

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

A Voice for Ecumenical Congregations and Christians Around the World

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President's Message

**Rev. Dr. William H. Samuels
(Rev. Bill)**

**“Then the Lord answered
Job out of the whirlwind, and said...”**

Years ago at the University of Chicago Divinity School, a core curriculum was developed with the intent to make sure that its graduates had a solid grasp of the issues which confronted modernity. The curriculum included The New Testament, The Old Testament, Christian Theology, Christian History, The History of Religions, Theology and Literature and Religion and Psychological Studies.

The curriculum itself was intimidating, but even more challenging was the idea that in most of the courses, the books that we read and the supplementary materials of the courses were taught by the original authors. One author, **Langdon Gilkey**, was finishing a book entitled, ***Naming The Whirlwind*** during my time with him. Because of my upbringing and stature as a fundamentalist civil rights activist—you know, CORE, SNCC, SCLC, PUSH, NAACP, and the Urban League and Sunday School, my ability to shift from fundamentalist Bible Study to Literary and Historical criticism left me both stunned and excited. **Here was an opportunity to integrate prayer and modern religious studies with marching, sitting-in and occupying lunch counters which, at the time, were for only white folk.**

I felt socially bilingual in that my challenge to bring to the discussions the insights of these giants of modern thought while still interacting with the “fellas” on the basketball court and the baseball field was, indeed, satisfying. But now—the world has changed.

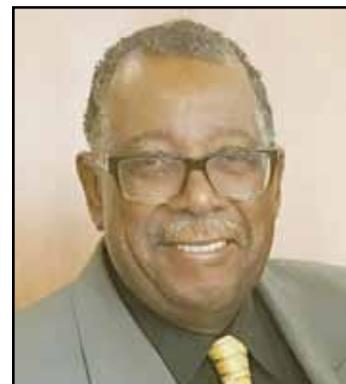
The idea of “Paint me—warts and all” is out of control. Heroes, just causes, pure motivation and honesty have yielded to alternative truth, fake news, “morons,” and mass murders with no identifiable motivation. We are now reduced to the station of Job and his friends searching for the answer of “what did Job do wrong to bring such wrath?” We do not get some form of solution until the 38th Chapter of Job 38:1 (KJV)—“**Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind.**”

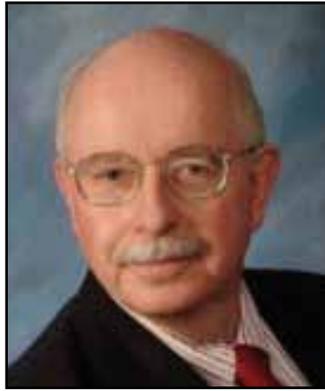
We have certainly had our share of “whirlwinds” in the last few months as well as fires, earthquakes and wars and rumors of wars. It looks like, feels like and sounds like—as the fundamentalist story of the ***Color Purple*** puts into song—“God is trying to tell you something.” While trying to make sense out of the Bible, I am always amazed with Elijah’s confrontation with King Ahab and his powerful wife Jezebel—“Shall it be God or Baal?”, he questioned.

Elijah’s courage only extended so far. After the success on Mt. Carmel and the apparent victory over evil and idolatry, Jezebel announced, “not so fast brother Elijah.” And Elijah retreated!

The point of the story now is capsulized. Elijah (God is Yahweh) out of fear—runs, hides and laments—and listens to the answer from the whirlwind. The frightened and exhausted Elijah is visited by the angel of the Lord who attempts to strengthen him from his fears and exhaustion. The Lord asks the question, “What doest thou here, Elijah?” After further dialogue in the presence of the Lord... **behold, the Lord passed by and a great wind...and after the wind an earthquake...after the earthquake a fire but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still, small voice.(1 Kings 19:11-12).**

Now YHWH speaks directly to the ICC! What doest thou, here ICC?





Thanksgiving and the Community Church Movement

Don Ashmall

Council Minister, Emeritus

No, I'm not about to claim that the first Thanksgiving dinner in the "new world" was hosted by a community church. I rather think that native Americans had given thanks to the Creator for bountiful harvests and plentiful hunting long before Europeans arrived on the scene. And I have no doubt that the recent arrivals gave thanks to God for all manner of things (among which was their own survival) without waiting for any indigenous people to appear for a special meal. So the "first American Thanksgiving dinner" paintings we've seen, featuring Pilgrims and native Americans chowing down together, are more imaginative than accurate. But there is one feature of Thanksgiving dinners that has been and is fairly common. Through the years and around countless tables there has been a recital by one or all of the diners of a list of "things I'm thankful for." In anticipation of this year's harvest dinner among family and friends, here's a part of my list.

I'm thankful for the visionaries – those who through the years helped gather groups of community based churches for mutual prayer and support. The names of many of these are known only to God. Long before "community" became a common name for congregations in the US and Canada there were "union" churches. In Africa and Asia there were repeated efforts to draw together congregations without the competition seen between different denominational missions. In the "old world" of Europe, a few faithful were willing to defy centuries of conflict among Christians and seek reconciliation. All these efforts preceded the ICCC and in many places they continue even today.

I'm thankful for the Revs. Evans and Burkhardt, and I'm also thankful for so many behind the scenes in the years leading up to 1950, who labored to bring together two racially diverse groups of churches and ministry centers to form the International Council of Community Churches. It does not diminish the groundbreaking efforts of the two pastors to recognize the many who took care of innumerable details in organizing the founding conference and developing communications between the participating congregations. I don't know the names of the (almost surely female) secretaries at the churches Evans and Burkhardt served, but I rather suspect that they did more than their share.

I'm thankful for the innumerable lay members of congregations around the world who have "caught the vision" of the community church movement and who have shared the vision even at times when (dare I mention this?) some pastoral leaders did not. And I am especially thankful for laity and clergy alike who have understood that at the heart of the community church movement is mission – sharing the good news by word and deed beyond the stained glass windows to their neighborhoods and to the shrinking neighborhood that is the world.

I'm thankful that the hallmarks of the community church movement are justice, reconciliation and Christian unity. I was reminded recently that there are times when those marks may seem to be in conflict with one another. Indeed they could be if it were not for the underlying

influence of a love that moderates justice with mercy; that changes a reconciliation based on tolerance to one founded in radical hospitality; that reaches beyond institutional negotiation to spiritual communion. For each and all, I am deeply grateful.

I'm especially thankful for the dedication and commitment to the community church movement of so many of yesterday's and today's laity and clergy. The Council is the visible face of the movement, and in the last half-dozen years, the ICCC has held steady and grown a bit in membership while mainline Protestantism in the western world has shrunk. Now, we all know that "a bit" is not enough and we need to continue to work for growth. But I'm thankful for what we have received, and I am convinced that because justice, reconciliation and Christian unity are in the will of God, the Council will continue to grow not only in numbers but also in the spirit of Jesus.

Most of all, I am thankful for you. You have endured. You have been steadfast. You have been faithful. When I talk, as I often do, about the Council being the visible manifestation of the movement, I'm talking about you. You are the Council and you are at the heart of the movement. Your witness is one of justice, reconciliation and Christian unity. Your worldwide missions to build community, address hunger of the body as well of that of the soul, and to bring people together in Agape love: these are a vibrant, exciting expression of your Christian faith. For all of this and especially for you, I give thanks to God.

Have You Read This?

REVIEWS

By Stephen York



Brueggemann, Walter. *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination: Preaching an Emancipating Word*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012, Second Edition, 151 pp., \$18.95 (paperback) \$9.99 (Kindle)

5 Star***Review – Highly recommended!**

Widely-acclaimed author Walter Brueggemann is William Marcellus McPheeters professor emeritus of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary. According to his website, “[H]e is the author of over one hundred books and scholarly articles.” See (<http://www.walterbrueggemann.com/about/>). He writes:

The prophetic task occurs amid a denying, despairing, totalizing ideology that is will full set against the inscrutable holiness of God. That totalizing control, with its wealth, power, technology, and propaganda, presents itself as the only game in town with nothing outside its domain. That is what makes it ‘total.’ That is what evokes ‘totalizing’ practice. That is what runs toward the ‘totalitarian.’... In the face of that unnamed, unacknowledged powerful reality come the prophets who have words of truth-telling and hope-summoning.

Walter Brueggemann wisely dedicated this book to a modern day prophetic leader and preacher, Gordon Cosby (1917-2013), the founder of the Church of the Savior in Washington, D.C. Cosby exemplified the prophetic imagination and emancipation, a fact which Brueggemann candidly acknowledges. One a personal note, I must say that this book’s dedication resonated as Gordon Cosby influenced my own thinking beginning back in the 1980s leading me to re-evaluate and consider the political and theological convictions with which I had been reared. Further, the foreword by John M. Buchanan, then the long-serving pastor of the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago, set the tone of

Buchanan’s book. Particularly helpful was Buchanan’s description of a “framed objet d’art” hanging on the wall at his office with Brueggemann’s flip-chart notes regarding certain prophetic phrases: “**Orientation, Disorientation, New Orientation,**” and four other words, “**suffering, hope, lament, doubt.**” Those words offered a framework to understand the author’s direction and purpose and were useful in unpacking this volume.

I quickly must add that I found Brueggemann’s *Prophetic Imagination* to be rich and demanding. It is slow, active reading, and requires frequent reflective pauses to stop, ponder, question, and then to re-read. Additionally, it required a personal response. Frankly, I put the book down and prayed for understanding and then resumed reading. My copy of this book is laden with annotations, commentary, question marks, and challenges. It is the kind of reading that Robert Scholes wrote about in *Protocols for Reading*—a volume that has deeply enriched my own level of deep engagement with Brueggemann’s text and with other printed texts of this caliber. It is Scholes’ contention that the reader enters into dialogue with a book. That certainly was true in my experience with Brueggemann’s work.

One of the biggest challenges that I had when reading this book was a practical one. How does a preacher serve as priest and prophet in a local congregation? Tisdale’s book *Prophetic Preaching—A Pastoral Approach* (which I reviewed previously in this column) was helpful with that question as I unpacked what Brueggemann was writing. The

“prophetic imagination” as explained by Brueggemann became clearer to me, as did the words noted by John Buchanan’s foreword. The notion that Buchanan put forth was helpful: “True prophetic preaching is witness, affirmation, proclamation that God is, that God reigns, and that God does not abandon or forget. It is, simply put, publicly articulated belief in God.” That statement gave me pause to consider what exactly it is that I publicly articulate about God. As I understand it, what Brueggemann is attempting with his thesis is to help twenty-first century preachers “imagine” what it means to have a prophetic voice while attending to the pastoral needs of the congregation. Brueggemann writes:

[P]rophetic proclamation is an attempt to imagine the world as though YHWH—the creator of the world, the deliverer of Israel, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ whom we Christians come to name as Father, Son, Spirit—were a real character and an effective agent in the world.

What was confusing to me, at first, was Brueggemann’s point that prophetic preaching is not restricted to contemporary social issues but rather presenting a counter-cultural view of God’s perspective and involvement in the world. That point, by the way, reminded me of what Heschel was intending when he spoke of the “Pathos” of God. Prophets look at the world from God’s perspective by offering people hope and what could be possible, not just at what the current reality is. This insight, for me, has

continued on page 4

Sharing Joys:

- Congratulations to The **Rev. Herman Harmelink III**, ICCC Ecumenical Officer! Herman was elected to the Board of the North American Academy of Ecumenists at their annual meeting in Boston in September.
- **Greendale People's Church** held a conference on Oct. 14th. **Michael Droege**, **Wilson Memorial Union Church**, was their Keynote Speaker. Churches partnering in faith and resources *in action*.
- Council Minister, **Don Ashmall**, will be speaking at **Greendale People's Church** on Nov. 16th. The church will have an Ecumenical Thanksgiving Worship that afternoon as well, with 7 Worcester partner churches.
- **Carla Dietz**, Senior Pastor, **Greendale People's Church**, and her husband, **John Carroll**, are now consultants for the MA Conference UCC, leading "Making It Real" trainings in churches that are interested. Invite them to visit!
- The Fall Regional meeting for the Central Zone, Region A was held Oct. 28th at **Commonwealth Community Church**, Chicago, IL. Led by **Pastor Bill Samuels**, ICCC President, **Dr. Sharyon Cosey**, ICCC Regional Trustee and **Barbara Ratliff**, Area Coordinator.

Our prayers are with:

- **Don Fair**, **Greendale People's Church**, who completed a triple bypass mid-September. The procedure was a success and we wish Don a quick and easy recovery.

Be sure to submit any church news you may have.... blessings, achievements, illnesses, passings, etc, to the council office so we can share with readers in future newsletters.

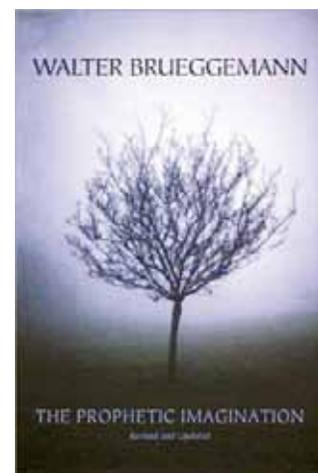
Book Review cont'd. from page 3

profound implications for how to minister in our current culture. This also gave me better insight to the ministry of Jesus amid the Roman Empire and what Jesus taught regarding the Kingdom of God—something which Richard Horsley effectively addresses in his discussion regarding the apocalyptic/nonapocalyptic debate regarding the historical Jesus in his book *The Prophet Jesus and the Renewal of Israel: Moving Beyond a Diversionary Debate* (which was also reviewed earlier in this column).

The chapter "Divine Loss as Judgment" spoke volumes to me. Beyond the historical context of the Hebrew prophets, it has huge implications for ministry today. It reminded me of what Robert P. Jones wrote about in *The End of White Christian America* (2016) where he applied the death and dying process (Elizabeth Kubler-Ross) to demographic changes, especially for Protestant Christianity. (Jones is the CEO of the Public Religion Research Institute.) While Jones' book has nothing to do with "divine judgment," it has everything to do with how people of faith (and secular people) deal with loss—denial, anger, negotiation, and ultimately acceptance, but not always sequential nor in that order. There are, I think, significant parallels between Brueggemann's point-of-view regarding deportation, exile, and loss resulting from the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of the people of God, with the significant sense of loss and exile among people of faith today.

Ultimately, this book offers preachers and laity a guide into practical theology. Not only is Brueggemann is a "preacher's preacher" and an exemplar, he is a great author and resource for the Christian church. The book is inclusive and beneficial to local congregations for two reasons. First, it helps a church to understand the preaching task of clergy. Second, it helps a church to understand that they, too, are called to a prophetic ministry in partnership with their leadership team and boards. A seasoned teacher and preacher of the "emancipated Word," the author leads by example those who will listen and heed his "prophetic instruction." This book is ideal for Adult Christian Education, Bible study groups, and for dialogue between clergy and the congregation at-large.

One final note, if your pastor does not own a copy of this book, buy a copy and make it a gift. And don't forget to buy a copy for yourself! I, for one, plan to read and re-read Brueggemann. It is a spiritual opportunity for growth, self-discipline, repentance, and action. I look forward to the ongoing challenge. (As noted above, this is available in paperback and on Kindle).



Responding to Hurricane Harvey & IRMA



Imagine Church, Charlotte, hosted a benefit musical concern to raise awareness and funds for St. John and the US Virgin Islands on Sunday evening, October 15, 2017 at 6:00 p.m.

Pastor Bruce Jones' daughter and son-in-law, Lauren and Bo Magnie, are musicians and recording artists who reside at St. John and though their house was spared, many of their neighbors lost everything in the devastation wrought by Hurricane Irma. They will perform the concert with free admission and the hope that patrons will make a contribution to St. John Rescue, a relief effort that has been established.

The recovery efforts at St. John will likely take months as Centerline Road, the main thoroughfare from Cruz Bay in the South to Coral Bay in the North remains impassable, and electricity has yet to be restored to most parts of the island. Many of the tourist resorts and restaurants have been heavily damaged or destroyed.



CHURCH WORLD SERVICE

Church World Service partners with local churches and church agencies in responding to natural disasters. This is more cost efficient, and allows for more flexibility in meeting both immediate and long-term needs.

Financial gifts are easily sent to Church World Service. Simply send your check to the ICCC, 21116 Washington Parkway, Frankfort IL 60423. Be sure to mark "CWS-Harvey" on the check; the full amount of your gift will be sent along to Church World Service immediately.

For more information on Church World Service' response to Hurricane Harvey and how you can help, see <https://cwsglobal.org/Harvey>.

May God bless you in your sharing.

How Great Leadership Inspires Action.

Submitted by
Rev. Stephen York,
ICCC VP for Leadership Development

Why take 18 minutes of your life and watch this TEDx talk, "How Great Leadership Inspires Action," when you already have too much to do today?

- It will change how you lead.
- It will change how your churches make a difference.
- It will get results.
- You WILL want to show it to your leaders!

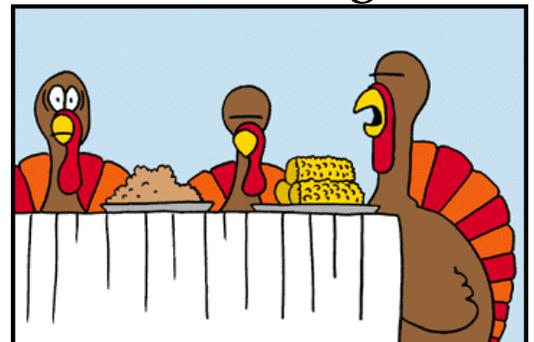
I highly recommend Simon Sinek's TEDx talk on leadership. In it he discusses that we must begin with "Why?" before we get to "How?" or "What?" Every effective leader must deal with the neuroscience/brain research which supports this information.

https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action

It may be the best investment of 18 minutes of your day.



A Time to Laugh



WE GIVE THANKS FOR ALL THE BOUNTY THAT FARMER BOB HAS BLESSED US ALL WITH THESE PAST FEW MONTHS

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

A Voice for Ecumenical Congregations (ISSN - 0145-3297)

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Seeking an Executive Director... an ICCC Executive Director!

International Council of Community Churches (www.ICCCnow.org) an ecumenical interracial communion, seeks EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (Full- or Part-time). We are looking for an eager person wanting to lead our communion forward in meaningful Christian work for: growth, racial reconciliation and exploring diverse ways of being church in the 21st century. EXTENSIVE TRAVEL REQUIRED. EOE. **Resumes:** ICCCDirectorApplications@gmail.com.

Seeking a Senior Pastor

St. Timothy Community Church, a non-denominational church, has been blessed to praise and worship God for 91 years. We are currently seeking a committed and innovative full-time Senior Pastor. With a servant's heart, this Senior Pastor will faithfully and to the best of his or her ability, experience, and talents serve as the spiritual leader of this 600-member congregation. In addition, he or she must have the capacity to support our mission and maintain the highest level of spiritual commitment, theological literacy and integrity possible. Passionate, visionary leaders who feel God's call to this ministry are asked to please visit our website at www.st.timothychurch.org to learn more about our church, the position and the application process.

Seeking a Music Director

Norris Religious Fellowship (Norris, TN) is seeking a Music Director. Salaried, part-time position. The Music Director works in initiating programs, rehearsals, special music, etc.; provides piano and/or organ accompaniment for the hymns. Ability to lead a choir and congregation, directing and inspiring others through a ministry of music. Excellent vocal skills a plus. Please provide a resume and cover letter along with recording demonstrating your skill set via audio CD, DVD, or link to digital materials online (YouTube, Vimeo, professional website). Submit via email to norrisreligiousfellowship@comcast.net. More information about NRF www.NorrisRF.org.

Seeking a Director of Music

The Church at Litchfield Park is seeking a Director of Music to oversee the music program of a historic growing and dynamic interdenominational community church in Litchfield Park, AZ. The director will be responsible for leading and rehearsing the 30+ member Chancel Choir for two Sunday worship services, leading and rehearsing a "blended" choir for a third service, and oversee the directors of the bell and children's choirs. Qualified candidates should have a demonstrated ability as a director and work well with musicians, pastors and staff. The position is half-time and compensation will be based on qualifications and experience. Interested applicants should send a cover letter, resume, and list of references electronically to info@clp.church.

ICCC Endowment Fund Status As of October 5, 2017

Gifts Goal by 30 Jun '18:\$15,000

Gifts since 7/01/17:\$3,085

Help us meet our goal, need:\$11,915

Total Endowment Gifts to
ICCC since inception:\$46,373

Current Fund Assets:.....\$321,694

Current Investment Mix:
36% stocks, 28% bonds, 36% Treasuries