

## *Laity Notes*

*Chuck Hall*

April 20, 2003 – Number 3

### ***PALM SUNDAY AND MDO***

Last Sunday morning after Sunday School and before church, I stepped out of our front door to chat with people coming to church. The first comment I heard was, "Look, our parking lot is filling up!" It was. Unfamiliar cars were entering our parking lot. Parents were getting out, turning to their back seats, and retrieving their children. Not one car, but many. What a site to behold! New faces, young faces, many faces; all coming to our church for Palm Sunday worship.

What a thrill it was to watch the procession of children down the center isle, then round the outside of our congregation. How delightful it was to watch children searching to find a place for themselves at our altar during our children's worship. They filled our altar. What a joy it was to hear the sound of young voices singing a special song for our congregation. What deep pleasure resounded from seeing parents watch their children perform in our church. Twenty-one children and many parents graced our church on Palm Sunday. We extend heart felt thanks to those parents and their children.

In March twenty-eight letters were mailed to MDO parents. Parents were thanked for participating in the MDO program and informed that we would like to see the faces of those children who graced our church during the week. They were asked to mark Psalm Sunday on their calendar and to bring their children to our church that day to watch them perform for our congregation. It was suggested that we would from time to time like to have their children come to our church for special Sunday occasions designed specifically for them.

Why did they come to our church on Palm Sunday? Because we extended an invitation to

them. Nothing complicated. An invitation. An extended hand. Come worship with us.

Let us rejoice, and let us learn. Many hands within our church participated in this venture. This combined effort filled our altar with children. We learned that we can fill our parking lot on Sunday morning. It takes considerable exertion, but it can be done. The proof is in the pudding.

Dear God, give us a teachable spirit, and show how to love.

### ***CHURCH DEBT REDUCED***

As of Palm Sunday those leading our debt reduction program had collected \$11,225. All of this has been used to retire outstanding principal on our church mortgage. After April's monthly payment, we will owe \$14,080 on that mortgage. The debt reduction program has shortened the life of our loan by ten months. Rather than making our final payment in January, 2005, we will make our final payment in March, 2004. The final payment in March, 2004 will be \$773.87 rather than the regular \$1,206. In 2004 we will make total mortgage payments of \$3,186, a reduction of \$11,286 from total regular mortgage payments of \$14,472 made in 2003.

In addition to the financial benefit, this is another example of the ingenuity and perseverance to be found within our congregation. An idea came to mind, and it was expressed in January to our congregation. Reminders were offered along the way. Many responded with checks, and it is still not too late for those wishing to contribute.

Many thanks both to those with the original idea who exerted great effort to implement that idea, and to those who responded with checks. These kind of efforts do not just happen, but they obviously can be made to happen within our church. The proof is in the pudding.

### ***FOOD FOR THOUGHT***

We are moving in the direction of having two church dinners each month. One will be held on a Wednesday night and the other will be held on a Sunday following worship service.

Wednesday night dinners will be designed to attract new people to our church. We will focus on our neighborhood by utilizing our church

marquee to post a series of invitational messages over a period of days. We learned that people read our church marquee and we intend to put that knowledge to good use. We will focus outside our neighborhood by providing members with a good reason to invite friends to our church: "Come join us for dinner Wednesday night." For those reticent to invite friends to worship, it might be easier to invite friends to eat.

Wednesday night meals involve considerable work by a handful of faithful people. How can we properly thank them? Perhaps the best way to offer thanks would be to participate in the meal. Our thanks can resonate louder by bringing a friend or two to dinner with us.

Wednesday night meals will have a fixed charge of \$5.00 for all you can eat. Small children eat for free. If anyone has ideas about a more attractive pricing structure, please let us know. Profits will be donated to the church general fund. Our next Wednesday night meal will be held on May 14<sup>th</sup>. Please mark your calendar and make every effort to attend. We could be laying the foundation for wonderful memories.

Sunday morning meals will be designed for our congregation, although guests will be most welcome. These meals will be potluck affairs without a fixed charge, but a donation jar will be made available. Profits will be donated to the church general fund. These potluck meals might provide us with time to learn more about each other. A time to visit with one another. A time to tell some of our own stories, and to listen to the stories of another.

Not long ago I sat visiting with someone in our congregation. We have known each other for some years, but at that particular moment we were sharing tales in a relaxed setting at church. In the course of our conversation, I learned that my friend had joined the military the same day he graduated from high school. He along with a friend had graduated in the morning and together had gone for military induction that same afternoon. Suddenly the tone of his voice changed. "That was the last time I ever saw that man. He was killed in the war. Not a day has since gone by that I have not thought about him." I sat in stunned silence.

There is great wealth to be discovered in our church. This is one of the virtues of a small

church, but it is by no means an automatic virtue. The gold must be mined. Sunday morning potluck meals might provide the time and opportunity for us to experience and explore that hidden wealth we carry within. We know many faces, but what of the stories within? We encourage your participation.

Dear God, give us a teachable spirit, and show us how to love.

### ***EASTER SUNDAY***

Last Easter Sunday I arose early to make copies of each Easter Sunday setting in the Gospels. My intention was to review these passages with our Sunday School class. Copies of those excerpts today remain on a shelf at home. I did not make it to church last Easter. My Mom and Dad were visiting me on their return to Nebraska from winter in the Rio Grande Valley. My oldest sister was with them to help on the drive because of my Dad's recent surgery.

I missed church last Easter because my Dad became sick. Too sick to go to church, and too sick to stay in my home. We took Dad to the hospital on Easter Sunday for what turned out to be the last week of his life. God rest his soul.

Many in our congregation have felt the sting of death this past year. All have felt it somewhere along the way. This Easter Sunday may we extend a silent hand to each other to honor our memories of those we deeply loved and who are no longer with us. May those memories be a blessing to each of us.

I have sat through many Easter Sunday services, but this year it will be different. Resurrection is a word that will resonate in a different tone for me this year. Perhaps that will also be the case with some of you this year. For others perhaps it has been an Easter past, and for some it might be an Easter in the future. Each of us travels this journey in our own particular fashion. If one word cannot possibly mean precisely the same thing for each of us, we might agree that a mystery surrounds the word Resurrection. Death is a great mystery both in itself and as part of the mystery that surrounds us all our lives.

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

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