
PASTOR'S MESSAGE

Dear OPUCC Community,

When it was decided that I would go back to school in pursuit of a Doctorate in Ministry, I promised that I would do my level headed best to share with you what I am learning, as I am learning it. Some of the new knowledge seeps out in sermons, some in meetings, small groups or other venues, additionally there is a topic about which I am anxious to share and at present the newsletter seems like the most appropriate medium.

The following is an assignment from a class I took last week, which centered largely on applying various methods, systems, and structures to ministry. My job was to examine an essay from a book called, "Reconstructing Christian Theology," by Rebecca S. Chopp and Mark Lewis Taylor and then to teach it to my classmates. I choose a chapter entitled, "Human Beings, Embodiment, and our Home the Earth" by Sallie McFague. At first glance it may seem a little heady, but with any luck it will offer some insight into an important issue facing Christianity today, the issue of eco-justice.

Here is what I learned...

Identifying the Issues: Christianity, including Northern American theology does not take seriously the issue of embodiment. "Hierarchical dualism of the spirit over flesh, male over female, and human beings over the natural world has been a factor in the Western utilitarian and imperialistic attitude toward the earth. The attitude says: it is here for our use and subject to our control." (Pg.141) Christianity is not the only culprit of such destruction "but Christianity has not preached a gospel of embodiment, has not proposed an earthly anthropology, and has not taught us to think of the planet as our home." (Pg.142)

Why does it matter? Because the planet is dying and it needs our help, and because at the heart of our religion is the Incarnational message that proclaims God's desire for

wholeness in the whole of creation. Liberation insists that not only human beings be included in the spectrum of equality but also that ecology as a whole be taken into consideration. "Thus, justice and ecology issues join hands in a theology of embodiment." (Pg.142) The nexus of hope is the possibility of a realm in which people live in harmony with God, with each other and with the planet.

The theology at work: the Incarnation of God. "All bodies live and move and have their being in the body of God." McFague is interested in radicalizing the idea of Christian Incarnationalism by understanding that, "God is Emmanuel not only in Jesus of Nazareth but also in the flesh of our planet." (Pg.143)

Practical Analysis

Embodiment theology: "Is a theology that begins with the body, each and every body, which is the most basic primary notion of space: Each life form is a body that occupies and needs space." (Pg.143) Each body requires food, water, and air to survive.

Bias that resists change: "In Christian thought, space has often been connected with 'Pagan' fertility religions that are earthly and celebrate the rebirth of life after it's wintry death. The eternal return of the earth's physical cycle is contrasted with the historical movement toward the eschatological fulfillment of creation in the kingdom of God, a fulfillment beyond earthly joys." (Pg.143) In other words, Christian tradition has taught us to think of ourselves as being in the world, but not of the world. This traditional understanding sets up an irreconcilable dualism where care for the environment is concerned.

The truth of the matter: "We are the self conscious, responsible form of life on our planet and therefore have an awesome vocation to work for its well-being." (Pg.144)

Justice issue: "We need to turn from a historic (temporal) to a natural (spatial) perspective because space highlights the relationship between ecology and justice." (Pg.145) We are misusing space, McFague is clear that when

this occurs justice issues emerge as central as well as painful. "Without good land, none of the other goods of human existence are possible."(Pg.145)

What has to Change in order for liberation to occur?

We must reassess the theological anthropology of our time. Ask the question, "Who are we in the scheme of things as pictured by postmodern science? Who are we simply as creatures of the planet Earth, quiet apart from our religious tradition?"(Pg.147)

#1-Recognize that we share a common creation story. From this common beginning came everything that followed-we are all related, all interconnected. "We are distant cousins to the stars and near relations to the oceans, plants and other living creatures on our planet."(Pg.149)

#2-We are part of a changing, living, evolving story of life not one that is static or deterministic. God is a continuing Creator and we the Co-Creators, "as the self-conscious, reflexive part of creation that could participate in furthering the process."(Pg.150)

#3 No two things are the same: individuality is not just a human phenomenon-it is a cosmic one; we are all related through our common origin and history. Human beings are not separate from the rest of the created world we are interdependent and interrelated to all aspects of it.

#4 We must shift from thinking that there is an absolute distinction between the living and the nonliving, McFague points out that " life is a type of organization, not an entity or substance. The so called higher levels depend on the lower ones rather than visa-versa." (Pg.151) "The higher and more complex the level, the more vulnerable it is and the more dependant upon the levels that support it." (Pg.151)

The Bottom line: We must come to terms with the de-centering and re-centering of human life. We are not the center of the universe, but we do have a profound responsibility to restore balance to it. We do belong to the whole; the question McFague calls us to ask is "Can I, will I, live as if I did?" (Pg.157)

***The centerpiece of hope: Re-centering ourselves as "the stewards of life's continuity on earth." (Pg.168)**

"We now realize that our knowledge of the common creation story and where we fit into it means that we are responsible for taking evolution to its next step, in which we will consciously bond with other human beings and other life forms in ways that will create sustainable, wholesome existence for the rich variety of beings on our planet."(Pg.168) McFague concludes with the reminder that we are not the "creators or redeemers of creation, only stewards and partners of the creator and savior."(Pg.169)

I hope this gives you some thoughts to chew on. I am certainly still working my way through my thoughts on the matter and would be very open to being in further dialogue together. Let me know if you would like a copy of the full article.

May God continue to guide our feet as we move down the road seeking to be faithful, striving to be in right relationship, and learning to love as our brother Jesus taught us to love.

Rev. Curran Reichert

INTERPLAY Chicago 2007

Interplay is bountiful this year! Check out all of these fabulous events:

MOVING THE VOCAL BODY

with Curran Reichert & Jane Siarny
Sat. March 31, 1:00-4:00 pm (Chicago)

TALENT SHOW DAY

Sat. April 21, 1:00-4:00 pm (Forest Park)

NEW LEADERS CELEBRATION DAY

Sat. May 19, 1:00-4:00 p.m. (Forest Park)

CHICAGO SUMMER INTERPLAY RETREAT

July 26-28

More information, including reservations, cost and specific locations is available in the church office.

MISSION TEAM

Greetings from the Mission Team,

We wish to thank everyone who helped celebrate New Year's Eve by participating in the Jubilee Sunday Mission project. Under Ron's direction we prepared a truly delicious meal complete with party hats and New Year's Eve goodies which we then delivered to five Gateway homes. We were greeted with delighted smiles. Happy New Year indeed!

Following the Rogue's Dinner, the Mission Team will be hosting small groups to talk about Open Prairie in an effort to create an advertisement we can use on a local radio station. We'll be calling you to set up times when we can meet informally in the Open Prairie kitchen. All the best conversations take place in kitchens. Yes, there will be food. We promise not to record anybody with their mouth full.

Our next film presentation will be "The Future of Food", an award winning documentary concerning the effect multinational corporations have on the world's food system. The film also explores alternatives to large scale industrial agriculture placing organic and sustainable agriculture as viable solutions. We will also be offering the animated feature, "The Meatrix", a must see.

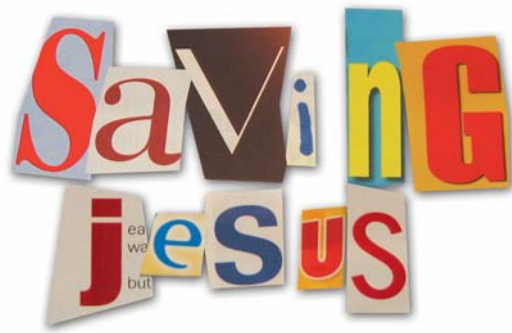
We will be purchasing a copy of the film, "An Inconvenient Truth" for the Open Prairie library. So, if you missed our screening, it will soon be available in the foyer to sign out.

The Food Pantry would like us to collect **soup and crackers** for the month of February and **tuna and noodles** for the month of March.. Thank you for all you help during the year in providing food for the pantry.

We you see Susan Hale, Barb Schiff, Cherie Martin, or Kelly give them a pat on the back. They're the Mission team folks who clean the bathrooms, the foyer, and the office every week before Sunday's worship. And then, while you're in the mood, give Wendy and Roger a big hug for cleaning everything else.

Peace to you all,
Kelly

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY



Ever feel like Jesus has been kidnapped by the Christian Right? Saving Jesus is a revolutionary DVD-based small group exploration of Jesus Christ for the third millennium. Rev. Reichert will lead our exploration of this contemporary program featuring leading religious voices of our day. The format for each 1–1½ hour session includes conversation around the readings, a 20-minute video segment and guided discussion.

Reading materials are available in advance in the church office.

CALENDER & WEEKLY TOPICS

Most weeks, there will be two opportunities to attend class -Sunday afternoon (bring a bag lunch) or Tuesday evening at 7:00 p.m.

5. Jesus' Birth: Incarnation

Sunday, February 25th

Tuesday, February 27th

6. Teachings of Jesus: Wisdom Tradition

Sunday, March 4th

Tuesday, March 6th

7. Jesus' Program: The Kingdom of God

Sunday, March 11th

Tuesday, March 13th

8. Jesus' Ministry of Compassion

Sunday, March 18th

Tuesday, March 20th

9. Killing Jesus, Part 1 Who Killed Jesus?

Sunday, March 25th

Tuesday, March 27th

10. Killing Jesus, Part 2 The Atonement

Sunday, April 1st

Tuesday, April 3^d

11. The Resurrection of Christ

Sunday, April 8th only

12. Why Jesus Is Worth Saving

Sunday, April 15th

Tuesday, April 17th

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

02/22	5:30 pm	Choir at Webber's
02/23		Confirmation Group to Pilgrim Park
02/24	7:30 pm	Coffeehouse
02/25	12:30pm	Saving Jesus, week 5
02/27	7:00 pm	Saving Jesus, week 5
02/28	8:00 am	Prayer Group at Autrey's
	7:30 pm	Church Council
03/01	5:30 pm	Choir at Webber's
03/02	9:30 am	World Day of Prayer
03/04	12:30	Saving Jesus, week 6
	6:30 pm	Mission Team
03/06	6:00 pm	Prairie Circle—Donna Chelin's
03/06	7:00 pm	Saving Jesus, week 6
03/07	8:00 am	Prayer Group at Autrey's
03/08	5:30 pm	Choir at Webber's
03/11	12:30 pm	Saving Jesus, week 7
		Semi-Annual Meeting
03/13	7:00 pm	Saving Jesus, week 7
03/14	8:00 am	Prayer Group at Autrey's
03/15	5:30 pm	Choir at Webber's
03/18	12:30 pm	Saving Jesus, week 8
03/19	6:30 pm	Christian Ed at Angie's
03/20	7:00 pm	Saving Jesus, week 8
03/21	8:00 am	Prayer Group at Autrey's
03/22	6:30 pm	Choir at Webber's
03/24	7:30 pm	Coffeehouse
03/25	12:30 pm	Saving Jesus, week 9
	4:00 pm	Concert
03/27	7:00 pm	Saving Jesus, week 9
03/28	8:00 am	Prayer Group at Autrey's
	7:00 pm	Church Council
03/29	6:30 pm	Choir at Webber's

STEWARDSHIP AND FINANCE

I look forward to chairing the Stewardship and Finance Committee this year. In addition to our financial support of Open Prairie, we have an opportunity to reach beyond our church doors and fulfill our mission through contributions to Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM). There are five areas of OCWM giving: One Great Hour of Sharing, Strengthen the Church, Neighbors in Need, The Christmas Fund, and the Basic Support Fund. Each area is designated to serve specific needs. As the time for the four special offerings approach, you will receive information regarding the specifics of each mission area. Your gifts to Basic Support can be made weekly, monthly, or quarterly. I hope we will continue to give generously. Last year, 2006, our total gifts to the four special offerings and basic support was \$6,527. Our generosity is important to national and worldwide mission. Thank you for sharing.

See you in church,
Patricia Wilson

CHRISTIAN ED

Sunday School Teachers for Feb. & March:
Feb. 25 – Wendy
Mar. 4 – Becky
Mar. 11 – Wendy
Mar. 18 – Dawn
Mar. 25 – Kathy

A NOTE OF THANKS

Many thanks to everyone who has contributed towards my Spring tuition costs at CTS. It was a very nice surprise when I was given the check. I put it to good use when it came time to buy books for spring term. Thanks again!
Wendy

HAPPY FEBRUARY & MARCH BIRTHDAYS

Feb. 2	Curran Reichert
Feb. 4	Gene Humke
Feb. 5	Becky Sapp
Feb. 12	June Harmon
Feb. 12	Maggie Beneke
Feb. 14	Karyn Stark
Feb. 20	Debby Jarvis
Feb. 21	Prudence Yagmin
Feb. 21	Barbara Madsen
Feb. 23	Susan Feigenbaum
Feb. 23	Susan Hale
Feb. 23	Michael Zearing
Feb. 24	Douglas Land
Feb. 29	Carol Kuhnert
Mar. 3	Kelly Autrey-Webber
Mar. 4	Angie Hughes
Mar. 10	Don Schiff
Mar. 13	Kathy Hornbaker
Mar. 16	Nick Forristall
Mar. 21	Jim Sears, Constance Deal
Mar. 22	Hazel Crain
Mar. 23	Abby Beneke
Mar. 26	Patricia Wilson
Mar. 28	Sharron Klingel

Note: if you have any additions or corrections, please let the church office know.

HEALTH TEAM MINISTRIES

It is with much excitement that I write this first article introducing the Health Ministries Team. The team consists of members from the congregation who are Health Care Professionals or who have expressed an interest in being on the team. The team members include Dawn Rudolph, Beth Forristall, Janis Land, Michelle Feigenbaum, Carol Kuhnert and myself.

The ministry of health brings another dimension of caring to our congregation. Health is viewed not as the absence of disease but rather a sense of physical, social, psychological and spiritual well being. The purpose of this ministry is to touch our congregation with information, knowledge and skills that will help raise awareness of the relationship between health and spiritual well being; and to help empower each of you to maintain your physical, mental and spiritual health.

We have already begun taking blood pressures the first Sunday of the month before

and after church. This has been very well received and quite successful. We will soon put up a sign up sheet for people to request a visit or a phone call from a member of the team. I look forward to working with Rev. Curran and the incredible, passionate members of this team. Watch the bulletin and newsletter for further information.

Mimi Cofoid

February Health Tip:

Warning Signs of a possible Heart Attack

Chest Discomfort

Pain or discomfort in one or both arms, back, neck, jaw or stomach

Shortness of Breath

Sweating

Dizziness or lightheadedness

Warning signs of a possible Stroke:

Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body

Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding

Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes

Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination

Sudden severe headache with no known cause

Should you or anyone you know experience any of these signs call 911 and get to the nearest emergency room.

Time is valuable.

MISSION TEAM

Good Coffee for a Good Cause

Open Prairie United Church of Christ is now serving Equal Exchange/Fairly Traded Coffee! We are proudly participating in the UCC Coffee Project, which brings UCC congregations nationwide together with small-scale farmers in the developing world. By offering our members a great cup of coffee - and spreading the word about fair trade - we are helping impoverished farmers build a better economic future for their families and communities. Already with the participation of over 500 UCC congregations, we are working together to build a more equitable relationship with our global neighbors.

Our coffee, tea and chocolate purchases are making a difference in the lives of small farmers in Latin America, Africa, and Asia by ensuring that the people who grow the delicious beans used to brew your cup of coffee:

- receive a fair price for their hard work and care in growing our coffee;
- benefit from being members of a democratic co-operative;
- have access to co-op services such as healthcare, education and training;
- emphasize agricultural practices that are healthy for the land and farmers;
- enjoy the stability of a long-term trading partner, Equal Exchange.

Small farmers are currently in the midst of an economic crisis caused by the historically low market price of coffee. As a result, farmers often receive less than the cost of production for their beans, forcing some to abandon their farms for cities in a desperate attempt to make a living. On the other hand, fair trade guarantees that small farmer cooperatives receive at least \$1.26 per pound for conventional coffee, and \$1.41 per pound for shade-grown, organic coffee. By purchasing fairly traded coffee for our fellowship hour, home and business use, we are ensuring that the farmer benefit in this time of crisis, and receive long-term support when prices rise again.

Additionally, for every pound of coffee, tea, cocoa, or chocolate purchased through the project, Equal Exchange makes a contribution to UCC Justice and Witness Ministries' Small Farmer Fund for relief, development and economic justice projects in coffee-producing communities.

For every package of coffee sold through Open Prairie, \$2.00 of the cost will go directly to our mission and outreach program!

For product information, pricing and order forms, see Susan Hale or call at 646-4118 or e-mail at susanhale@insightbb.com. Open Prairie will be sending in orders the first Sunday of every month. Packages of coffee will also be available for sale after church while supplies last. Thank you for partaking in a "cup of justice"!

A NOTE OF THANKS

A Big *THANK YOU* from the youth group! Your support of our Café Italiano luncheon after church on Jan. 21st was outstanding. We received \$500 in donations that we will use for our summer mission trip to the Appalachian South Folk Life Center in West Virginia. Thanks for your continued support!

SPRING 2007 WORK PROJECT TRIP

Hurricane Relief Mission Trip
New Orleans, Louisiana
APRIL 22-28, 2007

Sign-up now to be a part of this life-changing experience. 13 of the 20 slots are already filled and anyone age 16 and over is invited to participate. An organizational meeting will be held in early March.

A sign-up sheet is available in the church office or contact Steve Gunning for more information.

EACH ONE TELLS A STORY

*An Inspirational Concert
Celebrating the release of
Two extraordinary CDs*

Draw the Circle Wide

By Curran Reichert

ℳ

Woman of Faith

By Laura Hall

The Concert will feature:

Curran Reichert, Laura Hall, Adam Webber

and

Ron McCutchan directing the OPUCC Choir

Sunday, March 25th

4:00 pm

Open Prairie United Church of Christ

25 E. Marion St.

Princeton, IL 61356



Open Prairie UCC
25 E. Marion Street
Princeton, IL 61356

CHURCH CONTACTS

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