

***Oak Meadow  
United Methodist Church***

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***Laity Notes***

*by  
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*April 4, 2004 – Number 20*

***ONE YEAR LATER***

As San Antonio hosts the final four basketball tournament in the Alamo Dome, I am reminded that the idea of ***Laity Notes*** came to me last year while watching basketball with one eye and studying the twelfth chapter of Exodus with the other. In that initial effort I made note of then recent signs of movement in our church that included a new church directory, nametags, a successful spaghetti dinner and children playing games on Wednesday evenings. A year later that movement not only remains, but has increased. A mortgage payment has been replaced with a healthy reserve fund drawing interest, and for the first quarter this year our church has made all apportionment payments and is still in the black. Our financial condition that once stimulated the merger movement has been set along a sounder path. Splendid new chairs adorn our sanctuary, with painted walls and a mural soon to be added. More and more people find their way to our church on Wednesday evenings. In short order we will have new storage facilities to free additional space for church activity and to house our new lawn mower. We have added child care facilities to our Sunday worship service. Our former pianist now sings in our choir and we have added a new pianist. This year our church has witnessed the full cycle of life: a birth, a baptism, a wedding and a funeral. New plants and flowers are appearing outside our church. An ad hoc committee is working diligently to set the foundation for closer relations between the Mothers' Day Out program and our church.

Two and sometimes three MDO mothers along with their families now worship with us on Sunday. Seeds planted in the past year seem to be bearing fruit.

Perhaps the sense of a new vitality can best be felt on Sunday mornings in worship. During January we averaged 44 per worship service, of which 40 were regular members and 4 were guests. In February our average worship attendance jumped to 57, of which 47 were regular members and 10 were guests. The guest factor in February was bolstered by Boy Scout Sunday and a baptism. But in March there were no such special events and our sanctuary welcomed an average of 14 guests each week to complement 42 regular members. In short, during the month of March one out of every four people who worshiped in our church was a guest. Hospitality is a great virtue, and we need to make every effort to welcome our guests. All of us can recall those moments when visiting a church and receiving little notice. All of us also can recall those moments when visiting a church and receiving a warm welcome. As we grace our sanctuary with new chairs, painted walls and murals, let us also be mindful of gracing our sanctuary with gracious hospitality.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter of Genesis Abraham was sitting at the door of his tent in the heat of the day when suddenly three strangers appeared before him. He ran from his tent to greet them, bowing down and offering them water to wash their feet and a "morsel of bread." That "morsel of bread" in fact turned out to a fresh young calf and choice flour for bread along with butter and curds. As the three men dove into what must have been a welcome feast, Abraham "waited on them under the tree as they ate." (Genesis 18: 1-8) Hospitality has deep biblical roots, and gratefully we are now being presented each Sunday morning and Wednesday evening with many opportunities to practice it.

***CHURCH COLORS***

The colorful banners which hang in our sanctuary have a considerable history and tradition behind them. The church calendar revolves around the life of Jesus, and colors are used as symbols to help distinguish the different seasons. Since Ash Wednesday we have seen purple banners. On Easter Sunday we will see white banners. Early into summer we will see green banners.

Purple is the royal color of the season of Lent. While Lent is a season of soul-searching and repentance, the color purple harkens to the kingship of Jesus. Our English word “gospel” is derived from the Greek word *euaggelion* (yoo-ang-ghel’-ee-on), which originally meant a reward for good tidings and later came to mean the good news itself. At the time that Jesus walked the face of this earth, the word *euaggelion* was highly political and in this sense was used to indicate the announcement of an important message from the Roman Emperor. To a Greek speaking member of the Roman Empire, the word *euaggelion* would have immediately brought to mind thoughts of the Emperor, and the Emperor was clothed in purple. We have been seeing purple banners in our church since the last Sunday in February because the early Christian community was brazen enough to associate by word and by color Jesus as a challenge to the Roman Emperor. Jesus but once wore a purple robe, and that was placed upon him by those aiming to ridicule. But from an empire that once encircled the Mediterranean where do we today find a Roman?

On Easter Sunday the banners will be changed to white and they will remain while until Pentecost on May 30. White symbolizes the hope of the resurrection as well as purity and newness. White and gold are the colors of sacred days throughout the Christian year. Like Christmas, Easter is a period of time rather than a single day and it covers the seven-week from Easter to Pentecost known as Eastertide.

The church year and the use of symbolic colorful banners did not come about by accident. They were the result of long and concentrated efforts. Jesus was crucified in the year 30. By the year 200 as far as Roman society was concerned Christianity was invisible. In an empire of some 60 million people, Christians numbered less than half a million. A century later, by the year 300 the number of Christians had increased to approximately 6 million people, or about 10% of the people in the empire. By the year 350 Christians comprised about half the population of the Roman Empire, or about 30 million people. The Roman Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in 312 and shortly thereafter began to execute a program to build churches. In 321 Constantine made Sunday a public holiday. There is no question about the significance of Constantine’s conversion, but the foundation for his conversion was laid over a

period of three centuries. In 325 Constantine called 318 Christian bishops to the city of Nicaea in what was to become the first of seven councils of the ancient church that both East and West recognize as ecumenical and authoritative. A second council of bishops met in 381 to refine and elaborate the earlier work at Nicaea, and the result of their effort we read today in church as the Nicene Creed. The creeds, colors and other riches of our Christian tradition were the product of a determined struggle to be cherished today.

#### ***ABUNDANT RAINS***

When after forty years of desert wanderings Moses gathered the children of Israel in Moab to prepare them for conquering the Promised Land, he advised them that the new land would be different from the Egypt they and their ancestors had known. One key difference lay in the source of water for agriculture. In Egypt irrigation from the Nile River provided that source, but in the Promised Land God would provide that source from rainfall. “If, then, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, loving the LORD your God and serving Him with all your heart and soul, I will grant the rain for your land in season, the early rain and the late. (Deuteronomy 11:13-14)

God has certainly blessed us with abundant rain so far this year. Our new lawn mower has been put to good use and deep greens and bright colors are appearing in new plants and shrubs which seem to be finding their way, via helping hands, to our church. One member of the church’s Boy Scout troop is planning an Eagle Scout project for our front flower bed. A few days ago I overheard one member of our church offering another flowers from their own yard for this new effort. We offer many thanks to those who are making this effort to enhance the area outside of our church. Their efforts are complementing those being made by others to enhance our church interior. Church building is obviously a hands-on project, and the more hands we find at work the stronger will be our new foundation. We welcome each and every hand in this project, and thank God for an abundance of rain to support our efforts.

#### ***COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS***

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