

REFLECTIONS

The Monthly Newsletter of Grace OPC

“COMMUNITY” OR “COMMUNION”?

By Pastor Brian De Jong

American Evangelical Christians in our day are reacting against decades of autonomous individualism, and understandably so. For far too long the American church has promoted a do-it-yourself and go-it-alone approach to the Christian faith. But even Lone Ranger Christians discover sooner or later that they need a faithful companion – their “Tonto.”

This is one of the complaints of the so-called “Emerging Church.” Reacting against American individualism, these writers and thinkers are calling for “community.” They believe that one finds significance in “the community” – a path to recapturing the lost corporate aspects that have long defined the Christian Church.

As Dr. Craig Troxel pointed out at the recent Presbytery Christian Education conference in Janesville, we in confessional Presbyterian circles have a slightly different take on the rampant individualism of our age. We want more than “community” – we desire “communion.”

Dr. Troxel pointed us to the much neglected chapter of our Westminster Confession entitled Of the Communion of Saints (ch.26). This whole chapter is rich in insight, but especially the first paragraph. That paragraph begins by recognizing that “*All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their head, by his Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory...*” Yea and Amen! Praise God for our fellowship with Christ! But the paragraph goes on to add crucial perspective: “*and, being united to one another in love,*

they have communion in each other’s gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.”



The reminder of the second half of that amazing paragraph is this: since we are united to Christ our Head, we are also united to one another as mutual members of the one body. We have union with Him and communion with one another. And that communion of the saints obliges us to important duties for mutual good. In other words, we are connected through communion, and that is the basis for our corporate oneness – our community.

I am increasingly convinced that most Evangelicals in our day are willing to settle for what I would call a “spiritual subdivision.” That is an arrangement where people may live in close proximity to one another, and see each other frequently, while remaining essential strangers to each other. They “relate” without any substantial “relationship.” They don’t know, nor do they care to find out, the names of their next-door neighbors in this spiritual subdivision. They have a thin veneer of “community” but it lacks depth or substance.

Believing what chapter 26 of the WCF teaches, we must take time and make efforts to know one another, and to share in each other’s lives...

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UNDERSTANDING THE “EMERGING CHURCH”

by Pastor Brian De Jong

Prior to our Spring Presbytery meeting in Janesville, we had the opportunity to enjoy a conference on the “Emerging Church.” The Christian Education Committee of Presbytery planned the conference, inviting Dr. Craig Troxel to be the speaker. Dr. Troxel serves as Pastor of Calvary OPC in Glenside, PA. Dr. Troxel also teaches at Westminster Seminary and the Ministerial Training Institute of the OPC. He is a member of our denominational Christian Education committee.

Dr. Troxel’s assignment was to provide and introduction and analysis of a movement that is increasingly significant. In two forty-five minute sessions, he did an admirable job of describing and evaluating this far-flung phenomenon. (Audio files of the two sessions, and the question/answer period can be found at our Presbytery’s website, under the “Calendar and Activities” sub-page. On the top, at the right, you’ll find Presbytery Seminar 2007. The website is at www.pmwopc.org)

Having done some reading on this subject, let me provide an summary of the concept of the “Emerging Church” and of Dr. Troxel’s critique of it. I will follow Dr. Troxel’s basic organization, to some extent.

First of all, what exactly is this “Emerging Church”? Though they themselves dislike being defined as such, the EC is a new movement among evangelical Christians that rejects much of traditional evangelicalism in favor of a new postmodern approach to Christianity. They clearly embrace postmodern philosophy as their

guiding principle, in order to be relevant in their outreach and witness to contemporary culture.

Dr. Troxel provided this definition, from a book by Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger: *“Emerging churches are communities that practice the way of Jesus within postmodern cultures. This definition encompasses nine practices. Emerging churches (1) identify with the life of Jesus, (2) transform the secular realm, and (3) live highly communal lives. Because of these three activities, they (4) welcome the stranger, (5) serve with generosity, (6) participate as producers, (7) create as created beings, (8) lead as a body, (9) take part in spiritual activities.”* (Gibbs & Bolger, Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures, Baker Academy, 2005)

To understand the development of the EC, you need to start by looking at the background of this movement. They come from the broad evangelicalism of American Christianity. That would include Christians and churches which believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and accept the inspiration and authority of the Bible. They would be represented by leaders such as Billy Graham, Bill Bright and James Dobson. They are not Reformed Christians, however. Most of them would be Arminians rather than Calvinists. And most would prefer a congregational or even parachurch form of church government over Presbyterianism. Many of them once had a fundamentalist outlook, and can be very dogmatic. In more recent years, Evangelicalism has been dominated by the Mega-church and seeker-sensitive movements.

De Jong Continued...

This is the “family tree” of the EC.

Philosophically speaking, they have bought in to the philosophy called “Postmodernism.” Postmodernism is notoriously hard to define, but here is my try. Postmodernism is a reaction against rationalism and the Enlightenment. Postmodernism rejects the idea of absolute truth, and distrusts human reason. According to Postmodernism we cannot know the world as it truly is, so all we can do is talk about it. We shape, or make, the world into what we want it to be through our use of language. Furthermore, since there is no over-arching objective and absolute truth, we are left with perspectives, stories, opinions and personal preferences. It is what some will call “my truth” which works for me, but may not be true for you. With no standard of absolute truth, everything becomes relative and a matter of subjective opinion.

[Interestingly, even the statement that ‘there are no absolutes’ is itself an absolute statement, and is self-defeating]

As a result of their uncritical acceptance of Postmodern philosophy, the EC wants to leave the world of “absolutes” and search for “authenticity.” The best way they can think to do so is by joining in “conversations” within “community” to hear other peoples’ stories – even non-Christian religious stories. As Dr. Troxel observed, since all human knowledge is considered a social construct rather than a

reflection of reality, you should go to the community and find meaning there.

Key to understanding how such a movement could develop, you must realize that these folk are protesting some problems they’ve experienced in evangelical circles. They have lived through the seeker-sensitive and mega-church experiments, and have been dissatisfied and disen-

chanted. They mention several problems that are real issues, such as the business model where the Pastor is viewed as the CEO of a corporation. They’ve reacted against the bigger-is-better mentality, where numerical and financial growth are paramount. They view the mega-church movement as plastic and phony – too closely wed to consumerism and the entertainment industry. They dislike the extreme individualism, and long for some sense of “community.” As Dr. Troxel said, we in the OPC would

agree with them in these criticisms. Their reactions are understandable.

What we cannot share is their solutions to these problems. Their alternatives are equally unacceptable for a variety of reasons. One problem with their alternative is that it is often irresponsibly provocative. They border on being rude for the sake of being rude. Another difficulty is their lack of real accountability. No matter what they say, there is no way to hold them accountable for their overstatements. They distrust all authority, and so church discipline is out

“Philosophically speaking, they have bought into the philosophy called ‘Postmodernism.’”

De Jong Concluded...

of the question. They want the opportunity to say anything they want, but never have to face the consequences for their words.

Many in the Emerging Church are deeply suspicious of the Protestant Reformation, and of Reformed Theology. They see it as too “absolute” and so they reject Protestant thought. Some even call themselves “Post-protestants.” This raises real questions about their theological directions, and where they will eventually end up.

With no connection to the development of theology, they are open to heresy. At one point Dr. Troxel noted that “much of the emerging church is suffering, because if doctrine and practice are constantly changing, the result is living heresy. Dead orthodoxy is a real threat, but so is living heresy, and there is where a lot of the emergent church is heading.”

Another serious danger posed by the EC has to do with worship. Although they loudly repudiate “tradition,” they feel free to borrow elements of worship from Anglican, Roman Catholic and even Eastern Orthodox practice. They especially like the “mystery” of Catholicism and Orthodoxy, and use elements such as candles and incense to create an atmosphere of mysticism. Dr. Troxel quoted a PCA friend as saying that the Emergents were “The Salad Bar Guys” – meaning that they approach worship like a person going through a salad bar. You pick and choose the ingredients you want from the bar, making up your own salad to fit your own tastes. A good analogy!

Finally, the EC poses problems in its

prescription for reformation. Although they distrust the Protestant Reformation, they talk a lot about reforming Christianity. Yet, in their view, contemporary culture has become the standard rather than Scripture. As D.A. Carson points out in a book critiquing this movement, “What you have here is Reformed according to culture rather than Reformed according to Scripture.” So, like their spiritual parents and grandparents, you have a movement that craves to be culturally relevant and culturally acceptable. They want to be the “cool” church. And their reason for doing so is supposedly missions and evangelism. Be “cool” in order to reach the “cool” generation that is currently unchurched. While it is important for us to reach out to unchurched people in our society, we don’t have to adopt their quirks in order to reach them with the gospel of Christ. “True” is better than “cool.”

What will become of the Emerging Church? It is hard to say, but the long-term outlook is not encouraging. Very likely their movement will run its course and spend its energy, and then cease to be an influence for any good. By embracing Postmodernism, the EC “has a tiger by the tail, but they’re not being honest about it.” It would not be surprising to see that tiger turn on the EC, and devour them entirely.



Comments on Finances

by Joel Moody

General Fund receipts through February totaled \$19,839.64 as compared to the budget of \$22,333.76. Contributing to this shortage was one February Sunday in which services were cancelled due to snow. In addition, there was one evening Sunday in February where services were combined with Calvary and Bethel and services at Grace Church were cancelled for that evening. General Fund disbursements through February totaled \$21,329.35 as compared to the budget of \$22,333.76. Through the end of February, the General Fund decreased by \$1,007.20.

Benevolence Receipts through February totaled \$2,065.65 while the budget

was \$2,720.83. Each month, \$425.00 is sent to Worldwide Outreach for the General Missions outreach of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. In addition, each month \$187.50 is sent to the Midwest Presbytery's Church Extension Committee. During March, \$550.00 was provided to Rev. Karl Thompson for his work among the Menominee Indians in northern Wisconsin. During April, disbursements are planned for the Hub-Spokes Missions Program. Disbursements of \$2,100.00 are planned for the support of the Wingards and their work in Eritrea, Don Ritsman's work in South Korea, and the work in Haiti.

Pastor's Front Page Article Continued...

... To have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and to perform the obligations and duties requires time, energy and engagement. Through a variety of avenues, we at Grace Church are trying to promote this sort of interaction. Through worship services, Bible studies, prayer meeting, social events, service projects and outreach opportunities, we come to share in each other's lives and enjoy communion in one another's gifts and graces. And you're invited to join in— come share in this communion of the saints!



April Birthdays



Happy Birthday!!!

Old-Fashioned Hymn Sing

You are invited to the Old-Fashioned Hymn sing, which will be held at Grace Church on Sunday evening, April 29th. The Hymn Sing will be held after the evening service and a time of refreshments. Come and join with us in singing selections of hymns and psalms and listening while others share their talents through music.





Grace OPC

April 2007

Showing forth the excellencies of Jesus Christ



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 Youth Group	2 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m. <i>Theology 4 p.m.</i>	3 Pine Haven Study, 1:30 p.m.	4 Prayer Meeting, 7 p.m.			7 Men's Bible Study 7:30 a.m.
8 Missions Sunday	9 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.	10 Session Meeting, 6:30 p.m.	11 Prayer Meeting, 7 p.m.			14
15	16 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m. <i>Theology 4 p.m.</i>	17 Pine Haven Study, 1:30 p.m.	18 Prayer Meeting, 7 p.m.	19	20	21
22	23 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.	24	25 Prayer Meeting, 7 p.m.	26	27 Catechism Class 8:45 a.m.	28
29 Lord's Supper, (p.m.) <i>Old-Fashioned Hymn Sing</i>	30 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.					

"I have hidden YOUR WORD in my heart that I might not sin against you."

Psalm 119:11

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Nursing Home Ministry

By Pastor Brian De Jong

During the past month our congregation has had numerous opportunities to engage in the important work of nursing home ministry. On Tuesday evening, March 6th, we conducted a devotional service for the residents at Pine Haven. Then on Sunday afternoon, March 25th we held a worship service at Meadow View Manor Nursing Home, for the residents there. Add to this the regular Bible studies at Pine Haven on the first and third Tuesday afternoons, and the other visiting that goes on informally. All things considered, we have considerable opportunity to care for these elderly and infirmed folk.

This ministry is Biblically and spiritually important. Though not mentioned by name, nursing home ministry clearly fits under the model that Jesus commends in Matthew 25 – *“I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink. I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.”* The really stunning thing about such ministry is what Jesus tells his faithful and righteous followers: *“Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.”* To extend such love and kindness to even the least follower of Christ is to do it “unto Me.” Our love for Jesus is expressed in our care and concern for His people. By contrast, when Jesus condemns the wicked pretenders in that passage, he tells them “to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it unto Me.” To neglect them is to neglect Christ – a chilling thought.

This ministry of mercy to those in

nursing homes is also practically important. At least some of these people are largely abandoned by their families. They have few visitors, and little contact with people outside the other residents, the staff and volunteers. Since they are unable to get out, they frequently cannot attend worship or participate in the life of the church. For the Christians in nursing homes, this leaves them spiritually isolated and easily discouraged. For the non-Christians, it cuts off the good news of the gospel from their hearing, and leaves them unevangelized. But when caring Christians visit nursing homes and engage with the residents, spiritual encouragement can be conveyed, and the gospel can go forth to lost sinners.

In speaking to one of the male residents at the Meadow View service, he was very appreciative of the message. He commended it for being clear and true to God’s word. It made his day that we came and ministered to him and his fellow residents. The people at Pine Haven always say the same – how much they appreciate the efforts of our church to spiritually care for them. They love to sing the hymns, and to hear God’s word, and to have brief fellowship with other believers.

How can you be involved? Make an effort to join us the next time we go to Meadow View. Ask Pam if you can join in the Tuesday Bible Study at Pine Haven. Or, you could just go visiting yourself. Call Antoinette and set up a time to come by and visit with her – she would welcome it! You can be involved in a meaningful way, and your caring attention may brighten someone’s life!

Thank You

I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the congregation for your prayers, cards, calls and visits. The Lord is taking care of my needs both great & small.



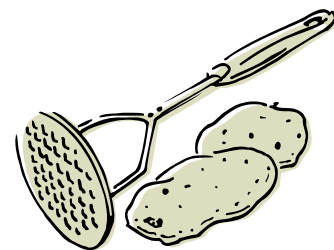
Antoinette De Master

Creamy Mashed Potato Bake

- ★ 1 1/3 cups of French-fried onions
- ★ 3 cups potatoes (hot & mashed)
- ★ 1 cup sour cream
- ★ 1/4 cup milk
- ★ 1/3 tsp garlic powder
- ★ 1 cup cheddar cheese (shredded)

Combine mashed potatoes, sour cream, milk, & garlic powder in large bowl; mix well. Spoon half the mixture into 2 quart baking dish. Sprinkle with 2/3 cup onions and 1/2 cup cheese. Top with remaining potato mixture. Bake 30 minutes at 350° until hot. Top with remaining onions and cheese. Bake 5 minutes until onions are golden.

Wendy Froh



“There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen, that it is from the hand of God. For who can have enjoyment without Him?”

Young Reflections

A page designed especially for the children of Grace Church (by Samantha De Jong)

My favorite plant will be blooming in just a few weeks. The Lily of the Valley is a small flower with a beautiful scent. Some-smell to say that something made God of the Old Testament were said to have might smell nice to our Heavenly Fa-
“And do not forget to do good and to God is pleased.” Just like tiny white your life with the delicious aroma of kindness to others.



times, the Bible uses the idea of a sweet happy. For example, the animal sacrifices a “pleasing aroma” to God. What else ther? Hebrews 13:16 gives us a clue.
share with others, for with such sacrifices lilies fill a room with their fragrance, fill

Sibling Scramble

Use lines to connect the names of brothers and sisters from Bible stories.

Benjamin	Shem	Ishmael	Cain	Leah	Martha	Aaron
Rachel	Moses	Jacob	Ham	Abel	James	Mary
Miriam	Isaac	John	Joseph	Lazarus	Japheth	Esau



BIBLE MENAGERIE



Complete each rhyme with the name of the correct animal. To win a prize, write your answers on separate piece of paper and give them to Samantha De Jong.

The Israelites’ food store began to fail.
 So they wouldn’t go hungry, God sent
 _____ *Numbers 11:31*

What a heap of trouble Adam did make
 For all mankind when he listened to a
 _____ *Genesis 3:1*

God’s Holy Spirit, sent from above;
 For our eyes taking the form of a
 _____ *John 1:32*

By the little brook Cherith, Elijah found haven
 When he got hungry, he was fed by a
 _____ *I Kings 17:11*

For praying to God toward the city of Zion,
 Daniel was sentenced to be eaten by a
 _____ *Daniel 6:16*

When out of the bushes a lion did leap,
 David ran after and rescued his
 _____ *I Samuel 17:34-35*

Bonus Question: Can you define the word “menagerie”?

Getting to know... Kathy Rodencal

compiled by Harlan Harmelink

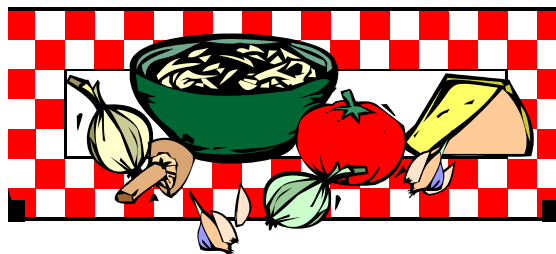
Pine Haven Italian Night Dinner

The Pine Haven Auxillary Board will sponsor an Italian Night Dinner, Tuesday, April 24th at the First Reformed Church in Cedar Grove. Dinner will be served from 4:30 p.m.

to 7:00 p.m.. More details will follow.

The Auxillary Board is celebrating 50

years of God's faithfulness. Please plan to attend. Mark your calendars.





Proclaiming the
Excellencies of our
Lord Jesus Christ.

The Monthly Newsletter
of Grace OPC

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★ Did you know that the writer of the hymn “Day By Day” was from Sweden?

★ Her name was Lina Sadell and she was a pastor’s daughter?

★ When older and while on a boat, Lina helplessly watched as her father fell overboard?

★ His death had a profound effect upon her hymn writing?

★ Her song was later translated into english by Andrew L. Skoog?

★ Skoog ended up living in St. Paul, MN?

★ Some have referred to Lina Sadell as the “Fanny Crosby of Sweden”?

Information and quote found in 101 Hymn Stories by Kenneth W. Osbeck; Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI, 1982: pg. 57--59.

Kathy Rodencal, continued...

