

***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

November 9, 2003 – Number 13

FALL FESTIVAL

Our Fall Festival turned out to be a resounding success. Unlike last year, the weather cooperated and we had a steady stream of congregation members and visitors from nine in the morning until four in the afternoon. Children found their way to the moon walk and enjoyed bouncing about, while adults were treated either to a barbeque dinner or tea room lunch, depending upon their preference. All were treated to a first rate display of paintings, stained glass art, jewelry and a host of items offered by members of our congregation. A small church can put on a first class Fall Festival, and that we did.

Some members of our congregation came much before nine and remained long after four, and some members of our congregation put in long hours of planning and preparation before November 1st. Events the size of our Fall Festival do not just happen; they are made to happen. Richard Pariseau asked that I convey his thanks to all who participated in this effort and I happily do just that. "Thanks to all whose hands joined in this effort!"

Chapters 25-31 in the book of Exodus find God talking with Moses on Mount Sinai. During a forty-day period, God laid out the blueprint for the Tabernacle and the priesthood which was to officiate. Chapters 35-40 cover the construction of all that is planned in chapters 25-31. In chapter 19, God had told all the people of Israel

that "if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation." (19: 5-6) This promise was made to the entire people of Israel. When it came to the actual construction of the Tabernacle and the ornaments of the priesthood, however, construction material was requested on a voluntary basis. "And they came, everyone whose heart was stirred, and everyone whose spirit was willing, and brought the LORD's offering to be used for the tent of meeting, and for all its service, and for the sacred vestments. So they came, both men and women; all who were of a willing heart brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and pendants, all sorts of gold objects, everyone bringing an offering of gold to the LORD." (35:21-22) Not everyone stepped forth with an offering. The offering was made by those "whose heart was stirred," and "whose spirit was willing." And you know what? That was enough. "So the people were restrained from bringing; for what they had already brought was more than enough to do all the work." (36:6-7)

Not everyone in our congregation stepped forth with an offering of one kind or another for our Fall Festival. But you know what? Those who did provided enough. Sometimes our hearts are not stirred. Sometimes our spirits are not willing. This is why we form a congregation of worship. Different hearts are stirred at different moments. We thank those whose hearts were stirred and we reach out with embracing arms to those whose hearts were not stirred. In this there is nothing new, for it reaches all the way back to Moses and Mount Sinai, but there is something vitally important. A congregation has its own rhythm created by the movement of many hearts, each at its own pace at any particular moment. At any given moment some step forward, some do not. But at each moment, our arms embrace all. This is the heart of community.

HELLO, GOODBYE AND BLESSINGS

Sunday October 12th was a rare combination of celebration and sorrow. With Lee and Heather Dobie we celebrated a baby shower. The shower was held immediately after church and was well attended. Our congregation showered gifts and in return received much appreciation and love. The occasion was quite touching. The Dobies lived in our neighborhood and church hopped for

a number of years before discovering Oak Meadow. It was love at first sight, and they have been with us ever since. With warm anticipation we look forward to seeing God's newest gift to our congregation. William was born on October 24th.

Equally touching, but for a different reason, was Betty Zook's goodbye to Oak Meadow. Betty is moving to Illinois to live with her sister and October 12th was her last Sunday in our congregation. She spoke of us as her family and while we wish her the best, we will dearly miss her. Her sister's gain is surely our loss.

¹ Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves." (Genesis 12: 1-3) "I will bless you...so that you will be a blessing." God has blessed Lee and Heather with the gift of a new life, and the expanding Dobie family will be a blessing to our congregation. God blessed Oak Meadow with Betty Zook, and though she leaves for Illinois, she leaves her blessing behind. Surely these blessings are not in heaven or beyond the sea, but before our very eyes in our Oak Meadow home.

LAIITY SUNDAY

October 19th was Laity Sunday, one of three special Sundays without church wide offering. The church laity consists of all people who are not members of the clergy. The word laity comes to us from the Greek word *laikos*, meaning "of the people," or "common." The key ritual separating clergy from laity is ordination, and that takes us once more back to Moses and Mount Sinai. "Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting, and shall wash them with water, and put on Aaron the sacred vestments, and you shall anoint him and consecrate him, so that he may serve me as priest." (Exodus 40:13)

Since that day on the mountain, there has been no lack of argument about the role of the clergy versus that of the laity. In general, the role of the laity increased with the Reformation in the 16th century. In the United Methodist Church, the

only body that can speak for the church as a whole is the General Conference, which meets every four years and is composed of an equal number of clergy and lay members. With certain exceptions, lay members of the General Conference may not vote on the ordination of ministers. In short, lay members share fully in general matters of the church, but are restricted in the matter of ordination. This is the situation today. It was not always so, and in fact one of the major divisions in Methodism revolved around the role of laity in the church. In 1830 the Methodist Protestant Church broke away from the original Methodist Episcopal Church over this very issue and the two did not reunite until 1939. Among other things, the Methodist Protestant Church dispensed with the office of bishop.

The nature of the problem can be illustrated in the origin of Methodism in America. Sometime between 1760 and 1766 an Irishman named Robert Strawbridge immigrated to Maryland. Strawbridge had been active in the early Methodist societies then emerging in Ireland. This was the period when Methodism was a movement rather than a church, and for the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper one went to an Anglican priest. In pre-Revolutionary America, there were fewer Anglican priests and as Frederick A. Norwood writes in *The Story of American Methodism*, Strawbridge was "the first of a long line of Methodist mavericks who grazed in fenced pastures very unwillingly." (p. 66) It appears that Strawbridge initially simply declared himself a preacher and began to preach. When the situation called for the administration of the sacraments, Strawbridge declared himself ordained and administered the sacraments. Such behavior flew in the face of the rules, but Strawbridge prevailed for the simple reason that he was successful: he had a large following. Strawbridge itinerated in the Chesapeake Bay area, the area in which Methodism took its initial roots in this country. He died in 1781. Three years later Methodism began as a church with the 1784 Baltimore Conference. Strawbridge and Laity Sunday are reminders that both clergy and laity have important functions in our church.

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

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