



United Church of Christ

“A Global Ministry Church”



Bismarck, North Dakota

February, 2010

A Bad Hair Day

There is probably no part of our appearance that most of us pay more attention to than our hair. Hair care in this country is an enormous industry, employing over a million people and producing well in excess of \$40 billion in revenues. And it isn't just those with flowing locks who spend money—various treatments for hair loss including drugs, transplants and hair pieces make baldness a big business.

Through the ages, hair has been about more than fashion and looking good. Hair has often been used to make social statements. Consider the 1960's musical *Hair*. The title song celebrates the long hair that was popular among the young, as in this line: “Oh say can you see my eyes? If you can then my hairs too short.” At that time, long hair was a sign of rebellion against the values and practices of the previous generation.

For many, hair also has a religious dimension. Consider that Moslem women keep their heads covered, and Amish women wear their hair in a bun and then cover it with a veil or bonnet. Hasidic Jewish men are easily recognized by their untrimmed beards and the curls that hang by their ears, called *payot*. Given the important role of hair in our day, it should come as no surprise that it has a prominent place in scripture.

Beginning with Ash Wednesday on February 17th, we will have Wednesday evening worship services during the season of Lent. This year the sermon series is titled: “Bad Hair Days: Hair in the Bible.”

Each week we will examine an incident from scripture in which hair plays a significant role. We will begin with Job who shaved his head, and end with Mary the sister of Martha who used her hair to wipe Jesus' feet. In between we will look at Absalom, Sampson, a group of women who were forced to go bald, the apostle Paul and the servants of King David.

Our interest will not be in ever-changing hairstyles, but in the symbolic and even spiritual significance attached to hair. Shaved heads, shaggy manes, long and short hair as well as beards—they were all used to reveal important dimensions of our relationships with God and one another. Job shaved his head and Paul let his hair grown long not in order to make fashion statements; both made faith statements.

What does hair have to say about how we can best serve God and one another? Come and see! Long and short hair, bald heads and beards are all welcome.

Pastor Jim

News and Notes.....

Haiti Relief

The United Church of Christ has launched an emergency appeal for Haiti after a major earthquake struck the country. Untold thousands have died and countless have been left homeless. There is also widespread destruction of schools, hospitals and other buildings, and major damage to key water, electricity and road systems. One Great Hour of Sharing funds were immediately rushed to our Haitian partners to support their initial emergency response. As damage assessments are made and plans for relief, recovery and rehabilitation are developed, additional support will be shared. The need is massive.



How We Can Help:

1. Pray for the people of Haiti their leaders and emergency and humanitarian aid workers.
2. We have already received funds in the congregation, and more are welcome. Please mark your check or offering envelope "Haiti Relief." Also, our offerings during our Lent services will go to the relief effort. 100% of the funds will be used to support both the immediate emergency needs, and the long-term recovery and rehabilitation of Haitian families and communities.



Quarterly Financial Report

This past year was generally good for our church's finances. An uptick in General Fund giving combined with careful spending enabled us to close 2009 with a positive cash flow.

One reason for low expenditures was that Dawn was not able to join us as our three-quarter time associate until June 1st since she needed to finish school. Prior to that time she was on an hourly wage. Had she been with us the whole year, however, we would still have had a positive cash flow, albeit a small one. This is encouraging news as we look to funding a full staff in 2010.

We can also be thankful for sustained inflows into our Building Fund—about \$14,000 over the past year. The Building Fund is used to pay for improvements in our church. This past year the Board of Trustees upgraded the sanctuary sound system at a cost of approximately \$3,500 dollars. We will soon be replacing the old windows in the church for about \$16,000. Giving to the Building Fund enables projects such as these. We will continue to utilize the Fund for major maintenance and improvements.

The area in which we experienced disappointment was in our Benevolences. Over the years we have made great strides in giving to address needs beyond our congregation. In 2009, however, we experienced significant decreases. The only area of Benevolence giving to increase was Charles Hall Youth Services.

Nevertheless, the decrease needs to be kept in perspective. Even at a diminished level, Benevolence giving was over 17% of General Fund giving—still a very healthy number. Also, the decrease occurred in an economic context in which many, even most, churches are experiencing a decrease in outreach giving. It will be important for us, however, to keep close watch on our benevolences since the needs in the world around us are greater now than they have been in the past generation.

While North Dakota in general and Bismarck in particular haven't experienced the brunt of the economic downturn, we are by no means unaffected. We can rejoice in the stewardship of our people—not just financial stewardship but also in the giving of time and talents. Thank-you to everyone who gives so much of themselves in so many ways. We are blessed to have a wonderful church and a significant ministry.

Music in East Timor

Our Sunday School Offering has been going to special projects. Recently our children gave over \$220 to Charles Hall Youth Services in time for Christmas! Our current special offering will be used to help purchase two electronic keyboards: one for our school in East Timor, and another for a Timorese village church.



Music is an important part of East Timor's culture. The church sited for one of the keyboards has electricity just a few hours a day. They wish to schedule around the availability, so they can add music to their fellowship time. As a church, we are very thankful for our music program, including our organist, adult choir, hand bell choir, children's choir, Vicky and the Boys and special music. It is within our power to make this dream a reality. Anyone wanting to contribute to the Sunday School's special offering can contact Cecelia Tolstedt or Dawn Archer.

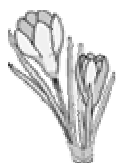


2009 Giving Statements

Our financial secretary has prepared our 2009 Giving Statements. They are filed alphabetically in a box on the secretary's desk. Please pick yours up if you haven't done so already.

New Songbooks

Mayflower Circle has generously purchased new songbooks to supplement our hymnals: *Sing! Prayer and Praise*. Many thanks to Mayflower Circle for helping us to enhance our worship by adding more variety to our music!



Sympathy

Our prayers go out to Gene Weekes and his family at the loss of Eunice. A funeral was held in our church on Saturday, January 9th.

Coming Events.....

Church Wide Planning Process

We are currently undergoing a church-wide planning process to determine our next steps forward as a congregation. Pastor Jim and Moderator Dana Schaar have been meeting with several of our committees, getting ideas about where we need to go next in our life and ministry. Two sessions are scheduled for members and friends of the congregation at large to give their input. They will be held on Tuesday, February 9th at 7:00 pm, and Sunday February 28th after the 10:30 service. Everyone is welcome to participate.



UCY Babysits for Valentine's Day

Need a break from the kids to celebrate Valentine's Day? UCY will be babysitting for church families from 4:30 to 7:30 pm on Saturday, February 13th. Just drop your kids off at the church, and pick them up later. The kids will enjoy dinner, crafts, games and movies. RSVP to Dawn (home: 751-0712; cell: 425-2208; church: 223-2915).



UCY Valentine's Party

UCY will have its Valentine's Party on Saturday, February 13th after babysitting (beginning at 7:30). If weather permits we will go sledding so bring your sleds, toboggans or snowboards! Hot chocolate and snacks will be served back at the church. RSVP to Dawn (home: 751-0712; cell: 425-2208; church: 223-2915).

Lent Simple Meals

Each Wednesday evening during the season of Lent which begins with Ash Wednesday on February 17th, Mayflower Circle will serve a simple meal. The meal will consist of home-made soup and Bread Poet bread. It will be served from 6:00 to 7:00 pm. Everyone is invited, a free will offering will be taken.



Lent Worship Services

On Ash Wednesday, February 17th, there will be a Service of Ashes in the Fellowship Hall at 7:00 p.m. That will be followed by a Lent worship service in the sanctuary at 7:30 p.m. Thereafter, worship services will be held at 7:30 every Wednesday evening during Lent. The theme of this year's Lenten services is: *Bad Hair Days: Hair in the Bible*. All are invited to attend.

Hospitality for Conference Council

The Conference Council of the Northern Plains Conference will meet in our church February 19th and 20th. To defray costs of the meeting, the conference is asking for host families to provide lodging for a council member the night of the 19th. The host is not responsible for any meals. If you are interested, please contact the conference office at 255-1104.

Buffalo Supper

We've changed the date of our Buffalo Supper, moving it out of the winter to avoid bad weather and conflicts with the many community events occurring at this time. It will be held on Saturday, April 10th.

**AWARE****February 2010*****As I Look At It:***

In recent weeks when discussing various issues, especially health care, I have used the phrase, "IT IS A MORAL ISSUE." My reasoning is that one might approach this or any other subject from a purely economic, political or social perspective, but this limits our sense of the whole. For it is only when we look at it from a moral perspective that we take into account the entire picture. The dignity of a person as a child of God, the health of the person, the wellbeing of the entire person, the recognition of each person as being endowed with innate human rights, all are essential to the whole picture. This highlights the fact that while certain issues may have economic, political or social implications, when they deal with the well-being of God's people or God's creation (I would defy you to come up with something that does not), it is a moral issue.

It means that if we are going to look at something we have to look at it from such a faith perspective. We cannot turn our back on the viewpoint of a loving God. If we, for example, look at health care from a purely economic perspective we may end up with a program that is cost effective but that does not care for the well-being of all of God's children. The moral question does not give us an easy out when it comes to caring for our brothers and sisters in the family of God. What is politically or socially expedient may fall short. The moral question pushes us to look at the fullness of life. It calls us to take a broad perspective and ask ourselves how our response affects all of God's people. The moral question calls us to look at life through the eyes of the God who sacrificed Jesus Christ that we could live more fully. It calls us to look at the world in which we live and the impact that we are having upon it. This moves us beyond the perspective of convenience to the viewpoint of the God who calls all into being and who loves this world and every rock tree and life form in it. The moral perspective calls us to recognize that our lack of understanding is not a basis from which we have the right to hate. We cannot hate God's children simply because they do not fall into the confines of our familiarity.

I believe God expects us to view our world from this moral perspective. I believe God understands that when we do otherwise, when we let money, fear, or social pressure make a decision for us, we are taking a short cut that is not faithful. I believe God is saddened when one of God's children is neglected because it is economically or politically expedient. I believe God is angered when God's creation is abused because of our greed or gluttony. After all, Jesus did not die on the cross so that we could go through life wearing blinders.

Finally, I would have to say that I am morally and spiritually offended when my brothers and sisters use the faith to justify their fears and biases. Not only is this a lie, it is using God's name in vain and that my friends is a sin. I am tired of hearing people proof text the Bible to justify their hatred and to support the limits of their understanding, and I believe God is also. I cannot imagine that not comprehending the way someone else lives is a justification for acting unfaithfully towards a brother or sister in the family of God, who is walking down a different path of life.

In closing, I would invite you to celebrate the reality that viewing the world and all that is in it from the moral perspective gives life to all and empowers even the weakest to make a difference. Looking at life from God's perspective is viewing our world not only from what is before us today but from what can be before us tomorrow. The moral question is the life giving question for those who ask it and those who are touched by it.

I look forward to joining with you as together we explore the moral issues of our time. **Grace and Peace - Wade**

