



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

Ann Arbor, Michigan

March 8, 2006

Pastors' Reflections

by Paul Simpson Duke

"Here comes the cane brigade!" sang out Zella Willis. She was referring to herself and two other women moving through the line to shake the preaching pastor's hand after last Sunday's service. Mildred MacGregor was first with her walker, then came Zella with her neck brace and walker, then Elizabeth Lee with her broken ribs and a cane. After our usual affectionate greetings, "the cane brigade" moved on. But this odd designation got me to thinking about who else came through that line, and about others who had been in worship.

There was Helen Foley, whose apartment building burned last week and one of whose neighbors died just outside her door. There was a woman in such agonizing back pain that she can hardly sit through the service. There was Bill McKeachie, his arm in a sling, back from shoulder-replacement surgery only nine days ago. There were people with family members battling dreadful illnesses. There were others who are grieving or depressed. There were some whose financial circumstances are dire, some who are in great family stress or other relational anguish. Some are struggling with the pressure and exhaustion of overburdened schedules; others are struggling with physical decline or debilitating loneliness.

To be a fairly active member of this church and to read the above paragraphs is to have certain faces appear in your mind. We are people who seek to know and care for each other, and who generally seek to be known and cared for. Even so, a pastor comes to know pockets of pain in a congregation - and some deeper layers of it - that few others can be aware of. This is a sobering part of a pastor's calling.

There are Sundays when, sitting on the chancel and looking out on the faces of those present, I am overwhelmed by what has been suffered - and is being suffered - by members of this congregation. My older brother David, who taught theology and ethics but who also preached on occasion, told me that before he preached he would sometimes look at the congregation and imagine the arms of God stretched around them in compassion. I have done the same for you.

The whole church, it seems, is in the cane brigade. This doesn't distinguish us; it comes with membership in the human race. Sooner or later, one way or another, we all end up limping and leaning. What moves me about us as people of faith is how we come limping into each other's company and together into the presence of God. We move past the bearing of our individual hurts into the praying of our joined hurts. In so doing, we lift the hurts of the world, along with our own, into the compassion of God. From this experience we limp away, knowing how deep is our connection with all the wounded of the world, and knowing how privileged we are to live as daily instruments of compassion.

To call ourselves "the cane brigade" is by no means to say all there is to say about us. We would also want to think of a church as, let's say, a school of love or an expedition of spiritual discovery or a chorus of witnesses or a troupe of praise dancers. Our hurts are not the main thing. But they are there, evident in every man, woman, youth, and child among us. They tell us much about who we are and about what brings us together and about the larger, desperately hurting world that could use a more faithful church. Sometimes the starting point of that fidelity is to look again at ourselves, to be stunned by the pain we have known - alone and together - and by the magnitude of love we were given for it, and then go limping out again to make our astonished difference in the world.

FBC News & Happenings



March FUN Night!

Save the date! The March Fun Night will be held on Friday, March 31 from 6 - 8 p.m. and will feature "A World of Games."

Contemplative Knitting: A Prayer of Heart and Hands

Saturday, March 18th, 10:00a.m. - 12:00 noon, in the Memorial Lounge; childcare provided. The first part of our time together will be more social, then we will move into quiet, reflective, guided meditation and prayer experiences while we work with our hands. Please bring yarn, needles, and a simple project to work on (our focus is not the product but the process). Please RSVP to Stacey at stacey@fbca2.org by March 17th.

Vespers

Our March 21st Vespers devotional will be given by Ron Gregg.

Clothing items continue to be appreciated by the guests. The most requested item is pants or blue jeans. Small toiletry items such as toothpaste and toothbrushes, travel shampoos, etc., are also always useful. The guests come for personal support as well as for food, so we appeal to anyone who is willing to come just to share the mealtime with us, sitting and talking with the guests to ease some of the burden of loneliness. Our meal begins at 5:30, but guests often arrive at 5:00. Please continue to pray for the guests and for the ministry.

Spring Rummage Sale

The AB Women's Ministries Spring Rummage Sale will be held on Friday, April 28 and Saturday, April 29, with the set up on Thursday, April 27. As you do your "spring cleaning" please save your gently used items that you no longer plan to use, and donate them to our sale. We ask that you wait until March 28 to start bringing in items, as the stage will be in use for the Rotating Shelter the previous week. A reminder that we cannot accept large furniture, but do appreciate any baby furniture.

Thank you,
Annabel Erskine, Coordinator

"Jesus' Parables"

Bound copies of *Jesus' Parables* compiled by Mr. Scott are still available at the Information Counter. One per family, please.

MacGregor-Stitt Circle

The next meeting of the MacGregor-Stitt Circle meets Thursday, March 16 at 1:00 p.m. at the home of Doris Fraker. The program will feature music and hints of Irish humor from Betty Gerstler.

Greeters Needed

Friendly folks are needed to welcome others to worship Sunday mornings. This is one of the easiest and *most fun* ways to help out at FBC. Please sign up at the Information Counter if you're interested.

THE LENTEN JOURNEY



Lent is a time of reflection and discipline; a time set aside to prepare our hearts and minds for the good news of the resurrection; to journey with Jesus toward Good Friday and Easter. Traditionally, many Christians have marked the period by fasting or other types of penance or sacrifice, as a way to identify with Jesus in his suffering and to make atonement for their sins. Others focus less on giving up and more on giving to those in need (Isaiah 58:5-7) - giving of one's self through time and effort and giving of one's finances. But Lent is not only a time of giving up - we are also encouraged to *add* to our spiritual life, by taking up a new spiritual discipline, or adding more depth to current disciplines. *You are encouraged to use these 40 days to see yourself and your relationship with God in new and growing ways.* The Board of Christian Education offers several resources to help you on this journey. Booklets, calendars and other materials are available on the table near the Information Counter with choices for families, children, youth and adults.

You might also want to try an online devotional website:

1. www.abc-usa.org/devotionals.htm: The website of the American Baptist Churches-USA offers daily devotionals focusing on discipleship, written by American Baptists.
2. <http://www.d365.org/> is another website featuring the "d365" devotional series, which reflects on themes that impact our faith journey while creating a quiet space for contemplation and prayer.

Or perhaps read, contemplate, and study the lectionary texts:

March 12: Genesis 17:1-7,15-16 · Psalm 22:23-31 · Romans 4:13-25 · Mark 8:31-38

March 19: Exodus 20:1-17 · Psalm 19 · 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 · John 2:13-22

Especially For Families

1. Discuss the March 12th readings:
 - Share about a time when you received bad news from someone. How did you react?
 - Peter was upset when Jesus spoke about his death and resurrection. Why do you think he reacted the way he did?
 - Jesus said that if we want to be his followers, we need to forget about ourselves and take up our crosses and follow him. What do you think this means?
2. Cut strips of colored paper. Each evening during Lent, gather prayer requests from the family. Write or draw each suggestion on a paper strip. After you have prayed together, staple the strips into a paper chain, which will grow throughout Lent. Drape it somewhere in your home as a reminder to pray.
3. Gather six purple candles, one for each Sunday of Lent, and a white candle to represent Christ. Light one candle for this next week, two candles for the week after, and so on. Begin Holy Week (on Palm Sunday) with all of the candles lit, then extinguish one candle each night thereafter. Light the Christ candle as you celebrate Jesus' resurrection on Easter Sunday.
4. As a family, decide not to buy a special treat item that you would normally buy each week, or to set aside the money you might have spent on eating out. At the end of Lent, use what you have saved to donate to a charity within our community or the Sister Church, or buy food items to donate to the Second Baptist food pantry.



CAMPS & CONFERENCES

Green Lake Conference Center (American Baptist Assembly) offers a wide-variety of conferences as well as wonderful opportunities for rest and recreation. Green Lake's schedule includes: The Family Life Celebration Week, Holy Spirit Renewal Conference, the Conference for Church Musicians, The National Women's Conference and the World Mission Conference. Magazines explaining these conferences and others, as well as the beautiful facilities are available at the Information Counter. Very generous scholarships are available through the Robert Johnson Memorial.

On the Christian Education bulletin board (near the information Counter) and on the CE desk near the coat racks, you can also find the schedules and descriptions of the camps at our Michigan ABC facilities at Lael and Lake Louise. There are camps for ALL ages, including very popular family camps and a camp for senior adults. Scholarships are also available for these camps.

Please contact Sue Ellen at sueellen@fbca2.org or by calling 663-9376 if you are interested.

A good time was had by all at the February FUN Night!!



An update on Sara Parker Floyd

Upon Sara's recent release from Heartland to home, John shared the following:

The cards sent, visits made, prayers offered, food prepared(!), errands run, and the love these all represent - not to mention their practical aid - have been gratefully received. We now have help at home, and for the time being need less food aid & errands run than previously. In particular, my lack of communication has both been a sign of my emotional-swampedness, and of how accustomed I am to Sara performing traditionally "girly" social tasks that I have not yet adequately taken on myself. The Church's support for all of my family has been invaluable, and a great source of comfort. My silence is merely a sign of my inadequacy, and does not reflect the importance to me and to us of your love and support.

In the hospital, Sara had an operation (successful!) to shore up her leg in order to bear weight and receive radiation. She has since started a new chemotherapy. Her situation is serious, but right today things are OK, and we have hope. She loves being in her own home with her kids, cats and her own bed(!), and is in good spirits. We are taking life a day at a time (a novel idea...). Visits are welcome, however please call first (663-8090.)

***What does the LORD require of you but to do justice,
and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?***

Our **LENTEN PERSPECTIVES** series will begin March 9. We will reflect on issues of justice and peace as viewed through our Christian perspective as we continue our on-going journey with God. There will be three weeks with speakers alternating with weeks of Evensong, a meditative prayer service.

Join us each Thursday evening through April 6 for a delicious meal served between 5:45 - 6:20, followed by the program from 6:30 - 7:30 p.m. Reservations are requested and a sign-up sheet will be at the Information Counter each Sunday. You may also call the church office by Wednesday morning. There is a small fee for the meal (\$6) with no charge for children's meals. Childcare is provided free of charge during the speaker portion.

March 9: Jason Crosby will present **A Just Minimum Wage: A Matter of Faith**. As Michigan voters prepare to vote on a proposal to raise the minimum wage for our state's lowest-paid workers, we will explore the moral, religious, and policy implications of this proposal.

March 16: Evensong Prayer Service

March 23: **A Hope for Peace**; a presentation concerning peace in the Middle East.

March 30: Evensong Prayer Service

April 6: **Hunger in a World of Plenty**; A discussion concerning the disparity of the food economy, with information on how to take action in response to the poverty of food distribution in our world.

ROTATING SHELTER

FBC will host this year's Rotating Shelter beginning the evening of Monday, March 20 and running through the evening of Sunday, March 26. The shelter program provides sleeping arrangements for homeless men. FBC has participated in this program since its' inception many years ago and we consider it to be an important part of our mission outreach.

At least two volunteers, preferably three, are needed each evening to spend the night as hosts. If you are able and willing to help out this year, a sign-up sheet is available at the Information Counter, and in the office during the week.

Thank you,
Board of Mission Action

David Robbins recently shared the following note from Gracie Kiver:



NANDASMO CAMPAIGN REPORT

We have had a successful campaign to raise financial resources to support egg production on the farm, and to support the Baptist school in Nandasma. Our goal was \$20,000 for the whole campaign. As of January 1, we had identified sources for \$12,000, including amounts from the 2006 budget, the Roger Williams Fund income and commitments from members of the Nandasma Task Group. So we announced a two month campaign to raise \$8,000. The two months have now passed and we have raised \$11,270. Congratulations!

What is more impressive is that twenty-five individuals and families, plus the children and youth, have all been a part of this. Two significant gifts came from people no longer active in the congregation but whose lives have been touched by our sister church relationship and who wanted to participate.

Recent news is encouraging. The school continues to do well with enthusiastic participation, and the egg production has been as anticipated. The farm is producing 1800 eggs a day which are sold in the surrounding area. The demand seems strong and the resulting cash flow has been strong.

So far, so good. The Nandasma Task Group is grateful for your continued faith in these projects, and in this Sister Church relationship.

"FOOD FOR BODY & SOUL: SACRED STORIES UNFOLDING"

Sunday, April 2

The Interfaith Round Table invites you to a delightful evening of Persian and Hindu food and an enjoyable program featuring students from our new youth theatre/arts initiative and Bharata Natyam Dance by children from the Chinmaya Mission. Location: Baha'i Center of Washtenaw County, 5550 Morgan Rd, Ypsilanti. Appetizers at 5 pm, dinner and program, 5:30 - 7:00 p.m. Tickets: \$15, \$25, \$50; children under 12 are \$8 (charitable contribution receipt with \$25 and \$50 tickets). Ticket deadline is March 27. For more information or to order tickets, please call 424-1535, email gbrides@umich.edu, or go to <http://www.irtwc.org/>.

HUNGER MEETING/WORKSHOP

Bread for the World, a non-partisan, Christian hunger legislation and education organization, will hold a meeting on Saturday, March 18th, from 10:00 a.m. - noon. A portion of the meeting will be a short workshop on holding a hunger-based "Offering of Letters." During an Offering of Letters, congregations are asked to write letters to legislators in support of specific hunger legislation. The meeting will take place at the Interfaith Council for Peace and Justice on the corner of Hill and Tappan in Ann Arbor. The meeting is free and open to the public. For more information call 487-9058 or visit www.breadmichigan/15.

ICPJ: 40 YEARS OF WORKING FOR PEACE & JUSTICE

Come celebrate ICPJ's past, present, and future with an evening of song, food, community and discussion this Sunday, March 12 at 4:30 p.m. at the First Presbyterian Church, 1432 Washtenaw.

First Baptist Church
512 East Huron Street
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
734-663-9376
www.fbca2.org

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The Reverends Paul & Stacey Simpson Duke, Co-Pastors

Dated material:

Wednesday, March 8, 2006

Next Deadline:

Sunday, March 19, 2006

FBCA2

Show your FBCA2 pride!

FBCA2

Just a reminder from the Evangelism board that FBCA2 apparel and other merchandise can be purchased online at <http://www.cafepress.com/fbca2>. There are T-shirts, golf shirts, sweatshirts, hats, mugs, tote bags, bumper stickers, magnets, even a Vespers apron. These items are great conversation starters! If you need help ordering or cannot get online, just talk to Sarah Heidt and she will be happy to help you.



Mousepad, \$11



Hat, \$14



Totebag, \$13