



Joy Mennonite Church Newsletter

January 1997

Pastor's Corner

"Evaluation: Secular or Christian"

The year end and the beginning of a new year are a natural time to evaluate where we have been and where we are going. We believe it is good for the church to do this, but we cannot evaluate as secular institutions do. Secular institutions evaluate on the basis of how well they accommodate the culture around them. Their guiding light is the values of the culture that bring them wealth, prestige or fame. Jesus told us to beware when all men speak well of you. (Lk 6:26) Believers are called to be present for the healing of

those wounded by the powers of the world. Jesus said, we are not of the world, but sent into the world. (Jn 17: 14-18)

The church must also evaluate differently because we are accountable to a higher authority, God. If we are the people of God, led by the spirit of God, we cannot put everything into neat categories to be judged for their success. God cannot be contained. If we are not occasionally surprised, but always able to anticipate and plan, we should be concerned.

We are living in a society where religion has be-

come big business. Our gospel entrepreneurs today have far out done the temple traders of Jesus time. Success is measured in numbers of converts and offerings counted in millions.

In a small church we are probably too quick to dismiss the meaning of numbers. Numbers do not mean everything, but numbers mean something. I believe the question we must ask is not how many joined, but why did new people come to us, or why do some not join us. This is one of the ways to better understand what our proclamation is.

I believe we should be

more concerned about the condition of the church body than by the rate of growth. What really matters is not the culturally correct theology, but a passion to know and live the truth in a culture that does not. In contrast to the world that will judge each person by the contribution that person can make to the institution, we believe the institution will be judged by how we serve the person. By this standard every person has equal value.

I hope you had a blessed Christmas and pray God will give you a prosperous new year in the Lord.

Moses Mast

My Life on Death Row

by Judie Menadue

In 1985, at the urging of Sister Helen Prejean (author of *Dead Man Walking*), Mennonite Central Committee sent me to Louisiana where I worked for a non-profit program that coordinated volunteer attorneys to represent people on death row. I had grown up in Wisconsin and lived in Iowa and Minnesota. None of those states have the death penalty, so I knew little about it, other than that as a pacifist I opposed it. After leaving MCC in 1988, I moved to Elkhart, Indiana. I represented people on death row there for eight years, taking cases as an independent contractor when the State public defender office had a conflict of interest. Last July I moved to Oklahoma and started working for the Oklahoma Indigent Defense System. This move represented a

large pay cut for me, but I came believing God called me here to put to use the skills and experience God has given me.

I started out opposing the death penalty based on my Christian and pacifist beliefs that oppose the use of violence to solve problems. God not only taught us to not stone others, to turn the other cheek, and to love the least among us, but also gave us the example of Saul. Saul was a mass murderer, but God healed him and he became Paul -- one of the great founders of our church as we know it. Most Sundays we read Bible verses written by a mass murderer who wrote them from a prison cell!

I also oppose the death penalty as an attorney, be-

cause there is no fair way to select who shall die. The death penalty is imposed in an arbitrary and discriminatory fashion. It falls the harshest on those who are the weakest and most traumatized among us, and politicians often use it for improper purposes. It does nothing for the families of homicide victims, and some of them oppose its use. Sometimes it actually adds to their pain and keeps their wounds open.

Some people on death row are innocent. Many are mentally retarded, and others have serious mental health problems that they genetically inherited, like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Most have some form of organic brain damage either from birth (e.g., fetal alcohol syndrome) or acquired by accidents, illness and/or substance abuse. Many are illiterate. Almost all had traumatic

childhood experiences and most experienced abandonment and neglect as children.

I hate crime, just like everyone else, and I'm scared of it. The fact that Oklahoma has the death penalty and has executed many people does not make me feel safer. Not only does it not make us safer, it probably has the opposite effect. In killing people, the government serves as a role-model for the use of violence to solve problems. Homicide rates often increase just after an execution.

I believe the way to reduce crime and have safer communities is to work to deal with the root causes of crime -- to reduce unemployment, poverty, child abuse, illiteracy, and unfair labor practices. Every day, children are being abused and

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traumatized, and they will grow up to use alcohol and drugs to deaden their inner emotional pain. Many will end up committing crimes. It is undisputed that the death penalty is expensive and costs much more than keeping people in prison for the rest of their lives. By abolishing the death penalty we can use the money to protect and help children.

It is not always easy for me to love some of my clients, and some have committed horrendous crimes that can really stretch me in trying to love them. However, I always learn something from each one, if I am willing to be open to it. When I hear their life stories, I know "there but for the grace of God go I." My childhood was not all roses, but it was good enough to protect me from what others have suffered. If I had lived the lives of my clients, I too would have ended up committing homicide, and would need the forgiveness and compassion that God gave Saul/Paul. It's the least that God asks of us.

Calendar

- Jan 6 Epiphany
- Jan 6-12 Mennonite World Conference, India
- Jan 15 Martin Luther King, Jr's Birthday
- Jan 18 Church Annual Business Meeting, 10am
- Jan 26 World Fellowship Day
- Feb 6 Stanley Shenk here
- Feb 16 First Sunday of Lent

Fellowship News:

On the evening of Dec. 21, we met at the church for a caroling party and put together fruit and nut baskets, which we delivered to residents in the Lincoln Terrace neighborhood while caroling. On Dec. 23, the westside neighborhood association held their caroling party at our church.

Our condolences to Thea and Bill Klassen, on the death of her older brother on Dec. 29, in Canada. Our prayers are with you.

Worship News:

Peter Brueckner served as Worship Leader for December. Each Sunday we chose a name for the Advent candle for that Sunday, based on the message given by Moses. Then we lit the candle. This helped us to focus on the meaning of Advent.

Annual Business Meeting:

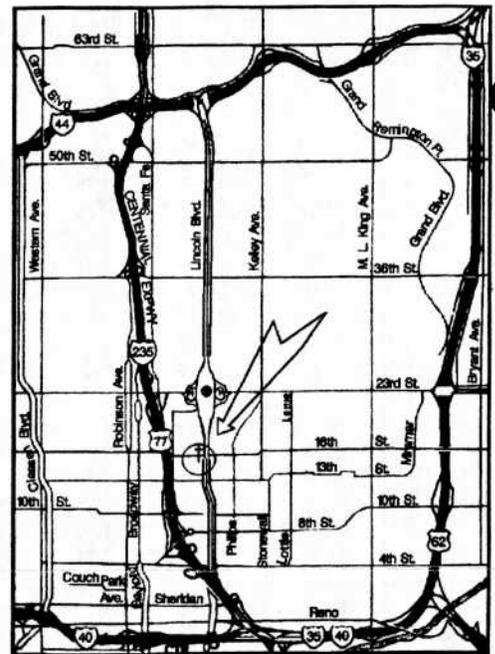
All members are reminded of our annual business meeting, scheduled for Saturday, January 18, at 10 a.m. Agenda items include the budget for 1997 and elections. Please plan to attend if you can.

More Changes are Coming:

Mike Powers has begun a new job in Wichita, KS, effective January 6. Darlene, Laura and James plan to stay in OKC until the end of the school year in May, or until their house is sold. Among other things, that means that this newsletter will once again be undergoing changes and a new look. This is the last edition that Mike will be able to publish, and Darlene will be phasing out her involvement by the beginning of summer. We are grateful we had this chance to contribute.

Worship Service:

Every Sunday at 10 O'clock A.M.



Church Address: 504 NE 16th St.
(just west of the oil derrick on Lincoln Blvd.)



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