

***Oak Meadow
United Methodist Church***

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Laity Notes

*by
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GOODBYE FRANCES RABB

We said goodbye to one of our members on January 26 at a funeral in our church. Frances Rabb was born on June 11, 1920 in Greenville, Texas and passed away in San Antonio on January 24. She last attended worship at Oak Meadow on December 21, 2003. Our church was filled with people for her funeral. Frances had six children, and it was deeply touching to listen to a forty-one-year-old man who grew up with her children refer to Frances as the “neighborhood mom” in his eulogy. Many kind words were spoken about a wonderful woman. Goodbye Frances, we will miss you.

Many thanks to those helping hands in our church that helped lay Frances to rest.

THE HOLIDAYS BEHIND...ON WITH 2004

We are rapidly leaving the holidays behind and getting well into 2004. One month has already passed. Only a year ago we were giving serious consideration to merging with University UMC, and finance was a major motivation behind that deliberation. Now we find our church not only free from debt, but the benefactor of a most generous \$50,000 gift at the end of 2003. We deeply thank the giver for the depth of their charity, and promise not to become complacent in our newly resurrected financial state.

A year ago we decided to go it alone, and part of that commitment meant replenishing two lost

generations in our church. During the past year one member has fallen, one has moved to Illinois and two have left for another church. Our goal of ten new couples has yet to produce the first. Seeds have been sown but still more must be planted. Each of us needs to be mindful of inviting visitors to church.

Our leadership must formulate a plan to foster church growth and clearly set forth a means of implementing that plan. We do not need to become a mega-church, but we do need to become a complete church. We cannot ignore demography. Ideas along these lines are welcome from any and all.

SUNDAY SCHOOL

In January we began a study of the Book of Deuteronomy, the fifth book in the Bible and the last of the Pentateuch or Torah. In Deuteronomy, Moses gathers the children of Israel in Moab and finds the voice he earlier claimed in Midian that he did not have. In a series of three discourses, Moses reviews key pieces of the forty-year history from Sinai to the Promised Land, and equips his people with God’s ordinances for taking and living in the land long ago promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In Moab Moses speaks to a second generation of wilderness Israelites, the first generation having been condemned to die in the desert for cowardice at Kadesh-Barnea. In a particularly poignant exchange, Moses as an old man is denied his request of God to enter the Promised Land. In his last public speech before his assassination, Martin Luther King, Jr. told his audience that he had seen the Promised Land and that he might not make it there with them. Within twenty-four hours he lay dead.

This is but one of an uncountable host of later echoes from Deuteronomy. When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness he quoted from Deuteronomy to defend His position. When the scribes asked Jesus what was the greatest commandment, Jesus once again quoted from Deuteronomy. Those same words, from Deuteronomy 6:4 (the *Shema*), were later used to begin each of the seven creeds which were formulated by church councils from 325 to 787. In fact, Jesus quotes from the Book of Deuteronomy more than from any other Old Testament book, with the Psalms and Isaiah those next most frequently quoted. If we wish to

know something of the mind of Jesus, we need to be familiar with Deuteronomy.

We are giving Deuteronomy a thorough study and tracing some of its echoes through the New Testament and beyond. All are welcome to join us on Sunday mornings at nine.

NEW CHAIRS

There is an effort afoot to purchase 100 new chairs for our church to spruce things up a bit by adding to comfort and attractiveness. Church members are being asked to pick up the tab for these chairs, which runs \$50 per chair. As of last count, pledges had been made for 79 chairs. We need to find offers for the remaining 21 chairs in order to pay the final bill from donations. We are sending in the down payment on 100 chairs with the faith that members will step forward during the next few weeks to order chairs. We offer a hearty thank you to those behind this commendable effort.

CHURCH CREEDS

Each Sunday morning during worship service we recite the Apostle's Creed. From time to time we recite the Nicene Creed. Why do we do that? One reason is that Christianity is a creedal religion. *Credo* in Latin means "I believe." One of the earliest creedal statements is found in I Corinthians 15: 3-8 where Paul states:

³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me."

Christ died, was buried, was raised and appeared. This is the bedrock from which all church creeds are drawn, and it is important to note that Paul writes that he is delivering "what I also received." That is, Paul was here not being original, but rather passing on that which he earlier received. Since Paul was not originally a follower of Jesus, this suggests that the verses he quotes go back to the original disciples. And this is why they stand as the bedrock for all later

creedal statements formulated by various church councils.

The oldest creed is that produced by 318 bishops who were summoned by the emperor Constantine to the city of Nicaea in the year 325. In 381 a second group of bishops met in Constantinople to refine and elaborate the earlier work at Nicaea. This was the second of seven councils of the ancient church that both East and West recognize as "ecumenical" and authoritative. The council in Constantinople produced the Nicene Creed as recited in churches today.

These first two councils dealt primarily with the issue of the Trinity, the relationship among God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The first produced a creed having but a single sentence about the Holy Spirit, while the revisions of the second contained a full paragraph on the Holy Spirit. Trinitarian thought is clearly raised in the gospels as set forth by Jesus in the Great Commission: ¹⁹ "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:10) Baptism was the entrée into the new way formed by disciples and followers upon Jesus' death and resurrection. But as questions were raised it became necessary to clarify the concept and to set boundaries of belief. A fence was necessary to keep sheep in the fold.

The next five councils, extending from Chalcedon in 451 to Nicaea II in 787, dealt primarily with the person of Jesus, and effectively answered the question posed by Jesus to his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Each of these early church councils was prompted by opposing views, and the creeds produced by these councils functioned to set the boundaries of belief for the church at large. Since the beginning, there have been those who argued that the creeds were confining. Others have contended that far from confining, the creeds set people free. Creeds anchor freedom in the same way that a string permits a kite to fly. Turn loose the string, and the kite's flight will end abruptly.

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

Please email comments or suggestions to cjhall_45@yahoo.com or leave a telephone message at 404-1894.