



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

Ann Arbor, Michigan

November 25, 2009

Pastor's Reflections

by Paul Simpson Duke

Many of our worship services lately have included what we've called "Words about our Stewardship." In most instances, representatives of various church boards have spoken to us about what their board is doing to help fulfill the church's mission. They have shared with us many of the very important outreach and inreach efforts, activities, and programs that we currently undertake. The message is that we all need to support the church's good work financially, and if at all possible, to increase our support. It makes good sense. We love this church, we have gained a great deal from it, we strongly believe in the mission it is seeking to fulfill locally, nationally, and internationally; its work, its life, and its future need generous funding from us all. Accordingly, pledge cards have been coming in. I am told that a fair number of them indicate increased support for the coming year, while others remain the same, and a few indicate reductions, presumable because of new financial constraints. I'm also told that we have some first-time pledgers. To all who are giving to sustain and strengthen the life and work of this church we are grateful.

Still, a different kind of word needs to be added, and to my way of thinking it is the most important kind of word to be said on this subject. Though the life and work of the church really do need our utmost support, the giving of our money is ultimately *not* about supporting the church. It is about who God is, and it is about who we are as God's children

It is only by God's love that we exist. To that love alone we belong. We are not our own, and nothing we "possess" is our own. All that we have that is worth having is born of God's love for all creation. And if these things are true, then the following is also true: the dumbest way to spend our years, the least honest way, and the sickest way, is to live without reverence, to live with closed hands, to be unexpressive of profound gratitude. An honest life will always be a generous life; and because the truth always invites us to more of itself, an honest life is inevitably a life that grows more generous in time.

Whether or not we feel generous is not the main thing. Whether or not we think we can afford to be generous is not the main thing. The main thing is to make an honest response, as palpably generous a response as we can make, to the *claim of God* on us, which is to say, the *love of God* for us. And God's love does make a claim. "Do as I have joyously done," it says. "Follow my creative lead," it says. "Answer my love with your love - it is the reason you exist. Withholding it, you fall into death; giving it, you flourish, thrive, and grow." That being so, to give gratefully and humbly of our material possessions is a matter of *obedience* - obedience to joyous divine command, obedience to Love. To such an extent is this true, that though we always of course have a choice, to the children of God strong giving does not function at all like a choice, but as love's bright, fierce necessity.

If you haven't yet decided on what you will offer materially to God through this church next year, I hope you will soon do so as an act of tremendous gratitude and faith. And maybe some of us who have already pledged should pause to re-think the significance of it all and find a way to offer more than we had planned on. Support the church? Sure. But most of all, the idea is to answer God's infinite self-giving love with our own love's glad and grateful obedience.

NURSERY CARE is available on the 3rd floor from 9:30am - 12:30pm.

All children are welcome to worship with their families. After the Time as Children portion of the worship service, preschoolers may go to the nursery for childcare and children in Kindergarten - 3rd grade are invited to Children's Worship.

Children and Youth Christian Education

Due to all the special events during the month of December, there will be no church school classes. Children's Worship will continue for Kindergarten - 3rd grade until worship is complete.

K - 2nd grade

10:30 - 11:10 Children's Worship
11:10 - 11:30 Children's Choirs (202A and 102)
11:30 - 12:30 Church School (Room 202B)

Youth (7th - High School)

10:00 - 11:00 Worship
11:00 - 12:30 Church School (Room 107)
(11:10 - 11:50 Jr. Choir)

3rd - 6th grades

10:00 - 11:00 Worship
11:10 - 11:50 Children's Choirs (202A & 102)
11:50 - 12:30 Church School (Room 201B)

Children's Music and Arts Ministry

Choirs and handbells will continue to rehearse on December 6, 13, and 20 but will not rehearse on December 27 and January 3.

Jr. Handbells..... 9:15 - 9:45 (Room 306)
Children's Choirs (all ages)..... 11:10 - 11:30 (Room 202A)
Older Choir will continue until 11:50 (Room 102)

Adult Christian Education 11:30 - 12:30

There will be no adult classes during the month of December. Classes resume on January 10.

November 29th

Sermon Discussion

(Lounge)

Bill Foster leads a discussion of this Sunday morning's scriptures and sermon.

Young Adult Class

Room 108

Led by Paul and Stacey Simpson Duke, this class consists of conversational Bible study and will devote its first months to discussing Paul's letter to the Philippians and its application to our living. "Young adult" is defined as mid-twenties to 40(ish!).

Other Adult Education Opportunities:

Wednesday Bible Study (1:30—2:30 pm; Memorial Lounge)

First Corinthians is the material for the Wednesday Bible Study class meeting this Fall with the leadership of Ron Tipton. Because Paul often discusses the same topic in different sections of the letter we are studying the letter by topics rather than a verse-by-verse study. The Bible Study will not meet on Wednesday, November 25 and will resume on December 2, when we'll discuss "wisdom and folly" which are included in Chapters 1 and 3.

Adult 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.

D E C E M B E R 2 0 0 9

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1 5:30 Vespers 7:00 Outreach	2 1:30 Bible Study 5:30 The Gathering 7:30 Executive Council	3	4	5 AHF Set-Up 4-6pm
6 - Communion Alternative Holiday Fair 11am - 3pm	7	8 5:30 Vespers	9 *newsletter* 1:30 Bible Study 5:30 The Gathering 7:30 Davis/Diels ChristCare	10	11	12 10:30 Christmas Celebration Set-Up
13 ABWM Christmas Celebration 11:30am	14 7pm Mission Action	15 5:30 Vespers 7:30 Bd. of Trustees	16 1:30 Bible Study	17 1:00 MacGregor-Stitt Circle	18	19
20 Children's Music & Arts Carol Sing 2nd Hour	21	22 5:30 Vespers	23	24 7:30 Festival of Lessons & Carols	25 Christmas Day Office & Church Buildings Closed.	26 Office & Church Buildings Closed
27	28	29 5:30 Vespers	30 *newsletter*	31	January 1, 2010 Office & Church Buildings Closed	January 2, 2010 Office & Church Buildings Closed



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The Reverends Paul & Stacey Simpson Duke, Co-Pastors



Next
newsletter
deadline:
*Sunday,
Dec 6, 2009*



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 13.

Thank you!