



THE NEWS

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Please visit our web site:
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ED IS STILL THINKING

Several years ago I preached a series of sermons exploring some of the theological and historical pieces that are part of the United Church of Christ's past and present. During one of those sermons I kept repeating the phrase, "Congregationalism is a polity, not a theology." After the service several people asked what I meant by polity, which of course told me that my point had been lost no matter what the intent.

Polity, for those of you who can't wait another minute for clarification, simply refers to the type of governance by which we choose to live in our denomination and local churches. Congregationalism puts the power of decision-making squarely in the hands of the local church. As our mothers, fathers, and teachers taught us early in life, with power comes the burden of responsibility. This is a lesson some of us learned the hard way and one that some people never learn.

For example, I had to learn early in life that if I worked hard all day cutting grass earning a few dollars, this gave me the power to choose how to spend it. If I took it to Red Caldwell's store and bought a whole box of Reese's Peanut Butter Cups, I would get four extra cups for free. The burden of such a decision was soon realized when I had to find money from somewhere to fill up the gas can in order to work the next day. I loved those peanut butter cups followed by a Moon Pie and washed down with a RC Cola, but it usually left me sick and broke, with my power to make choices severely limited.

Some of us recently noted that apparently Pat Robertson's mom, dad, and teachers didn't help him with these lessons. He seems not to have learned how to use wisely the power of his television exposure for the good of God or others. I guess that he always had enough money to buy peanut butter cups and failed to learn any lessons.

Forgive me, I digress. First Community Church has a great deal of freedom and power in the way we forge our communal life. We own our building and that gives us power to choose how to use it. But with such power comes the burden of whether or not we use it well in providing hospitality and grace for those outside and inside its walls.

You have the power to call your own pastor as I have the power to seek a call in any church. With such power comes an understood agreement that we will continue to support each other in our respective ministries and to use our combined gifts to share good news to others as long as we walk together in all God's ways. We agreed to this years ago.

We have the power to decide and support an appropriate budget according to the dictates of our collective conscience. With such power comes the burden of choosing whom we shall serve and how we shall live that others might know of God's great love and grace. We have the burden of deciding how to balance our spending between ourselves and others and whether we find some missions more significant to us than others.

The joy of being a Congregationalist is obvious to many. Americans are a people who love freedom above all things. But with such polity come responsibilities and we often forget that our call to be responsible comes from a theological place. We can bungle our decisions and priorities pretty badly, if we make it only about what we feel, rather than what we discern the gospel to say. And what is it that we glean from the scriptures? That everything is about relationship and covenant. We use our freedom best when we live with integrity in honoring each other's call and the call of those serving with us. These include folk like Douglas Anders, our South Central Conference Minister; Charles Stark, our Director of Outdoor Ministries at Slumber Falls Camp; Sherry Prestemon, our Director at Backbay Mission in Biloxi, Mississippi; and Geoffrey Black, the General Minister of the UCC. There are many others. We are all linked and are held together by a thread so thin and yet so incredibly strong; and because we are in covenant with these folk and thousands like them here and elsewhere, we pray for them and support them. It is our joy and our burden.

On January 31st we will meet once again for our annual congregational meeting. I hope that most of you will stay, enjoy some time together, and celebrate another year's ministry. I pray that as you vote on something so utterly boring as a budget, it might occur to you that thousands of your brothers and sisters across the globe will be thankful for the way you use that freedom. I also pray that as you vote on what may be the most boring item of all, the new Constitution and Bylaws, you will smile and take into account that these rules help us to honor such covenants with each other and God. And when we vote on our officers, I pray that you will do more than smile and be thankful that you don't have their job. I pray that you will wonder at that moment and during the days ahead how you might pray for them and consider how you might volunteer to make their jobs easier.

Congregationalism is merely a polity that offers us more freedom. It can only work if our theology and faith lead us to use it wisely. I've been thinking about it. I suggest that you do the same.

BEWARE OF COMPASSION FATIGUE

The images from Haiti are terrible, with few stories of hope emerging. The media will be gone soon enough but the people will be fighting this for decades to come. If you have yet to give and would like to make sure that your money arrives with little administrative overhead, feel free to make the check out to FCC with a note "for Haiti" and we will channel it quickly through our national offices. We have ecumenical partners already in action and the money will be well used.

ANNUAL MEETING TO BE HELD JANUARY 31ST

Following worship on the 31st, we will be holding our annual meeting. At that time the following items will be put forth by the FCC General Board for the congregation's consideration:

1. The 2010 recommended budget
2. The recommended nominations for the General Board officers and committee appointments
3. The recommended Constitution and Bylaws

Please read new Constitution and Bylaws as circulated and the budget information as found in the annual report. If you have any question regarding any item, please talk with the pastor, Pat Fugate or other members of the board: Rick White, Rosann Naim, Tina Amyett, Larry Amyett, Joe Smith, or Jennifer Ratliff. If they cannot answer your questions, they will make every effort to find out from someone else.

JANUARY 24TH TWO GREAT MUSICAL CHOICES

At 3 p.m. The TCU Cello Ensemble with Soprano Colleen Mallette will perform in the Sanctuary of East Dallas Christian Church. This is part of the annual East Dallas Church's cultural series. At 4:30 p.m. Doane Choir from The Doane College Music Department will be performing at Round Grove United Church of Christ, 249 E. FM 3040 (Round Grove Road) in Lewisville, TX. This choir has toured globally and this will be one of only two concerts scheduled in Texas.

ANNUAL REPORT'S READY ... BUT ARE YOU?

Have you been out of sorts since the New Year began because you failed to receive your favorite book at Christmas? Fret no more, because on Sunday, Jan. 24th, the First Community Church's Annual Report to the Congregation will be ready for your reading enjoyment. You will read committee reports capturing the excitement of the past year—much like half-time highlights during a football game. Pick them up. They are hot off the press. Enjoy!!!

CONTACT FROM HEATHER HODGES SANCHEZ

Heather has given her new address and information to the office. She is surviving the Billings winter and is in a warm, comfortable apartment complex where meals are served and the conversation stimulating. We miss her and continue to remember her in our prayers. You may contact her by e-mail, at duckula55@yahoo.com

JOBS WITH JUSTICE PLANNING HEARING ON UNEMPLOYMENT

On Friday, February 12th, Jobs with Justice will be holding a hearing from 2-4p.m. on the unemployment crisis. We will be hearing many voices from across all economic and class lines in order to highlight the growing need in our city neighborhoods. This will take place in the sub-court room at 410 S. Beckley Ave. We hope to raise the awareness of citizens and the media through this effort.

AN INVITATION...

If you have been wanting to know more about FCC and becoming a member, please let Ed know. He is planning a breakfast where such questions can get answered.



First Community Church

9120 Ferguson Road

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NON-PROFIT