

The Ambassador

News and Views From the Hill



*A Newsletter From The First Baptist Church of Norwich
239 West Main Street, Norwich, CT 06360 Phone: 860-889-0369*

April 2005

Sunrise in the Park

As the last chorus of “Christ The Lord Is Risen Today” wafted up toward the city, the sun broke free from behind the houses on Laurel Hill and Howard Brown Park and the 116 early morning worshippers were bathed in golden sunlight. Rev. Dr. Cal Lord commented that it was a sign that God was pleased with our worship on Easter morning.

Rev. Dr. Lars Wilhelmsson of the Missionary Alliance Church invoked God’s presence and called us to praise him and give thanks for the risen Lord. Rev. Jerry Davis of the Tabernacle of Deliverance and Praise read the scriptural story and offered prayer. Rev. Jim Eaton, from the United Congregational Church preached the Easter sermon. He reminded us that the empty tomb meant that we no longer needed to be afraid. God was now going to be with us. He then told us that we were to go out into the world to meet Jesus



Rev. Jim Eaton shares the good news! Jesus Christ has risen!

“in the least of these” and to minister in his name.

A special Easter Band, under the direction of Rev. Dwight Anderson, accompanied the singing again this year as our own Pastor played the song leader. Rev. Evans Olibrice offered the benediction and everyone was off to enjoy the breakfast at Missionary Alliance.

This was the tenth annual Sunrise Service at Howard Brown Park. From 1986 through 1994 we met at the Fort Shantock State Park on our

own. With talk of the Mohegan Indian Tribe putting a claim in on the Park in early 1995, we moved our service to the center of the city. It seemed quite fitting since we had our roots along the river back in the late eighteenth century. That year we held our own service at the beautifully restored Howard Brown waterfront park.

In 1996 we invited Rev. Bruce Elsensohn and

the members of the Central Baptist church to join us for the first community Sunrise Service. In 1997 we opened it up further and Rev. Jim Eaton of United Congregational, and Rev. Michael Maixner of Norwich Worship Center joined us and the rest is history.

We have had as few as 26 at the services and as many as 175. The common denominator over the years has been the joy of greeting Jesus early on Easter morn. Praise God. We did it again this year.

Worship

Come and worship!

April 3, 2005

Communion Sunday

Scripture: John 20:19-31

Sermon: "Mission Possible!"



April 10, 2005

Scripture: Luke 24:13-21

Sermon: "What Are You Hoping For?"

April 17, 2005

Scripture: Acts 2:42-47

Sermon: "Flying Together Like A Gaggle of Geese"

April 24, 2005

Scripture: I Peter 2:2-10

Sermon: "What Are God's Prized Possessions?"

Special Music by the Praise Band

**Daylight-Saving Time
begins, April 3, 2005**



On Sunday, May 15 Mark and Bonnie Ambruso will bring their son, William, before the Lord in a service of family dedication. Be sure to join us as we celebrate their joy.

Lilies, Tulips, Daffodils and Hyacinths Brighten up Easter Sunday Morn

On Easter Sunday we had a wonderful display of colorful plants at the front of the sanctuary. They were given in honor and in memory of loved ones and speak to our Christian hope. The flowers were for the following people;



In honor of Mildred L. Grant, Lorraine J. Bober, Mr & Mrs Raymond S. Deptulski, Sr., Mr. & Mrs. James West Sr., Paula Stone & Doris S. Royce.

In memory of Frank Adams, Tom Adams, Marie Adams, Mr. & Mrs. Clarence Stauble, Dorothy, Pauline & George, Mark Evans, Mr. & Mrs. Raymond Barber, Jennifer L. Kane, John & Priscilla Kane, Wesley, Herbert, Lewis and Louise Bromley, The Witham Family: Otis, Mabel, Beverly, Richard & William, The Bray Family: Robert H., Robert B. & Arnal, May F. Bowen & Harold & Esther Brockway Jr., Theodore Calkins Jr., Ignatius DiBiagio, Anna &

Marino DeNovellis, Helen Ornberg Joseph B Bober Jr., Stella Deptulski, Ann K. Bober, Oza (Ray) Stewart, Mr. & Mrs Gerald K Shorey, Mr & Mrs Harold E. Diehl Sr., Harold E. Diehl Jr., Richard & Flora Kyle, Bill Duguay, Harry Ferguson, Bob & Grace Stott, Dr. Ralph Lopez, Mr. & Mrs. Leroy Peckham, Clifford Peckham, Shirley & 2 boys, Ken Duntz, Florence Rusaniuk, Mary Ellen Johnson & Jeffrey Young, Lillian Bushey & Dorothy Gabriele, Henry C. Pendleton Sr., Charles & Grace Pendleton, Frank & Georgianna O'Neil, Anders & Marguerite Peterson, Celeste Copeland, Donna Grow, Paul & Esther Lorraine, Grace Rico, Mr. & Mrs. Amos Russell and Mr. & Mrs. Rossiter Willet, Richard Rogers, Mr. & Mrs Donald Royce, Mr. & Mrs. James Sypher, Butch Sargent, David Jordan, Louise & George H. Strouse Jr., Leonard D Royce, Mr. & Mrs. Henry Stewart, Mr. & Mrs. James Walker, Lloyd Cochran, Helen Benker.

Thank you to all who gave to make our day a memorable one!

Welcome of New Members planned for April 24

We are planning to welcome at least two people into church membership on Sunday, April 24. Ken Taylor and Gary

Schuster will be joining the church family by transfer of Church letter. Ken comes to us from the First Congregational Church of Norwich and Gary from Memorial Baptist in Hartford.

Daryl Alves has also expressed an interest in being baptized that day if his schedule allows him to be back.



**Become
Part of
Our
Church
Family**

He is currently in basic training with the U.S. Marine Corps.

Anyone else interested in joining the church should plan to attend a special meeting

on April 10 following Church.

There are three ways to become an official member of the church. You can be baptized. You can ask for a transfer or recommendation from your previous church or if you have been baptized and have had no contact with a former church for years, you can join by a simple confession of faith.

Looking Back at March

Palm Sunday Breakfast was a Super Time

About seventy men gathered for the Annual Palm Sunday worship and breakfast at Central Baptist Church this year. They received a special treat as Rev. Greg Hamby from Quaker Hill Baptist gave the message. Rev. Hamby shared insights on how to become a winner by using his trip to the Super Bowl in Jacksonville as an illustration. He really got into the part of number one fan by donning his New England Patriot Hat and Jersey.

Following the worship, the men enjoyed a terrific breakfast put on by the men of the Church. It was a great start to a special day.



Rev. Greg Hamby came to the service with his two sons.

Easter Sunday Draws Crowd To Worship

Easter Sunday was beautiful in every possible way. It began with an uplifting Sunrise service and continued on to our morning worship where 240 gathered to celebrate the resurrection.

The choir opened the service with a bright introit and the Easter Band raised the roof with

their accompaniment of "Christ The Lord is Risen Today." Then Joseph Brown took our breath away with his trumpet voluntary.

The Pastor shared the story of the resurrection promise with the children by teaching them just how good "empty" could be.

The Pastor went on to preach on the empty tomb and how that is good news for us today. (You can read the scaled back version of the sermon "That was Then and This Is Now" on the Church Web site.) We closed the service with the Pastor's favorite song, "He Arose."



Joseph Brown on the trumpet.

Fishkin Family Celebrates With New Son, Connor



The Fishkin Family

Joel and Sharon Fishkin brought their son, Connor, before the Lord in a service of family dedication on March 20. His older sister, Madalyn was standing by his side to make sure everything went well.

Connor was a perfect gentleman and he enjoyed the Pastor's march down the aisle to greet his new Church family.

We promised to keep the family in our prayers and to encourage them as they share the love of Christ with their son. Next time you see Connor at Church, make sure to smile at him and say "hello!"

Way of the Cross Was Very Moving For Those Present

For the tenth year in a row, Christians from across the city gathered to remember Jesus' trek through Jerusalem. The March began at Chelsea Parade with an introduction by Bishop Michael Cote and proceeded down Boardway and Union Streets. Fourteen different clergy and congregational leaders read the scripture and shared a reflection on what the cross means to us today.

Our Pastor participated again this year and carried the cross. April Rezendes read the New Testament scripture. The service ended on the steps of the United Congregational Church. Rev. Jim Eaton encouraged us to wait on the Lord.



The Pastor looks on as April Rezendes reads the scripture.



Youth Ministry

Primary & Junior Youth Had Lots To Smile About

Our kids have been busy over the last couple of months. They have been snow tubing, bowling, playing mini-golf and sharing fun, quality time with friends.



Jennifer, Heather, Rachel and Chelsea play "Monster Gold."



The gang had fun at the NorwichTen Pin.



Mac, Rachel and Jesse survived their fourth run down the mountain on a snow tube.

Get Fired Up on April 3

Primary and Junior Youth Groups (Grades 3 - 8) will meet following worship to travel to Pawcatuck for a fun-filled pottery pointing adventure. Cost: \$7. Scholarships available. Lunch provided. We'll return to the church at approximately 2:30.

Are You Ready For Six Flags?



We are planning our Annual Trip to Six Flags on Sunday, May 15 right after church. A sign up sheet will be posted in the next couple of weeks. We need to get advance registrations for the best price.

Thanks to our Winter Nursery Volunteers!

Sharon Fishkin, Sandra Stone, Heidi Adams, Barbara Bray, Joanne Clubine, Jennifer Marcy, Sandy Mehlinger, Nancy Schuster, Fran Rogers, Brian Goldin, Zelda Earle, Penny Sargent, Jacquie Jones, & Jeannine Pestey.

Speak to Jacquie Jones if you'd like to take a turn.

Upcoming Events

Mother Daughter Banquet

Mother & Daughter
Banquet



Come join the women of the church as we celebrate Mother's Day with our annual Mother Daughter Banquet on Saturday, May 7 at 5:30 p.m. George Rezendes and his crew will be serving up a hot turkey dinner and the dancers from Style Extraordinaire of the Luis Pabon Dance Arts Center will be providing the entertainment. Make your reservations now by calling the church.

The prices are:

\$7.50 for adults

\$4.00 for children age 6 - 12

Kids 5 & under - free.



Marge Booth enjoys last year's event with her daughter, Stephanie and two granddaughters, Alisha & Hannah.

ABCCONN Annual Meeting on April 30



Register NOW as one of our church rep to attend the Annual Meeting of the American Baptist Churches of Connecticut and enjoy meeting new friends and getting newly inspired.

Come meet our new Executive Minister, Judy Allbee, attend workshops, installations (*including the installation of our Pastor Cal as the new Vice-President of ABCCONN*) and learn a bit more about our work together as Connecticut Baptists. You may even have some fun! This annual gathering will be held in New Haven this year. *The church pays your way and you can ride down in the church van. Child care is available.* Contact the church office (889-0369) for more information.

NORWICH CROP WALK 2005

Hosted by
Lee Memorial United Methodist Church.

Sunday, May 1

Walk begins at 1 PM
Registration after church

Call 889-0369 for more info.

Give Blood!

Every year at this time the blood supply drops as illness and winter weather keep donors away from blood drives. Giving blood takes about an hour - and costs nothing. Yet, every donation can help save up to 3 lives. Appointments can be made by calling 1-800-GIVE-LIFE (448-3543). The blood mobile will be in Norwich on March 29 1-6 PM at the First Congregational Church, on April 2, 9 - 3 PM at Stanton Elementary School, and on April 18, 1:30 - 6:30 PM at St. Mark's Lutheran Church.



Rev. Smith's first - and only - healing service began with quite a challenge.

Our Ministry

Share Your Blessings Thru Our Food Pantry

We have targeted the second Sunday of each month as a time when we can all bring in bottled and canned goods for our Food Pantry, but we will take your donations any time. We help an average of two families a week through our pantry. Some of them are disabled and others are simply experiencing a difficult period in their lives. Some families are part of our church family and others are part of the wider community. We do not turn anyone away, although we do limit our assistance to once a month per family.

What can you donate? Canned vegetables, fruit juices, tuna fish, pasta, spaghetti sauce, cereal, baked beans, canned pasta products, spam, beef stew, cake mixes, coffee, tea, canned fruit, applesauce, bar soap, toothpaste, shampoo, toilet tissue and anything else you can think of that will keep for several months. You bring it and we will give it away.



Parking Can Be a Challenge on Sunday Mornings at FBC

Have you ever made it to church and found that there was no place to park? Parking has become one of our biggest challenges as our congregation has grown over the years.



Fortunately for us, the Firestone Tire Store has given us permission to use the twenty two spaces behind their store for parking on Sunday mornings. We also have permission to use the Midas Parking lot across the street.

If you are able to walk the few extra steps, you could help make our church an inviting place for newcomers. Simply use the upper parking lot on Sunday morning and save the spots closer to the church for visitors and our older members and those with young children.

Enjoy a sociable morning helping us fold and label the monthly newsletter.

We usually do it during the last week of the month.

Speak to the Pastor if you would like to help.



Summer Sports Ministries Will Start Soon!

Softball

The FBC Softball team will have its first two practices at the Mashuntucket Softball Field on Sunday April 3 & April 10 at 2:00 p.m. Anyone interested in playing this year should try to make one at least one of the practices or speak to Ken Kreger (564-0613) or Brian Goldin (887-6680) in the next few weeks. The Season opens the first week of May.



To get to the practice field take Rt. 2 East. Once on 2 East you will go past Foxwoods' Casino to the last Stop light, take a right you will be on Rt. 214. Follow RT. 214 for about a mile. You will see a sign on the right announcing the Reservation, take that right. Follow this road to the Ballfield.

Bowling

The Baptist Bowlers will have an organizational meeting on Sunday, May 1 at 6:30 p.m here at the church. We will make several decisions concerning the league including a possible name change. We have extended an invitation to our sister churches in the city and it looks like we will have at least three more teams this summer. We will also have an election of officers, decide on our start date and weekly time, the weekly price and any by-law issues that might arise.

If you are interested in bowling, come to the meeting or sign up on the list outside the sanctuary.

Golf

Is there interest in setting up a golf tournament this summer? How about a FBC Golf day where those in the congregation can simply get together for a round of golf at a local course? Speak to the Pastor, **Fred Green** or **Cliff Vanase** if interested.

Wit and Wisdom

Making Patients Comfortable

...When I first trained as a chaplain, I was taught to make my hospital rounds in full dress - wearing a suit and tie, with my jacket buttoned. However, one day a patient expressed that although she needed to talk to me, she felt terribly uncomfortable lying there "in a hospital gown with her tuchas sticking out" while I sat there in a three-piece suit.

I stood up, told her I'd be back in a moment, went to the nurse's station and got a hospital gown. I took off my suit, donned the gown over my briefs and T-shirt, and headed straight back to the patient's room. The minute she saw me in that gown, she brightened and relaxed enough to open up about all the concerns on her mind.

The visit took a little longer than usual, and when I finished our session with a prayer for healing, I rose from the chair. As I did, the sound as my thighs ripped themselves from the Naugahyde brought a huge smile to both our faces. I was laughing so hard I forgot to hold the back of the gown as I headed back down the hall - so I was exposed.

Fortunately, the nurses had a sense of humor. One said, "Not a bad tush for a rabbi!"

I learned an important lesson on creativity that day. But I also learned that two hospital gowns are better than one - if you remember to put one on backward.

Written to Dear Abby by Rabbi C. Ezring of Florida and submitted by Michelle Lord

Left Out

A dog had followed his owner to school. His owner was a fourth grader at a public elementary school. However, when the bell rang, the dog sidled inside the building and made it all the way to the child's classroom before a teacher noticed and shoo'ed him outside, closing the door behind him. The dog sat down, whimpered and stared at the closed doors. Then God appeared beside the dog, patted his head, and said, "Don't feel bad fella' they won't let ME in either."

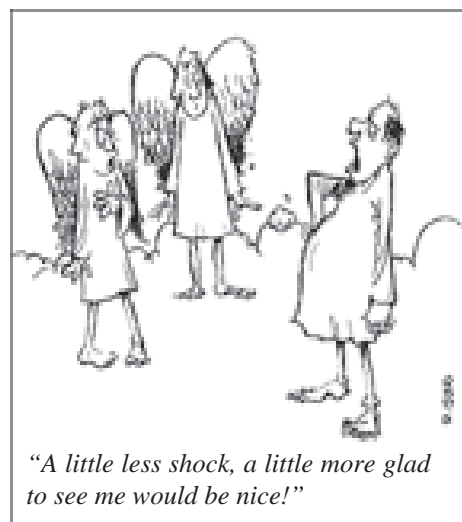
Submitted by June Pendleton

Hope

Hope is not the closing of your eyes to the difficulty, the risk, or the failure.

It is a trust that - if I fail now I shall not fail forever; and if I am hurt, I shall be healed.

It is a trust that life is good, love is powerful, and the future is full of promise.



"A little less shock, a little more glad to see me would be nice!"

Love one another and you will be happy. It's as simple and as difficult as that.

-Michael Leunig-

The Call to Ministry...

After a church service on Sunday morning, a young boy suddenly announced to his mother, "Mom, I've decided to become a minister when I grow up."

"That's okay with us, but what made you decide that?"

"Well," said the little boy, "I have to go to church on Sunday anyway, and I figure it will be more fun to stand up and yell, than to sit and listen."

A little girl became restless as the preacher's sermon dragged on and on. Finally, she leaned over to her mother and whispered, "Mommy, if we give him the money now, will he let us go?"

Submitted by Karen Murray

Did you hear right?

An elderly woman had just returned to her home from an evening of church services when she was startled by an intruder.

She caught the man in the act of robbing her home of its valuables and yelled, "Stop! Acts 2:38!" (Repent and be baptized, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven.) The burglar stopped in his tracks.

The woman calmly called the police and explained what she had done. As the officer cuffed the man to take him in, he asked the burglar, "Why did you just stand there? All the old lady did was yell a scripture to you."

"Scripture?" replied the burglar. "She said she had an ax and two 38's!"

Submitted by Dave Royce

The Good Life

Register for
CAMP WIGHTMAN
 Now you can register
 online!
 (www.campwightman.org)
 Applications for summer staff
 are also being accepted.

Why Summer Camp?

I think often we take for granted that camp is a good thing and is worthy of our support, but maybe it's appropriate to consider the benefits of camp. The benefits of summer camping were recognized well over a hundred years ago when organized camping began (in Connecticut, incidentally). Summer camp provides, among many other things:

1) An opportunity for growth – campers can try new activities, have new experiences, meet new friends. Oftentimes this happens in the absence of parents – camp is a place where a child can experiment with independence in a safe environment. This leads to personal growth.

2) Development of self-esteem – campers learn new skills, try new things, broadening their abilities and their sense of self.

3) Fun – let's not forget that so many of the activities at camp are fun and they're carried out in the context of adult supervision.

4) The chance to learn in a different way – psychologists tell us that people learn in different kinds of ways: some people learn better through hands-on activities, others learn better by working with others, still others respond best to music and rhythm. Camp mixes all of these different modes of learning into a day's activities, stimulating campers and stretching them.

5) A chance to interact with non-parental adult role models. Camp may be a camper's first opportunity to make friends with an adult.

6) An experience in the outdoors – our modern lives are becoming more and more detached from the environment around us so that many children are growing up without any real knowledge or experience of the natural world. Camp provides that introduction.

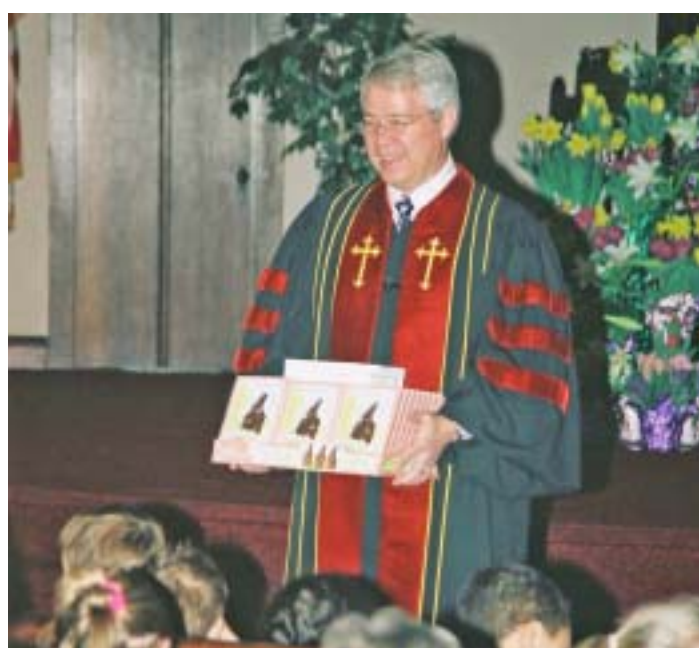
Why Camp Wightman?

Camp Wightman is **our** ministry – we share this ministry together. That gets worked out in some practical ways – some of our camp programs are staffed almost entirely from a single ABCCONN church; some of our

Summer 2005 Schedule					
	Spicer Village	Clark Village	Peck Village	Retreat Centers	Off Site Camps
Week 1 June 26 - July 2	Grandparents with Grandchildren 1 (6/26-6/29) New Friends (7/1-7/2)	Junior 1	Counselor In Training	Grandparents with Grandchildren 1 (6/26-6/29)	
Open House — July 2				Family Camp 1 (6/30-7/9)	
Week 2 July 3 - 9	Primary 1 (7/3-7/6) Primary 2 (7/7-7/9)	Middler 1	Lifeguarding Camp		
Week 3 July 10 - 16	Junior Aquatics	Junior High Aquatics	Senior High Aquatics	Adults with Special Challenges 1	
Week 4 July 17 - 23	Middler - Junior Music	Junior High 1		Wild Women in the Woods	
Week 5 July 24 - 30	Primary 3 (7/24-7/27) Primary 4 (7/28-7/31)	Middler 2 (7/24-27)	Pioneer	Senior High Event	
Week 6 July 31 - August 6	Junior 2	Junior High - Senior High Music	Adventure	Family Camp 2	Canoe (7/30-8/6)
Week 7 August 7 - 13	Middler 3	Junior High 2	Junior Explorers	Grandparents with Grandchildren 2 (8/8-8/10)	
Week 8 August 14 - 20	Adults with Special Challenges 2	Semana Hispana de Jubileo	Middler 4	Drama Camp	

ABCCONN pastors are involved at camp, helping campers understand the interdependence of Baptists and the family of faith to which we belong, many of our summer staff belong to ABCCONN churches.

Looking Back at Easter



Ministry to Families

Pastor's Sabbatical Plans Beginning To Take Shape

Our Pastor will take a sabbatical leave this summer to renew his vision for ministry and take some much needed time for his own spiritual growth. The Sabbatical will begin on Monday, June 13 and end on Monday, August 8, 2005. The Sabbatical Leave Committee is working to secure supply preachers on the Sundays that Dr. Lord will be away.

The Sabbatical will include three trips at this point. The first trip will include a worship seminar in New York City. A second trip will bring him to Chicago for the Willow Creek Worship & Arts conference. His third trip will lead him to Denver Colorado for the Biennial Meeting of the ABCUSA. While he is there, he will



attend an Emerging Worship Seminar at Calvary Baptist Church just prior the event. He also plans to meet with Rev. Brad Berglund, an adjunct faculty member of Andover Newton and author of the book, Reinventing

Worship.

While Pastor Lord is away he will take time to worship with his family in New York City, Saratoga Springs, NY, and Brattleboro, VT.

The Sabbatical plans will allow our Pastor some time to do some writing as well, and he hopes to edit and publish a collection of the Pastoral Epistles.

Oliver Bray and the Diaconate will be in charge of pastoral care issues.

Grace Latham was rushed to Backus hospital by ambulance after suffering another seizure. She is in the ICU right now, think of her and her family in prayer... Bob Buchowiecki continues to receive his chemo treatments each week. He is doing well so far. We pray it continues and his cancer goes into remission... We lift up Sue Suchulet as she recuperates in the hospital after surgery. We praise God that she received good news and we pray for a quick recovery... We lift up Les Main in our continuing prayers. He is encouraged by the latest x-rays and we are praying for a complete recovery... Barbara Bray came down with bronchitis again. We lift her up in our prayers... Melinda Maynard had surgery on her foot and is going to be laid up for a while. Think of her... Lora Mineau was in the emergency room recently and could use our prayers... We think of two families who just had babies: Michelle Capps had a little baby girl. Kaylie Madison Nye was born on March 5 and weighed in at 5 lbs, 13 oz and 18 inches long. Joe Contois had a little baby boy, Joseph Norman Contois III, on March 15 at 12:29 p.m. Little Joe weighed in at 7 lbs, 1 oz and 21 inches long. Think of both families... Zelda Earle was laid up part of this month with back problems. Think of her... Gwyn Green has had problems with her health again. Lift her up in prayer... We think of Elizabeth Strong who is still having some lingering problems with her back after surgery earlier this year... Keesen Howe broke his foot playing soccer and is out for the rest of the season. Think of him... Keep Kenny Marsden in prayer. He has to have surgery this month...



Recipe of the Month:

Cottage Cheese Pie (Low Calorie)

1 lb. cottage cheese	4 pkts. sweet'n low (or skip)
1 egg	1 t. vanilla
1 small can pineapple	1 t. lemon juice
1 pkt. unflavored gelatine	cinnamon

Place juice from pineapple in blender and mix with gelatin. Add egg, sweetener, vanilla and lemon juice. Blend. Gradually add cottage cheese. When completely blended, gradually add the pineapple and blend. Place in 9 inch pie plate. Sprinkle with cinnamon.

Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes.
Refrigerate when cooled.



Basketball Sunday Worship Celebrates Our Ministry To Kids

Our Basketball teams have finished the year and we had a nice celebration at Church on March 13. Fred Green invited the kids to come forward and trophies and photographs were presented to each one.

In Mission

American Baptist Missionaries in Africa

Jill and Mike Lowery work with the Congo Baptist Community. Mike is a professor and administrator at the Kikongo Pastors' Institute, and Jill ministers with women and youth. "Please pray for peace in D.R. Congo." the Lowerys write. "The war that started in 1998 is having a large destabilizing effect on the country. Pray also for peaceful elections that were scheduled for this year but have met with delays and threats of violence. Pray for the health and safety of our missionary families here in the Congo."



PRAYERS NEEDED

Katherine and Wayne Niles served for twelve years in Haiti; now they work with Congolese Christians in holistic healthcare and agricultural development. Wayne is working with a team to implement a development project that will serve most of Congo. The project distributes new seeds and disease-resistant crop varieties, and offers womens' groups small loans to purchase machines for hulling, milling, and producing oil. Katherine helps train health promoters in urban and rural communities



Edward and Miriam Noyes work with Congolese Baptist churches in promoting improved

farming techniques and literacy training. Ed also teaches agricultural students at the Milundu Teachers' College. The noyes appreciate the tremendous support shown by American Baptists during their U.S./Puerto Rico assignment this past year. "It seems that ministry opportunities in Congo - literacy for the rural church, agricultural development, evangelism of forest people, lay leadership training - have never been so compelling," they write. Ready to share new techniques for restoring and maintaining soil fertility, agricultural education, and food processing technologies, Ed says, "I wish we were headed back to Congo now, instead of in July!"

Wendy Bernhard

teaches theology at the Bible Institute in Kimpese, and works with doctors, pastors, and lay people, holding Responsible Living Skills seminars for youth. Wendy requests prayer for student pastors at the Bible Institute, especially for graduating seniors, that the Lord will provide their needs so they can finish the year and begin their ministries. She praises God for a solution to her transportation needs, so she can continue ministry visits to the villages.



Glen and Rita Chapman teach at the Kidongo Pastors' Institute. Glen teaches Old Testament, African religions, and Baptist distinctives; Rita works with spouses of the pastoral students, preparing them for rural ministry. She also teaches illiterate women to read and encourages them to share Christ in Kikongo and surrounding villages. Glen often travels to remote locations by boat or bicycle, working with local leaders in direct evangelism and showing evangelistic videos in villages. The boat helps local people to transport their crops to market and get to the hospital in Kikongo.



Global Mission Volunteers Needed



IM missionaries Tom and Terry Myers say volunteers are needed for ministry with junior/senior high youth in Dobrich, Bulgaria. Term of service is flexible (up to a year). A Bulgarian Baptist church is also looking for youth workers and English As a Second Language (ESL) teachers. Bulgarian language is not required; housing, meals, and transportation are arranged locally. For more opportunities, visit: www.internationalministries.org/volunteers/volunteer opportunities.

A Powerful Witness...

The American Baptists - A Bridge People in a World of Wall -Builders

by ABCUSA General Secretary A. Roy Medley

As American Baptists we rightly pride ourselves in the fact that our origins as a denomination lie in mission. Mission has knit us together over the years as autonomous churches, regions and organizations to accomplish wonderful things for Christ: consider the schools we've founded; the churches we've planted; the evangelization of India; the stand we took for civil rights here and justice in South Africa. Mission has fired our imaginations and inspired innovative and life-changing ministries. At our best, we have been a missional people engaging the world for the sake of the gospel.

To strengthen our missional focus, we have spent a year asking our churches about God's yearnings for us as a people. What is God's call upon our lives today? In June we heard a vision of nurturing radical personal discipleship in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural community of faith rooted in God's redemptive love in Christ and called through his cross to ministry in the world.

Mission is Job 1. Mission energizes. The response to this year's World Mission Offering proves that. Churches, liberal and conservative, urban and rural, East, Midwest and West have responded overwhelmingly to the challenge to maintain our international missionary force at its current level and not to cut it back. What a wonderful cause for praise!

Over the past couple of weeks, I have been reading the spiritual biography of Lewis Smedes, which he completed just before his death. Smedes was a professor at Fuller Theological seminary and noted evangelical scholar. Smedes writes of his early experience of his denomination: "call one group Christians of the wall or Christians of the gap; they dedicated themselves to sealing the borders to keep the strangers from

coming over. Call the other group Christians of the bridge; they did not ignore the reality of the gap, but they wanted to build bridges for people on both sides of it to cross over and learn from each other. I was from the start a Christian of the bridge."

One of the things I love about American Baptist life is that we have been Christians of the bridge. We have reached out to bridge the gap of ethnicity and race, the gap of theological differences, and the gap between gospel and culture. We are a bridge people.

The past two presidential elections have shown within our country a disturbing trend towards greater polarization as a people. Yet another form of division has arisen, yet another way of separating ourselves has been named; yet another way to define our neighbor as other has entered our vocabulary: red and blue.

As I read Galatians 3:28 recently, and thought about all the forms of separation it addresses, I wondered whether Paul, if penning that verse today, would have been inspired to write: neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, neither red nor blue, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Scholars have noted that in this verse, Paul has listed every major social divide of his era - their equivalent of our red and blue states - and declares in the face of these humongous divides, that the reconciling power of the gospel has trumped every one of them. "For all of you are one in Christ Jesus," is his declarative statement.

Their oneness, our oneness, rests in the fact that "in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." (Gal 3:26-



Dr. A Roy Medley

27) For many observers of the church in North America, the question is whether red and blue will trump "one in Christ." The question for us is whether we will mirror our culture in this latest embodiment of alienation or whether we will serve as a

counter-cultural community of reconciliation. I believe that God has uniquely gifted us to embrace the sacred call of being bridge people. Our heritage of responding to God's gracious invitation, through the hard work of bridging race-ethnicity; bridging evangelical-ecumenical; bridging male-female, has prepared us for the unique opportunity and God-given responsibility to be a community that builds bridges across even this divide.

The work of reconciliation is a sacred calling for it is uniquely God's work in Christ Jesus. The work of reconciliation is a costly calling for it is rooted in cross-bearing love. The work of reconciliation is a joyous calling for it provides the sacred space where God's grace can free people to risk to move from division to unity; from enmity to love; from red or blue to red and blue. Who would have dreamed, given our history of slavery, anti-immigrant sentiment, and suppression of women, that God could have put together a people like this? That's the joy of reconciliation, of bridge building!

To undertake this holy calling requires of us several things:

1) That we be centered in Christ as the common focus of our lives. Apart from him we can do nothing. Through him we can do all things. It is only as we offer ourselves more fully to him that our hearts and arms can be enlarged to receive one another. Only as we walk with him that we discover ourselves walking with each other.

2) That love and compassion are the rule of life for us. This is the supreme mark



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of Christ's community of disciples. Love is not sentimentality. It is the will to determine that in spite of what I believe you deserve, I will value you as God has valued you. And God has already set your value in the death of Jesus for you.

3) Because of that, I hold fiercely to you at the very moment I have every reason to cast you aside. G.K. Chesterton has written "We are all in the same boat in a stormy sea and we owe each other stormy loyalty."

Will we remain a bridge denomination? As one who calls myself evangelical, I treasure the freedom I have found among American Baptists. From you I have been able to learn and be challenged by the theological spectrum we represent. That freedom is precious.

In our common life as Baptists, we have a tradition that grants to the majority the right to be the voice of the local church or the denomination and say, "this is how we discern the mind of Christ" on any given matter. I support the freedom of the majority to state their discernment. At the same time we have also accorded to those who dissent the freedom to challenge the majority knowing that when prophets do arise they are seldom a product of a majority opinion. And I support the freedom to dissent as essential to the authority of scripture.

As I think about our life together at this important juncture, there are two texts that I would hold up to us. To some I would ask you to struggle with Matthew 13:24-51. Here are found the parables of the tares and the great net. You will recall that in the parable of the tares the master of the field, the Master of the Kingdom of Heaven, says to the servants who are eager to pull out the weeds and clean up the field, "No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest . . ." Jesus warns us against the dangers of our doing the sorting out because he knows how often the log in our own eye distorts our ability to see the speck in the other person's eye and that in so doing grace is often overcome by law.

To others, I would ask you to struggle

with Romans 14:13ff where Paul discusses the issue of conscience and the eating of meat, which has probably been sacrificed to idols. Paul says to those with "knowledge," "if your brother or sister is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love." This is another version of our effort to find the right balance between autonomy and interdependence. Paul says the balance point is love, our mutual concern and affection for one another.

As we face thorny issues, which will surely continue to arise in the future, we need to acknowledge a dark side to our Baptist heritage. Robert Bellah who helped author Habits of the Heart has spoken of Roger Williams as being an ethical genius and a sociological failure. He notes that after founding the First Baptist Church in America, Williams left it

Baptists in the North were slow to form a national denominational structure because they feared that at some point such a body might seek to usurp the rights and prerogatives of the local church.

for a smaller, purer congregation. However, he soon pulled out of that congregation and formed a church of only three people: himself; his wife and another man. Bellah writes, "One wonders how he was able to suffer the other two." Paul knew that in our proud insistence that we have more knowledge than the other, the first victim is usually love. For pride in my own correctness can easily destroy love .

Life together is never simple, never easy - not even in the body of Christ. I can't imagine that things went too

swimmingly with the others when two of the disciples sought to get box seats in heaven right alongside the Owner's. Nor was it easy for Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, and James, head of the church in Jerusalem. They had their differences. The question is how will we handle ours?

Baptists in the North were slow to form a national denominational structure in part because they feared that at some point such a body might seek to usurp the rights and prerogatives of the local church. When the Northern Baptist Convention was founded in 1907, it said the local congregation was the basic unit of the church, not a subsidiary of any other organization or unit. As a result they created an organization that emphasized cooperation for mission and rejected control in matters of our life together. They maximized the freedom of the congregations and organizations that were knit together into the Northern Baptist Convention, now the ABC, while focusing on mission to the world.

They resisted the sometimes neater and more orderly nature of hierarchical structures and embraced freedom and its sometimes chaotic nature. They prized freedom not as over and against the authority of scripture but as the functional foundation by which its authority is to be secured in the hearts and lives of believers. What they advocated was that religious truth can be witnessed to; it can be expounded; it can be declared, but it cannot be imposed.

Therefore, when people are eager to make our denominational leadership a national legislature for the congregations with authority to impose its discernments upon local churches, I shudder. I shudder because it flies in the face of who we are and that deep, deep commitment to congregational freedom that lies close to the surface in every Baptist. An association moderator recently told me of his conversation with a church that wanted the General Board to have just such authority over local churches. The moderator asked the deacons he was talking to what they would do if the General Board made a rule that American

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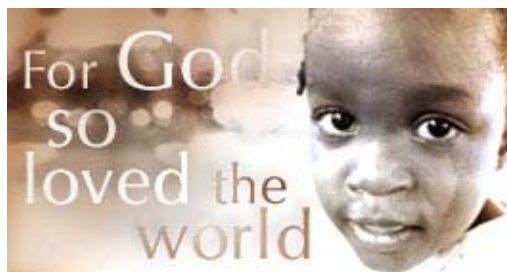
Baptist congregations could not call non-American Baptist pastors - apparently they had called several in a row. "We wouldn't stand for it," was their response. Point made.

I shudder because it will lead our Denominational leadership into trying to be a regulatory agency over entities they have no power to regulate, and the Board will become so entrapped in that quagmire that our missional task will become lost.

We need to keep your missional focus as job #1. As Baptists we have been a people who have treasured what some might call polar opposites such as soul freedom and the authority of scripture. Yet we have lived with these tensions and found blessing in their interplay. I hope that we are not tempted to collapse that tension to the detriment of both.

I confess that I have had many sleepless nights as I have wondered whether we will stay together and what kind of people we shall be.

I have heard and read very strong opinions expressed on the issue of homosexuality. I know that a large number of people feel very strongly and passionately that the practice of homosexuality is



inconsistent with scripture. I have also heard the anguish and pained cries of those who are gay and Baptist and struggle, and I know that each side feels that the stakes are high.

As we grapple with the question of homosexuality, especially as feelings rise to a fever-pitch, I worry because I see a tendency to shift from discernment to power moves. Factions arise and groups work to outmaneuver one another so that the body becomes politicized and its missional focus lost.

I agonize over the fact that many feel a split is inevitable. That we will cease to be a bridge people. And I wonder what effect that split will have on a society which already views the church with cynicism and casts back upon us with sneers, "See how they love one another!"

I worry that red or blue will trump one in Christ. Yet, we have seen the miracle of God's reconciling Spirit overcome what appeared to be inevitable separation. As the early church, divided over the Gentile mission, left the Jerusalem Council united in faith, in community and in mission God was at work. In the 1990's ABC partnered with South African Baptists. Here was a racially divided community filled with suspicion and hatred. We witnessed how God intervened and changed people who considered themselves to be irreconcilable and enemies. I pray God will move among us in such a way.

I urge you, dear friends, focus on the mission; center yourselves in Christ; owe each other stormy loyalty, even as we struggle with one another and with scripture hold fiercely to one another as Christ has held to us, trust God to give us the tools to listen, discern, respect.

Be a bridge people. Be a bridge people in a world of wall builders. Let this continue to be our sacred calling. "Most of all let love guide your life, for then the whole church will stay together in perfect harmony." Col 3:14

Who is Roy Medley and How do his thoughts impact our congregation?

Roy Medley is the General Secretary or top administrative leader of the American Baptist Churches USA. He is charged with leading our combined mission efforts to evangelize the world.

Unlike our sisters and brothers in the Roman Catholic Church or in many of our sister denominations, the pronouncements from the top are not binding on the local churches. We retain our own autonomy. Yet there are some within our denominational family who want the ABCUSA to make binding pronouncements about the great social issues of our day. They have threatened to split the denomination.

In the speech printed above, Roy Medley reminds us of that and calls us to keep our eyes on Christ and the true work we have been called to do together.

The truth is that many of us at First Baptist do not really plug into what is happening on the national scene with the American Baptists. We identify more readily with the local congregation and are more concerned with what the choir is singing, where are kids are going on a youth trip or what is the topic of the next Bible study.

You send me to the Biennial meetings and enjoy hearing my reports on the time I spend with our missionaries and listening to powerful preachers. Once in a while a group of us go to a Biennial, like we did in Syracuse and Providence, or to a National Youth Gathering in Colorado.

We place our mission money in the offering plate and enjoy hearing Nancy Allen and her cohorts tell us how it makes

a difference. That is the extent of our involvement with the ABCUSA.

I have included this article to let you in on what is happening on the national scene. This month I want to ask you to begin praying for Roy Medley and our denominational leaders.

Some people would have you believe this is all about homosexuality. It is not. It is really about one group trying to force its will on the whole and then pushing for a hierarchical structure that will force its understanding of scripture on every church in the denomination. It may begin with this sensitive issue but it will not end until they have had their way with every issue or scriptural question.

Roy Medley is right. THE ABCUSA is unique and very special so lets pray for it.

FBC Softball Team is Already Cooking

The season hasn't even started and the FBC Softball team is already cooking, literally. Several members of the team put on a fund raising breakfast last month and raised about \$200 to help support the team.

Fred Green was on the grill and he had help from Chip Chaffee and Dave Mehlinger as they cooked up eggs, sausage, homefries and toast.

Brian Goldin organized the event and arranged to have his friend, Sue Kenyon, take over the grill when Fred had to leave.



Chip Chaffee and Dave Mehlinger cut the potatoes for the home fries

The FBC Softball team will open its 19th season early next month. The guys have scheduled two practices so

far. The team will meet the next two Sundays (April 3 & 10) at the Mashuntucket Recreation Fields at 2:00 p.m.

Anyone interested in playing on the team this year should call Ken Kreger or Brian Goldin and let them know. They can give you directions to the field and any other pertinent information.

Returning players this year include Fred Green, Chip Chaffee, Mike Staron, Ken Marsden, Ken Kreger, Brian Goldin, Steve and Dave Moon, Armin Harris, Jason Mandeville, Dave Mehlinger and George Rezendes.

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Sunday School 9:15 a.m.
Sunday Morning Worship 10:30 a.m.

Mid Week Worship & Prayer Service
Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m.

Rev. Dr. Clayton A. Lord, Jr., Pastor
Adele DiBiagio Cofer,
Organist & Choir Director
Sandy Callender, Administrative Assistant
Harry & Doris Calkins are the Production Assistants.