

**Oak Meadow
United Methodist Church**

2740 Hunters Green
San Antonio, Texas 78231
(210) 492-3902

<http://www.oakmeadowumc.org/>

Pastor Larry Scharmann

Laity Notes

by
Chuck Hall

February 27, 2005 – Number 24

LAITY NOTES

On Friday when I went to my mailbox I was greeted with my monthly copy of First Things, the journal that prompted Laity Notes some two years ago. The purpose of First Things as stated in the journal is to “advance a religiously informed public philosophy for the ordering of society.” Richard John Neuhaus, editor-in-chief is a former Lutheran turned Catholic priest. Each month First Things contains letters to the editor, a series of serious articles, a number of book reviews and a lengthy essay by Neuhaus at the end of the journal entitled “The Public Square.” In 1984 Neuhaus published his influential *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America*.

In the March 2005 issue Neuhaus begins “The Public Square” with an essay entitled “Secularization Doesn’t Just Happen.” This is a book review of sorts that takes dead aim at the idea that modernization and secularization are directly connected. He writes that Liberal Protestant clergy were important players in the secularization struggle because they capitulated to the secularizers. Along these lines, Neuhaus cites a Methodist Bishop, Edward Thompson, who in 1870 told an audience that he saw in the reasonably near future an America that would be “without an adulterer, or a swearer, or a Sabbath-breaker, or an ingrate, or an apostate, or a backslider, or a slanderer; hundreds of thousands of homes without a prodigal, a quarrel or heartburn, or a bitter tear.” More than a century

later the Bishop appears to have been a wee bit optimistic.

I owe Neuhaus a thank you for stimulating in me the idea of Laity Notes. As I wrote in the first column I had no idea about the consistency of this effort but I would give it a try. My effort has been sporadic at best but I find writing much easier when I have something to say. Suggestions from readers would be dearly appreciated.

SUNDAY SCHOOL...THE DAVID STORY

On the last Sunday in November our adult Sunday school class began a study of “The David Story.” Our effort will cover the biblical text of 1 and 2 Samuel and the first two chapters of 1 Kings, a period beginning with the birth of Samuel and extending through the death of King David. Key biblical characters include Samuel, Saul and David. Samuel anointed the first two Israelite kings, Saul and David and thereby began a period known as the “United Monarchy,” when Israel was under the kingship of Saul, David and Solomon. Upon Solomon’s death the united monarchy quickly split into Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Israel fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. and Judah to the Babylonians in 587 B.C. The Babylonians destroyed the Jerusalem Temple, which had been constructed under Solomon, and took with them on their return to Babylon a number of leading citizens from Judah, the “Babylonian Captivity.” “The David Story” covers the period from approximately 1050 until approximately 970 B.C., a period during which tribal Israel became the Kingdom of Israel.

We are beginning the fifth year of the current version of our adult Sunday school class. We began with six students and have now grown to about triple that number. There is always room for more people in our class, so if you are intrigued by a class that pays high regard to the biblical text and offers a running commentary on that text, then please join us on Sunday mornings between 9 and 10 a.m. We focus more on understanding than speed and last Sunday worked our way through the 13th chapter of 1 Samuel. We typically cover a chapter each week so there is plenty of time left to join our effort with “The David Story.”

Our class spends much time in study with the Old Testament because of our bias that without

an understanding of the Old much of the New sails over our heads. People saw Jesus as the Messiah because of his descent from the line of King David. Bethlehem was the hometown of David. Genealogies at the beginning of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke trace this line of descent. While our study concentrates on Old Testament text, a conscious effort to connect the Old to the New is made each Sunday morning.

You are invited to our class with the assurance that you are free to determine your own level of participation, which can range from a host of questions and ideas to attentive silence. That is for you to decide in your own good time. We do want to inform those who may not be aware that serious bible study is underway each Sunday morning in our church.

FOR THOSE WHO READ

At the end of last year, Wendell Berry published his seventh novel, *Hanna Coulter*. Hanna was born in 1922 and in this book recounts her life in an imaginary setting in rural Kentucky, the same setting of each of Berry's previous novels. She sent her first husband to war and he never returned. She spent over fifty years with her second husband before burying him. Her life is lived within the confines of a few square miles in rural Kentucky, yet hers is a full and complete life created by Berry's deft hand and thoughtful imagination.

"Most people now are looking for 'a better place,' which means that a lot of them will end up in a worse one. I think this is what Nathan learned from his time in the army and the war. He saw a lot of places, and he came home. I think he gave up the idea that there is a better place somewhere else. There is no 'better place' than this, not in *this* world. And it is by the place we've got, and our love for it and our keeping of it, that this world is joined to Heaven." (p. 83)

Berry writes with intelligence and grace and reading his work offers rich rewards.

MOTHER'S DAY OUT PROGRAM (MDO)

A year ago this month the Administrative Council accepted a proposal to create an ad hoc committee to set about reducing the gap between our church and its Mother's Day Out program. In March the Administrative Council acted on that proposal and appointed a committee. The

committee in turn began to hold regular meetings and gather information about MDO. In May the MDO program was restructured and today there are more than twenty children along with their parents who are benefiting from this program. The MDO committee makes reports at each Administrative Council and Finance Committee meeting and the gap between our church and its Mother's Day Out program as been dramatically reduced. The MDO program today contributes \$300 monthly to the church general fund and is projecting a healthy ending fund balance in its current budget. We offer a hearty thank you to all members of the MDO ad hoc committee who have given much time and faithful effort to their assigned task. This committee has been a model from which we could draw profitable lessons.

In response our church is putting the finishing touches on a track for tricycles in our own back yard which will be available to MDO children and any others who happen by.

WINTER RAIN

The slow but steady rain this weekend will surely be followed by a flood of color when the sun decides again to shine. One of the most obvious improvements we have made to our church during the past two years is cleaning and clearing our grounds. Much work mainly by four dedicated men went into clearing the tangle in our huge back yard. A Boy Scout became an Eagle Scout with a garden project in the front of our church. A faithful soul put much effort into making colorful our long strip of flowerbed running from the church door to the street.

The time of year is fast approaching when additional efforts along these lines could produce a spectacular invitation to those driving by and a marvelous welcome to those driving in. A little coordination might go a long way toward making our small church one of the most colorful churches in our city.

This is but another way we can utilize the many talents we have under our roof. We have signs of this talent all about our church and there is always room for more.

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

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