speeches; Political Oratory from the Revolution to the Civil War*) is also available. Since each is over 800 pages, we will focus our discussion on the second volume, which "collects the unabridged texts of 83 eloquent and dramatic speeches delivered by 45 American public figures between 1865 and 1997." More information is available on the internet (npr.org, *All Things Considered*, Oct. 30, 2006, by Robert Siegel).

New participants are welcome; just let us know so we can plan accordingly. You can join the discussion even if you have not looked at the book. But if you have read some of the speeches and have a favorite, please let Henry know so he can pass the word to other participants. The Griffin home is located at 1410 Harbrooke (off North Revena, 2 blocks north of the Huron-Dexter-Jackson intersection; phone 994-3499; email hcg@umich.edu). We will meet at 7 p.m. and to let you get away by 9. Do come!

AB Women's Ministries 2006-07 Mission Project

In April, 2007 the American Baptist Women's Ministries of Michigan will be sending a leadership team to Nagaland (Northeast India) to lead a conference addressing the "felt needs" of women in Nagaland. Our project this year is "A Handful of Rice." We are asking that each of you select one item that you buy regularly at the store, and put that amount of money aside each week - like the ladies in Nagaland put a handful of rice aside. When their jar was full they sold the rice. The ladies there raised enough money for a building. We'd like to raise enough money to help the Naga women have a women's conference to help them learn about being leaders and better wives and mothers.

In addition to money, we are asking for Playtex household gloves that our Naga team will take with them and give to the 1,000 women attending. We would like a special prayer to accompany each pair of gloves asking for spiritual growth and for ways that God will use them as a result of their presence at the conference. Please sign your name and write "First Baptist Church of Ann Arbor" and tape it to the gloves.

There will be a basket at the Information Counter Sunday mornings throughout December, where we will gladly accept your donations. Your donations will also be accepted on December 17th, the day of our Christmas Celebration.

If you have any questions about this project, feel free to ask any of the members of the AB Women's Ministries.

In Christ,
Robert Hause
Mission Chairperson



January 2007



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1 Happy New Year! (Office Closed)	2 5:30 Vespers	3 1:30 Bible Study 7:30 Davis-Diels ChristCare	4 6:30 Handbell Practice 7:30 Choir Practice	5	6
7 Communion Newsletter Deadline	8	9 7:00 Board of Worship 7:00 Bd. of Evangelism	10 1:30 Bible Study 5:30 The Gathering 7:30 Executive Council	11 6:30 Handbell Practice 7:30 Choir Practice	12	13
14 5:30 Second Sunday Series	15	16 1:00 Beecher-Brewer Circle 5:30 Vespers 7:00 Board of Trustees	17 1:30 Bible Study 5:30 The Gathering 5:30 Board of Christian Ed.	18 1:00 MacGregor-Stitt Circle at E. Kelly's 6:30 Handbell Practice 7:30 Choir Practice	19	20
21 12:30 Teacher's Lunch Newsletter Deadline	22	23 9:30 ABWM Bd.	24 1:30 Bible Study 5:30 The Gathering 7:30 Davis-Diels ChristCare	25 6:30 Handbell Practice 7:30 Choir Practice	26	27
28 12:30 Annual Financial Meeting	29	30	31 1:30 Bible Study 5:30 The Gathering			



Happy Birthday!!

Adina MacGregor	2	Mary Munson	14	Annabel Erskine	20
Christina Alaniz	4	Nick Dodson	17	Robert Rushton	23
Katy Beene	6	Jose Barrantes	18	Nathan Kirchner	25
Owen Stearns	9	Tom Fleming	19	Helen Johnson	29
Bill Ames	10	Peggy MacGregor	19	Radka MacGregor	29
Lindsay Ambridge	10	Lloyd Crabtree	20	Zella Willis	30
Patty Simmons	12	Aaron Diels	20	Dante Pierantozzi	30

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

Next Deadline:

Sunday, January 7, 2006



Christmas Celebration, Bazaar, and Bake Sale

This Sunday, December 17th following the worship service, the AB Women's Ministries will hold their annual Christmas Celebration, Bazaar and Bake Sale in the Fellowship Hall. The children will enhance the celebration by adding their talented voices and ringing of the handbells, which should certainly put you in the spirit to shop at the bazaar and baked goods tables. Please contact Helen Johnson (662-1461) or Beverly Inbody (904-5750) if you have any questions. The Beecher-Brewer and MacGregor-Stitt Circles appreciate your support in helping to make the Christmas Celebration a success!