

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

A Voice for Ecumenical Congregations and Christians Around the World

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"Conference Happenings"

Get ready to be entertained Tuesday night! Performing for us live is the duo **Gatlin!** Together, these two artists have combined their dynamic voices and diverse musical backgrounds to create an exciting show like none other.

Darryl Gatlin grew up in Beaver Falls, PA where he began singing with his brother Don at an early age. He has been a singer/songwriter/entertainer his whole life, focusing on his live shows the past 10 years and mesmerizes every crowd.

Andrea grew up in Marion, OH and earned a Bachelor of Music degree from Ashland University where she majored in music education with a vocal emphasis. Her voice has taken her to stages across the country and even overseas to England with her ability to sing six languages and all styles of music.

The two have had great success in Nashville, recording two albums with Sony/Epic Records and were nominated for Country Music Duo of the Year for five consecutive years. They performed at the Grand Ole Opry eleven times and performed with such legends as Merle Haggard, Garth Brooks, Reba McEntire, Alabama, the Mandrells and many more. They even managed to score a Billboard Top 40 hit with their single 'No Sir' and have three videos in the TNN Hall of Fame. The duo can be seen all over Ohio, Midwest and South, performing over 200+ dates a year.

Entertaining thousands of visitors with their high-energy, vocally driven performances, you will not want to miss this!

Sunday Night Panel Discussion **A Very Present Time of Trouble**

There will be a panel discussion, hosted by Don Moore, Sunday night to talk about Christianity & Islam - Dealing with the Muslim world from a Christian perspective. Testimonies of Contact - Military Clergy - Pastoral Contact - Immigration, Integration, Communication - Theological Problems - Bible, Koran, Sharia Law & Jihad will all be discussed. *Handouts will be given on religious comparisons and Islamic mandates according to the Koran.*

Here's the latest workshops that have been added to the Annual Conference schedule:

Use of Social Media for your Ministry

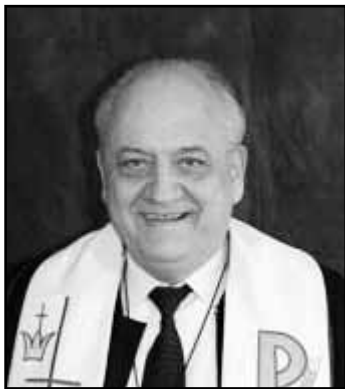
Is Facebook for the kids? What is a Tweet? Is YouTube social media? What's a blog? Social media is a powerful and often misunderstood tool in modern ministry. Without an understanding of how to participate in this new conversation, we will find our message not getting to the audience who could use it the most. Join Michael Droege as he gives a basic primer on social media itself and gives some general guidelines on how to maximize this extraordinary tool for ministry.

Michael Droege has been doing ministry with the church's new generation for over 25 years. Part of this means being tuned in to trends and tools that each generation brings. Michael brings what he has learned to this year's conference from what he's learned at Wilson Memorial Church in Watchung, NJ where he serves as Youth and Family Minister.

Multi-Cultural Church

Don Moore, with over 20 years' experience in a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic congregation, will answer questions and provide suggestions for the following in relation to a multi-cultural church: Descriptions, definitions, models - Demographic realities - Biblical defense - Church conflicts/Church benefits - Breaking down dividing walls - Adjustments to change - Church growth and evangelism - Effects upon Praise and Worship, Sunday School, Outreach/Evangelism, and Cross-Cultural Communication.





AVOIDING EUTHANASIA? (pt. 1)

Behold, I make all things new... To the thirsty I will give water without price... [excerpts from Revelation 21:5-6]

President's Message Rev. Dr. Richard O. Griffith

The other day, we had to "put our dog to sleep." It was a painful decision, but there was no choice – his cancer made him bowel and bladder incontinent, the pain was obvious, and the hope was no more. There was nothing else we could do. My wife and I were there when the injection was administered, cuddling him, knowing that he would know in his last waking moments he was being cuddled by people who loved him.

Most of us have been forced to make such decisions about our pets, and some of us have made end of life decisions for our families. I, personally, have signed "Do Not Resuscitate" orders for my parents, following their previous and clear wishes. It was not easy, but I was doing what they trusted me to do.

Some of us have been forced to make and/or witness even more difficult decisions – "pulling the plug" for a loved one. More than once I have been with a family at a bedside when this was the "least worst" option available. Surrounded by love and prayer, they moved to the Life to Come.

Some of the churches many of us have attended have been forced to make similar decisions. I remember a church to which the United Methodist bishop appointed me. They thought I had been sent to close them. When I reassured them that was not my intent, (I was doing some graduate work) they looked at their finances, and decided to close! And what a wonderful closing it was – the commercial kitchen equipment was donated to another church, the \$50,000 left in reserves was "bequeathed" to missions,

and a final service of celebration was held in a totally filled sanctuary!

For some of our churches and centers, the choices are not crystal clear – attendance might be slipping, but "adjustments have been made"; finances are more difficult, but "we will survive"; the congregation is getting older, but "a few newer faces are arriving." We want to grow and move forward; we don't want to stagnate, but the "solutions" seem to elude us.

I will say more next time. But for now, remember the words of scripture – "To the thirsty I will give water without price," and the theme of our 2015 Annual Conference – "Come to the Water."

Oases will be there to slake the thirst of the faithful – a theologian committed to making the faith alive to people in the pews; workshops helping us deal with the domestic violence several of our people have endured, and the realities of social media in today's environment; and a time of "Listening to our Voices," along with the deep fellowship of spiritual worship.

Come to the Water, and as Easter People continue the pilgrimage toward a community of Inclusion, where there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, black, white, pink, purple, gay, straight, young, old, liberal, conservative, angel or adversary, but where we all strive to become one in Christ Jesus.

On the Journey,

Ecumeneews

by Herman Harmelink, III
ICCC Ecumenical

and Interfaith Relations VP

The National Council of Churches has forwarded to us a statement of support for Christians, issued by the Synagogue Council. This is a fine illustration of the potential in interfaith and interreligious relations, and we hope that all of the major religious traditions will follow this good example of mutual support and concern. It is high time for us to learn that an attack on any major religious tradition is an attack on us all.



The National Council of Synagogues has issued a statement supporting Christian communities that are currently under siege and condemning the acts of violence against Christians in the Middle East and Africa. We are grateful for their support of our brothers and sisters and send our prayers with theirs to those still under threat. - Tony Kireopoulos. The full statement can be found at www.nationalcouncilofchurches.us.

A Call to Pray!

For all those who wish to join us in fervent prayer please call 1-605-562-0020; member id number 378277696 on the following date in your respective time zones. Pacific Time is 5 pm; Mountain Time is 6 pm; Central Time is 7 pm; and Eastern Time is 8 pm.

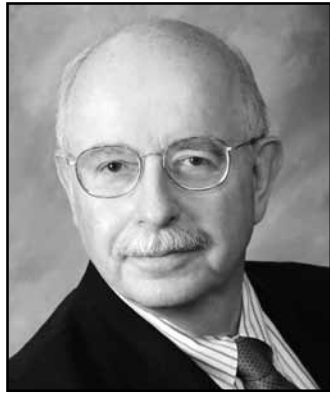
During our prayer phone conferences I look forward to hearing your praise reports (answered prayer) as well as prayer request. Let us never forget that God still answers prayer and tell Him "Thank You".

May 11, 2015

Scripture Focus—"He said to me: "It is done. I am the alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life." (Revelation 21:6)

Prayer Focus—Deliverance from the thirst of this world

Sis. Shyreece Pompey
ICCC/WCF Spiritual Leader



Death – and Life

Don Ashmall
Council Minister

“Old Marley was as dead as a doornail. Mind! I don’t mean to say that, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a doornail. I might have been inclined, myself, to regard a coffin-nail as the deadest piece of ironmongery in the trade. But ... Marley was as dead as a doornail.” Thus begins a classic tale told for a season other than Easter.

To us in our mortality, there’s nothing quite as final as death with all of its doornails and coffin nails. In our experience once really dead there is nothing that can regain the life that has gone. True, mistakes have been made. People and things thought deceased have made remarkable recoveries. In some areas of the world the un-embalmed dead lie in state for three days, their toes tied to strings that will make small bells ring just in case the not-quite-departed awaken. Those of us in northern climes see bare trees exposed to a long season of winter winds, seemingly without life. Yet in the spring those once barren branches leaf out into a new season of greenery. But if no bell rings, and if in spring the branches shed bark instead of sprouting new shoots, then we say “death” and expect nothing more.

So it should be a matter of shock and awe that Christians proclaim the surprise of resurrection. Yet many of us in the church have at least in our own minds, made Easter a matter of routine. It’s not just because of the early hour that we yawn our way through the greetings “The Lord is risen; He is risen indeed.” From our lack of enthusiasm an outside observer might suspect that people are raised from the dead on a daily basis. Or perhaps the conclusion would be that we are both cynical and jaded in equal measure.

The truth is that it’s difficult for us to grasp how a decline that is headed for death can

be reversed, much less a truly lifeless body can be revived. With that in mind, indulge me while I share a true-life story.

My dad, who came to ordained ministry late in life, was serving a “three point charge,” preaching to three congregations each Sunday in the hills west of Scranton and Wilkes-Barre, PA. The smallest of the three congregations was attended by a dozen or so people at best on an average Sunday; most of them were well past retirement age. Even my dad admitted at the time that “one rough winter with a few more deaths will finish that congregation.” Other clergy encouraged him to “shut the place down” and encouraged the remnant there to attend one of the other two services each Sunday. In spite of everything, he persisted, preaching to and caring for those few as faithfully as he did for and with the other two congregations.

Then came what locals referred to as “the great flood.” The river that ran through Scranton and Wilkes-Barr ran high and wild. So forceful were the waters that they scoured out cemeteries with caskets, later found tens of miles downstream and some never recovered. In response to the destruction of homes and apartments, the federal government brought in mobile homes - trailers - for the many displaced. Many of these instant settlements became permanent, but that would be evident only after a while. At first the trailers were just that – trailers parked in fields with rutted paths leading to temporary steps, with porta-potties placed hither and yon and no water or electricity yet installed.

One such settlement was next door to that smallest and moribund church. Somehow, despite their age and fragility the faithful remnant rallied. They went door-to-door amongst the trailers, inviting the displaced to use the rest room facilities of the church, and to sleep on the pews if the trailers were too cold. They prepared meals for the displaced until the trailer-dwellers reminded them that though displaced, they could still

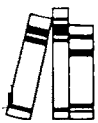
cook. So they took over that task, continuing the work of mass-producing three meals a day.

Come Sunday, those who were sleeping in the church rolled up their bedding and the barracks became a place of worship once again. The sleepers joined the ranks of the remnant, and the rafters rang with heartfelt hymns as they had not in decades. The fellowship grew firm and warm, and as the weeks rolled along with facilities among the mobile homes improving, there were fewer and then no sleepers in the church anymore. The mass production of meals was no longer necessary. But the newcomers kept coming to worship. Why would they not? They had found succor there in their time of need and pain. They had discovered caring and fellowship from folks who didn’t even know their names at the start. Over time many of the displaced found their way back “home” but they continued to return to that church for worship. And as the “temporary” housing was sold in place and new residents moved into the settlement (which by then had paved streets and permanently installed water, sewer and power services) the newcomers found themselves so enfolded that taking part in the life of that church was a natural thing to do. The end result? The smallest of the three churches became the largest. What was dead found new life, because people cared and gave of themselves in service to the Risen One.

Four years ago when I was called to my present position with the Council, the fellowship was pronounced dead by many self-proclaimed experts. Two years ago when the Annual Conference adopted the growth goals of Vision 2020, yet more purveyors of doom and gloom said that the goals were unrealistic and could never be achieved. In this Easter edition of the Christian Community, I am pleased to announce that the Risen One continues to care for His people. The Council’s name is not Marley; the Council is very much alive! The Council is

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REVIEWS



Dr. Robert M. Puckett



Let Me Tell You a Story, Life Lessons from Unexpected Places and Unlikely People; Tony Campolo, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, 2000, 223 pages, \$12.99.

Earthy Mysticism, Spirituality for Unspiritual People; Tex Sample, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 208, Paperback, 104 pages.

Craddock Stories; Fred B. Craddock (Edited by Mike Graves and Richard Ward), Chalice Press, St. Louis, Missouri, 2001, Paperback, 155 Pages.

All the best preachers I ever heard were great storytellers, and Tony Campolo, Tex Sample, and Fred Craddock are among the best. They learned the art of storytelling from Jesus whose parables are among the greatest stories ever told. Stories well told have the power to be entertaining and captivating at the same time. Clarence Jordan practiced that art well. His stories often snuck up on you and suddenly you knew that they were about you!

Tony Campolo is a pastor, author, lecturer and professor of sociology at Eastern College, in St. Davids, Pennsylvania. He says that he learned the importance of storytelling from the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard who declared that the Christian gospel is not so much heard as it is *overheard!* In fact it is always *overheard* if it is heard at all according to Kierkegaard. What is *overheard* is the major theme of this book. Many of these stories reveal how God loves all people of all races and tribes. One such story is the Hasidic story of when the Israelite are delivered from the Egyptians at the Red Sea and the Egyptian armies are drowned. There is a big celebration in heaven and one of the angels asked Archangel Michael, "Where is God?" Michael answered, "God is off weeping because many thousands of His children were drowned today!"

Then there is the story of the African-American woman who worked in a soup kitchen. (p.9) As the door was opened for the hungry street people to come in she prayed, "Lord, we know you'll be comin' through the line today, so help us to treat them well!" (p. 28) Finally there is the story of the elderly woman who underwent serious surgery when her prospect of recovery was slim. "The first thing she saw when she opened her eyes was the blurred image of her doctor in his white doctor's jacket. She smiled and said, "Hello, God! My name is Mary!" That is faith's assurance in action. (p. 204)

Tex Sample is a freelance lecturer, workshop leader, and preacher. He was the Bible leader at the Annual Conference of the International Council of Community Churches last summer in Omaha.

He confesses that he does not find much help in conventional approaches to spirituality. He is

moved best by his observance of what is going on in ordinary human lives, and this is what his stories are about. Stanley Hauerwas says about *Earthy Mysticism* "To tell a truthful story well is not easily done. To tell a truthful story well about God's refusal to abandon us is even harder. But in this beautiful book of pain, tragedy, and healing Tex Sample tells stories of God's refusal to abandon us truthfully." His most moving story for me was about his personal experience working in the oil fields of Mississippi when he was eighteen. The work was hard and it was hot that summer. He worked with an older African American who knew more about the work than Tex did but he was white, so he was the boss. One morning the water can had been stolen off the truck but Tex decided to go ahead without one. His fellow worker found an old rusty syrup can and filled it with water. As they struggled through the day, the heat got the best of him and he had to accept the black man's offer of water from the rusty syrup can. Having never drunk from anything after a black person, he took the can with a trembling hand and drank. He said "As I drank, it hit me. This is the cup of salvation given for you...I was being served Communion!"

One of Craddock's most moving stories was about an experience in the middle of winter in a Canadian bus station where he was served some awful soup. He could not eat it, but it was warm. A poor woman came and asked for a glass of water. The greasy spoon waiter demanded that she had to buy something in order to get the water and stay long enough to get warm. She had no money and was told she must leave. When she started to leave, everyone there got up to leave with her and the waiter said, "All right, all right, she can stay." Everybody sat down, and he brought her a bowl of soup. Fred decided to try the soup again and found that it was not so bad after all. He said, "I have no idea what kind of soup it was...but I do recall when I was eating it, it tasted a little bit like bread and wine. Just a little like bread and wine." (p. 84)

A good story well told can fill one's life with deeper meaning!!

Mission Statement



"As people devoted to following Christ we are committed to community, to treasuring diversity, to living our faith in service and love."

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

A Voice for
Ecumenical Congregations
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Laity Nominations

Each year the Council recognizes two laypeople for service to the Council and to their local congregations. The Laywoman and Layman awards are designed to express our appreciation to individuals who:

1. Shared the open, welcoming, joyful spirit of the Council as well as items of Council news with their local congregations;
2. Shared events, joys and concerns of their congregations with the wider fellowship of the Council.
3. Acted as advocate and interpreter of the Council within their local congregations.
4. Participated in area and regional events as well as attending Annual Conference.

You may nominate a candidate for Laywoman and/or Layman of the year. Please include in your nomination:

- A. Your name and contact information.
- B. The name and contact information of your nominee.
- C. A short biographical sketch of your nominee.
- D. Specifics on how the nominee has fulfilled the expectations for the award listed above.

Submit your nominations by email to iccc60423@sbcglobal.net, or by postal mail to ICC, 21116 Washington Parkway, Frankfort, IL 60423. Deadline for nominations is April 15th.

\$300,000 Endowment Goal By End of Annual Conference Set

The Endowment Trustees have set a "Shoot for the Stars" goal of increasing the Fund's assets to \$300,000. As of mid-March the assets were \$274,276.

"If the stock market increases by just 2% between now and the end of the Dublin, Ohio conference, then we will need to raise an additional \$20,000 in current gifts to reach this goal." stated Bob Harris, Chair of the Endowment Trustees.

"Raising \$20,000 in gifts will be a big challenge. However, the faithful support we have received for the Endowment Fund never ceases to surprise me." he added.

Reaching this goal will enable the Endowment Fund to better support the Council in the future.

IMPORTANT: Gifts to the Endowment Fund should be made in addition to—not instead of -- gifts to the Council's General Fund.

Volunteers Needed!

DeAnn is looking for volunteers for Registration & the Walking Group!

Hours for Registration are:

Sunday 7/12

8:00am - 11:30am, 7:00pm - 10:00pm

Monday 7/13

7:00am - 9:30am, 2:00pm - 4:00pm

The **Walking Group** is new this year. But it needs a leader!! The only responsibility for this is to lead a group of walkers 3 times around the 1 mile loop. Mon-Thurs, 7:00am-8:00am.

Please contact DeAnn at the Council office to help: icccdc@sbcglobal.net or 815-464-5690 Thank you!!

Sharing Joys:

- **Chapel By The Sea**, Clearwater, FL, **Herb Freitag** Senior Pastor, held a reception on March 15th to celebrate **Dr. Marilyn Michaels** 25th year with the Chapel as its Director of Music. The church has enjoyed her incredible talent and thanked her with a special gift for being part of their church family.
- The Spring Mini Conference for the **Central Zone, Region A** will be held on May 2, 2015 at the **Commonwealth Community Church**, 140 W. 81st St., Chicago, IL, where Rev. **William Samuels** is pastor.
- The **Central Zone, Region B** will hold its spring regional meeting on **Saturday, May 16th** at **People's Community Church** in Berea, OH, **Leroy McCreary**, Senior Pastor. Registration, Meet & Greet, and a Continental Breakfast will begin at 8:30am and the program will begin at 9:30am. If you are in the area, please plan to attend!
- **People's Community Church**, Detroit, MI has elected a new Minister! **Rev. Dr. Charles Clarke** will be installed on Sunday May 31, 2015 at 3:00 pm. Welcome!



ICCC Market Place

Think of the times that you wished you could find someone with the knowledge and experience to help you with a task, project, campaign, or other church problem (opportunity)? How about the times you developed know-how but have no one with whom to share what you learned or accomplished. The ICCC Market Place - where people can turn to and hook up with others wishing to talk about the same topic. Here is how it works:

- At the Market Place there are two sections: One for **I have know-how in** and the other for **I seek know-how about**
- If you have knowledge and experience you are willing to share put that on the **I have know-how section**. Include your name and phone number. Examples are:
 - ❖ "I have experience in managing an oil to natural gas church boiler system. Name. Phone.
 - ❖ "Want to know how about QuickBooks?" Name. Phone.
 - ❖ "I am a CPA and have experience with church tax code, particularly housing and parsonage allowances." Name. Phone.
 - ❖ "I set up the church's ConstantContact weekly eblast newsletter." Name. Phone.
 - ❖ "We recently established and trained members to do pastoral counseling." Name. Phone.
- If you are seeking help with a church issue, technology, policy, etc. post your need on the **I seek know-how section**. Include your name and phone number. Examples include:
 - ❖ "I need to talk to someone who has in-depth experience with safe church policies and procedures. Name. Phone.
 - ❖ "Help! Who can mentor me on social media for the church: facebook, twitter, instagram?" Name. Phone.
 - ❖ "Who has worked with the church management software called CMS?" Name. Phone.
 - ❖ "What do I need to know about adding a door access security system and cameras?" Name. Phone.
 - ❖ "We are looking at Seasons of the Spirit children's curriculum. Anyone have experience with it?" Name. Phone.
- Take time to look at this exhibit table throughout the conference. Perhaps there is someone you can help or someone to help you!
- Contact the person via phone and arrange a time during the conference to meet.

The ICCC Market PlaceWhere Smart People Meet!

2014 Trentham Award Winning Sermon

JESUS MIGHT BE THE ANSWER... BUT WHAT IS THE QUESTION?

Herb Freitag, Chapel By The Sea

Scripture – Luke 4:14-30

I saw a bumper sticker the other day (one I have seen numerous times before)...and I am sure that you have also seen the same message, whether on a car or a billboard: JESUS IS THE ANSWER! Chew on that for awhile - Jesus is the answer. To those of us who are Christian, the immediate reaction might be one of agreement...it is only a four-word phrase but it is succinct; it is clever; it is positive; it sounds right. However, even a bit of thought must lead to the observation...okay, but what is the question – what is the question to which Jesus is the answer? Because, I would suggest, Jesus is not the answer to every question!

A rich man once told me that he doesn't go home anymore because when he does, everyone has his or her hand out. That's kind of what happens to Jesus – he gets used over and over and over... and often the use is misuse. All kinds of claims are made for what one gets when one believes in Christ, and so many of them are neither biblical nor logical nor correct. All kinds of claims are made for what God will do for one if one has the right faith and follows the right rituals and says the right words and espouses the right beliefs... and this is done by Christians and Jews and Muslims and folks of pretty much all brands of religious observance...but too often there is no evidence to back up such claims. All kinds of claims promising well-being are made to those who must do nothing more than accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, but what such well-being might entail is often misleading and untrue.

Throughout his ministry, friends and enemies, supporters and critics, were continually trying to figure Jesus out. They flat out didn't understand him. To them, he was an enigma in a paradox in a quandary – he was far more complex than he ever appeared and, besides that, they couldn't figure out why a man of his obvious power and talents would not use them as seemed most positive and productive. They loved his miracles and thought that everything he did should be miraculous. If he was the messiah, they wanted him to act like a messiah...or at least like their concept of a messiah. The result? – all too often Jesus was a disappointment to even those who loved and followed him. And they wanted so badly for him to be what they hoped and expected him to be.

I would suggest that nothing has changed, even after 2000 years. So we say that Jesus is the answer because we want Jesus to be the answer – the answer to those questions of and in life which confound and perplex us; to those problems of and in life which seem overwhelming and frequently leave us disheartened and frustrated; to those situations of and in life over which we have little if any control and in the face of which we feel helpless. We want Jesus to meet our perceived needs and wants...but sometimes our perceived needs and wants have nothing to do with what Jesus was all about.

So what was Jesus all about? – perhaps that is a place to start. Our scripture lesson of the morning provides at least a partial answer...and reading somewhat between the lines, in addition to utilizing the rest of the picture we have of him, hopefully adds to

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Sermon cont'd. from page 6

our understanding. When our episode reported in Luke occurred, Jesus had just returned from what we call his "temptation in the wilderness". During the forty days he was alone, wrestling with what he thought his mission was and how he was going to accomplish what he felt he had been called to do, Jesus had not had an easy time of it. But he came away from his ordeal with strength of mind and purpose – he knew where he was going...and believed that God had given him what he needed to succeed.

So here he was in the synagogue in his hometown after spending some time traveling around Galilee and making a name for himself as a preacher and teacher. The folks there were eager to hear what he had to say. After all, they had heard about him and had a bit of trouble connecting this image of a local hero with what they remembered of Joseph, the carpenter's, son. Jesus had been asked to read the scriptures and chose a passage from the great prophet, Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll he came to:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

And then he did something pretty remarkable – he stated that those prophetic promises were now being fulfilled...through him! His listeners appear to have been all right with that. Remember, they had heard about what he did before he came home and they saw themselves as the recipients of the benefit of those promises. After all, weren't they poor; weren't they captives (certainly of a tyrannical government which took and took until they had no more to give); weren't they handicapped and sick as people in poverty so often are; weren't they oppressed by the Roman occupying armies which treated them, more often than not, with brutality and contempt? So he seemed to be the answer to their questions; their hopes; their dreams; their needs; their wants.

And then, in their view, he blew it! He indicated that they were not necessarily the ones who would thus find God's favor...indeed, that there were times in Israel's past when the ones helped by God through his representatives were not even Jews! Well, that did it. Obviously he was not the answer...at least to their questions. They were so angry, in fact, that they wanted to throw him off a cliff. But somehow he passed through the midst of them and simply walked away.

We're back to the beginning. If Jesus is the answer...to what question? But before we go there, maybe we can indicate a few questions to which he is not the answer.

Jesus is not the answer if the question concerns personal wealth. You know, there are a good many "prosperity preachers" who would disagree. They claim that God wants everybody to be prosperous; to be rich; to be affluent; to have everything that he or she could possibly desire...and, since these preachers are Christian, they assure us that this prosperity will come to those Christians who believe the right beliefs and follow the right rules and live the right way; to those Christians who pray without ceasing and read the bible constantly and, by the way, send as much money as possible to them (the preachers). You don't hear them talk a whole lot about working hard or getting educated or patiently persevering. Indeed, some years ago the Chapel's treasurer and I went to a seminar in Tampa put on by the Willowbrook organization which

offered (for a price) church stewardship models based on the teachings of Jesus – a bit of a stretch, to say the least.

Now, there's nothing in our bible or our tradition about God not wanting us to prosper – in fact, we are urged to work hard and live well so that we might be happy and enjoy a positive relationship with him...and this, for Christians, through Jesus. But it doesn't take a whole lot of bible reading to discover who Jesus hung around with and what he primarily cared about...and these weren't rich people or getting rich. Jesus was concerned for the poor and needy...and said that those who had more should help those who had less. Indeed, he criticized and condemned those with more who didn't help those with less. Jesus was all for a more equitable sharing of the world's wealth...not for everybody getting as much as he or she could without concern for the less fortunate. So Jesus is not the answer for those asking: *How can I get rich?*

Jesus is not the answer if the question concerns personal power. You would think, from the way politicians throw his name around, that he is a member of their campaign teams and/or on their staffs if and when they get elected. They act as though everything they do is morally and ethically motivated and solely for the good of others. They act as though they are in constant communication with God, usually through Jesus, and that he gives them their "marching orders" (or at least agrees with what they want to do and where they want to go). They act as though he has personally guided them to their positions of influence and prestige because they, and they alone, are the ones needed in the political offices they hold.

When you think of the picture of Jesus presented in and by the New Testament, does all that square with what you find there? I don't think so. I'm not suggesting that politicians are never moral or ethical...but I am suggesting that Jesus doesn't care what they do for a living, although he might care about how they do the work to which they are elected. Jesus, remember, distanced himself from all political power and those who held it. He only came in contact with them when they were hurting those who were under their authority...and then it was as their adversary and critic, not as their supporter or ally. Jesus, himself, indicated time and again that his "kingdom" was a spiritual one rather than an earthly one...so he presented no plans or procedures on how to run a political campaign. So Jesus is not the answer for those asking: *How can I attain power?*

Jesus is not the answer if the question concerns national dominance. Every nation that has ever fought a war has claimed that God was on its side...and it doesn't matter what religion was dominant in that country. So a predominantly Christian nation fights in the name of Jesus and a predominantly Jewish nation fights in the name of Jehovah and a predominantly Muslim nation fights in the name of Allah...and all of them kill with the same gusto and self-righteousness in what each perceives, somehow, as a "holy war". I'm not suggesting here that war is never justified or necessary...but I am suggesting that we leave Jesus, the "Prince of Peace", out of it. And I am also suggesting that when it comes to national preference and prominence, God doesn't play favorites – all people are his people; all families are his family. And, in some way, he blesses them all equally. What they do with those blessings might vary, but the love of God doesn't.

Were you listening when I read this morning's scripture lesson? Then you remember how furious those Jews worshiping in

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Cosmopolitan Community Church is actively seeking and accepting resumes for the position of Pastor.

They are a historic church established in 1923 under the leadership of the late Dr. John Russell Harvey. The church has been led by three outstanding spiritual leaders: the late Dr. John Russell Harvey (1923-1932), the late Dr. Mary G. Evans (1932-1966), and Rev. Dr. Henry O. Hardy (1967- retirement, December 2014).

Cosmopolitan has consistently been a pillar in the urban landscape for over 90 years. The church has historically been involved in the spiritual growth and civic development of the local community. They are searching for a Senior Pastor with the passion and creativity to get them growing in both numbers and impact. They look forward to what God has planned for them next.

Interested candidates should mail resumes to:

Cosmopolitan Community Church
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Attn: Pastoral Search Committee

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Roser Community Church in Anna Maria, FL seeks an energetic, full-time Associate Pastor to work with the Senior Pastor and lay leadership to develop and expand our Christian Discipleship programs for all ages, to increase hands-on mission opportunities and to aid the Senior Pastor in worship activities. We are a lay-led 400 member non-denominational church with a traditional worship format. Applicants must be a graduate or near graduate of a divinity school recognized by the American Association of Theological Schools; an ordained Christian minister of the Gospel or a candidate for ordination; and have experience as a leader and developer of Christian Education programs. Send resume to pastorsearch@roschurch.com by April 17, 2015.

Sermon cont'd. from page 7

the synagogue got with Jesus when he said that, in the past, the folks who were sometimes apparently helped by God through difficult times were not necessarily Jews! And to claim that God is always on the same wavelength as Americanism or German-ism or Russian-ism or Iranian-ism or Congo-ism or any-ism has no biblical foundation – in fact, such a claim would fly in the face of what the bible does say. So Jesus is not the answer for those asking: *How is my nation favored over all other nations?*

There are numerous other questions to which Jesus is not the answer. Jesus is not the answer for those who see the wrongs in the world and the people who hurt others and do not attempt to do anything about any of it in the belief that Jesus, too, would have sat back and meekly accepted all that happened, good or bad, fair or unfair, just or unjust – seemingly they don't remember what he did to the temple money-changers who were bilking the poor and desperate. Jesus is not the answer for those who expect that they deserve special treatment because they behave a certain way or believe a certain way or speak a certain way – seemingly they don't remember what he said about God's sunshine and rain falling upon everyone without regard for their self-perceived goodness. Jesus is not the answer for those who think that, because they call themselves Christians, they are better than everyone else who is not a Christian...or their brand of Christian – seemingly they don't remember that Jesus was not a Christian...nor was he legalistic or ritualistic as he bent the rules, when necessary, to do the real work of God.

So to what is Jesus the answer, an answer, our answer? Jesus is our answer to those questions concerning how one should live in keeping with what Jesus, at least, perceived as the will of God. And Jesus is our answer to those questions concerning how one can attain a clearer picture of the divine and gain some guidance on how to form a closer relationship with God. And Jesus is our answer to those questions concerning how lives can be changed for the better in terms of caring and compassion, of dedication and discipleship, of sacrifice and service, of faith and fortitude. And Jesus is our answer to those questions concerning how to acquire the strength to overcome such problems as worthlessness and despondency, of loneliness and despair. And Jesus is our answer to those questions concerning the possibility of eternal life. And Jesus is our answer to those questions concerning how one can and why one should become, as much as possible, like him. Like him?

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Jesus might be the answer...but what is the question?

Death – and Life cont'd. from page 3

not a ghost of Christmas past: we are on track to achieve for the second year in a row the Vision 2020 growth goals! The power of the Resurrection is real, and we are seeing it in our midst!

Whether it's in our own spirits, or in our Christian congregations whose impending doom is announced repeatedly in the media, or in our community church movement whose witness is so desperately needed in a world of spiritual dis-ease, the power of resurrection is real. So this season let us not repeat the formula as though it is a dirge. Let us proclaim the good news as it is – ever new and ever present. The Lord is risen. The Lord is risen indeed.