

BRIDGING THE GAP

FAIRVIEW HEIGHTS CHURCH OF GOD
5500 Old Collinsville Road Fairview Heights, Illinois 62208
(618) 632-1438

Rev. Terry L. Clayton, Senior Pastor

Rev. Brian Pope, Associate Pastor

www.fhcog.org

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FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

"When Following Seems Unfair"

They were sitting around a fire at the edge of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus and over half of His chosen disciples. Suddenly Jesus turned to Simon Peter and said, "Peter, follow me." A very simple message heard by everyone, especially Simon. You see the Lord wanted Simon's heart. He wanted Peter to be totally available, fully committed with no strings attached. His command was perfectly clear, to get the fisherman off the fence. But Simon's response was a classic when he said, looking at John "but Lord what about this man?" Isn't that sometimes typical even today? Peter was attempting to dodge the point by asking Jesus about John. Aren't you going to give him the same kind of command? Notice Jesus reply in the very next verse. Jesus said to him, "If I want him

to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me."

Now what does this say to us and to the members of our family? Simply that following Christ is an individual matter. The Lord saves us individually. He commissions us individually. He speaks to us and directs us individually. Peter momentarily forgot this fact. He became overly interested in the will of God for John's life. Does that sound a little like you? It may be that God is putting you through an experience that seems terribly demanding, even humiliating. You may be looking over the fence or across the dining room table, wondering about his life, or her commitment. You may be entertaining the thought that it is simply not fair. When it comes to this matter of doing His will, God has not said that you must answer for anyone else except yourself. Quit looking around and concerning yourself with the need of others to do what you are doing. God chooses the roles we play. Each part is unique. It is so easy for the Peter within us to respond with why me Lord? The Lord's answer for all of us is the same, remember you are not John, you are Peter.

As we begin this New Year, is God calling you to a difficult mission field, or occupation, or type of ministry? Is He leading you to live sacrificially or to pass up a few pleasures? If He is then follow Him, and forget about John. Another year has gone by and we cannot relive 2005, but we can start 2006 with new commitment for our Lord! I don't know what this new year holds for our church but I believe it will be the best ever as we each one do our part as God directs our lives.

What sacrifices have you made in order to follow Christ? Who really wants to stay the same as we begin this new year? I sure don't. So let's move out of the rank of the mediocre and join the ranks of excellence. Remember you are not John, you are Peter and the Lord has a special calling, ministry for you. Are you willing to be all you can be for the Lord in this new year?

*Enjoy the Journey,
Pastor Clayton*

SERMON OUTLINES FOR JANUARY 2006

January 1 "New Year's Day 2006"

MORNING SERVICE: Pastor Clayton
"Getting Off to a Good Start in 2006"
Text: I Cor. 3:1-11

NO EVENING SERVICE

January 8

MORNING SERVICE: Pastor Clayton
"How Much Do I Owe?"
Text: Matt. 18:21-35

EVENING SERVICE: Video from Anderson
Campmeeting by Lori Salierno

January 15

MORNING SERVICE: Pastor Clayton
"When People Do What They Have
Always Done"
Text: Romans 1:28-32

EVENING SERVICE: The Visual Bible Study of
Matthew Chapter 17

January 22

MORNING SERVICE : Pastor Brian

EVENING SERVICE: The Visual Bible Study of
Matthew Chapter 9

January 29

MORNING SERVICE : Pastor Clayton
"WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES"
"Salvation: God's Plan"
Text: Romans 10:9-10

EVENING SERVICE: All Church Singing and
Fellowship

PASTOR BRIAN SHARES

My Gift From God This Christmas

God gave me the gift of insight this year for Christmas. While some may call it hindsight I call it insight, because God gave me the ability to see how He is working IN sight of me. God has given me a loving and sometimes angelic wife. She becomes more beautiful to me each and every day. It is her walk with God that makes her beauty multiply each and every day. God has given me two wonderful children to help raise and watch grow up. I know all children are a gift from God but I didn't know He would use them so much to speak to me. The expressions, the words, their thoughts move me unlike no other. God uses everything around me to speak to me.

I am also blessed by the Family of God that God has given me. Our Church is a blessed Church and I am grateful to be a part of the Church. While we may not all get along all the time or see eye to eye, we are loved. Remember the Hope that Christ brought back in to our lives and how grateful we were. It is that feeling of love and completeness that we need to share with each other. It is when we have nothing but love in our hearts that we truly share the Kingdom of God with everyone.

We always say it is the small things in life that makes us happy, but in reality each thing we consider small is a big gift from God. I always ask God for blessings, sometimes I need help in seeing the blessings that are truly a gift from God. May

you see all the blessings God has given you this Christmas.

Pastor Brian

50-Day Spiritual Adventure

What Is a 50-Day Spiritual Adventure?

The dictionary calls an adventure an exciting and unusual experience. So when our church participates in the 50-Day Spiritual Adventure, you can assume it's not going to be business as usual.

The 50-Day Spiritual Adventure is eight unforgettable Sundays and the seven life-changing weeks in between. Adventures are exciting times when everyone in our congregation determines to grow spiritually and to chart their progress in an age-graded journal.

Obviously, it's the risen Christ who transforms our lives. But the 50-Day Adventure helps focus everyone in our church on the Lord's presence by coordinating what happens on Sundays with spiritual learning the rest of the week. This includes personal time in God's Word and practical, fun ways of applying his truth. Adventures stretch people spiritually, but are also enjoyable.

Imagine what would happen if everyone in our congregation---preschoolers and school-age children, teens, adults, and seniors---began practicing Christ's presence in their everyday lives! Well, that is exactly what will be happening starting February 19th.

Start praying for this new ministry now. Pray that everyone will be involved.

Darla Clayton, Adventure Coordinator

J.O.Y. (JUST OLDER YOUTH) SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS

Jim and I were unable to attend (we were in Indiana) but we heard that our class Christmas Party was a big success with 25 people in attendance at Pam and Richard Knowles house.

Thanks so much to Steve Brooks for planning the event and for Pam and Richard opening their house to such a large group.

We have started our new study on "Thinking Like a Christian". This study is sparking very good discussion and I think people are gaining a different perspective by what it means to have a Christian Worldview. It is not too late to join this study and we would love to have you.

*See you in class,
Candy Niemeyer, Teacher*

WCG NEWS

Advent will conclude today - Christmas Day. We have had great participation in preparing us for celebration of the birth of our Savior. Thanks to our Advent readers Marshall, Steve, Victoria and Stella and to our Pastor who have helped us focus on our theme: Willing to Be, Serve, and Change. Last Sunday we received our Christ Birthday Offering and we are happy to report we are over our goal of \$2,000. God is good!

Saturday morning (17th) we had a wonderful time at our Christmas Brunch. The theme was "Candy Canes" - decorations were candy canes and we were reminded about the symbol of the candy cane. The meal was wonderful. Thanks to Kim and those who helped furnish the meal. Also of great interest and fun was the mugs filled with an assortment of neat items. These were auctioned off - proceeds went to the Christ Birthday offering which amounted to \$169.50!!!

Some of our ladies joined the Men4Him on the 10th and helped distribute gifts and lap robes they made to residents in nursing homes. What a rewarding experience!

Five hundred dollars has been sent to Mid-America Christian University to the Ministry Advance Program (MAP). MAP funds provide scholarship assistance to ministry students in exchange for their future service to the Church of God. MAP funds

also assist in developing the MACU Ministry Program, including faculty, research and curriculum development.

We will have a special meeting Wednesday Dec. 28 at 6 pm to begin making plans for hosting the WCG Illinois State Convention in April. We are excited about the convention being in Fairview Heights next year and want to do all we can to make the ladies experience at Fairview Heights a memorable one.

We have eight offices in our local WCG. Each year we elect four for a two year term. This year we will be electing President, Finance Coordinator, Historian, Parliamentarian/Literature Coordinator.

Please pray about how the Lord might be leading you to become an officer. It's very important that you have a heart for Missions and attend the monthly meetings. The nominating committee will be meeting in January to review these offices. It would be wonderful to have volunteers to step up to these four offices. Let Ruth or Stella know if you are interested and would like additional info about an office. We have a great group of officers and appreciate all they do to keep our local group active!

Let's look for new opportunities and goals as we begin 2006! God has blessed us and we in turn want to bless others!

Ruth Pope, President

MEN4 HIM

What a wonderful time was had by all who participated in distributing the Christmas gifts to the Rosewood and Caseyville Nursing Homes. Thank you ladies for joining us in this venture to brighten the Christmas season for the residents.

We are looking forward to a great 2006 year. We encourage all men to join us as we enjoy some special events and times of fellowship.

January 8th cars will be distributed to anyone who wants to race in our Grand Prix on January 28th. Saturday, the 14th, we will have a work day for anyone who would like

to have help putting their cars together. Men, we will meet together on the 14th also to complete organizing for the Valentines day dinner. If you would like to help, please let us know. The dinner will be Sunday, February 12th at 5:00 p.m.

Bill White

FOOD PANTRY NEWS

The boy scout drive on November 20th netted the pantry 9100 items. That was not as much as other years, but was successful. Our shelves are full but things are going fast. We served 50 families in October—164 people.

In case you want to see the Pantry, we'd be glad to show it off. God owns it—we are only his little helpers. That is why it is so wonderful and a blessing to be a volunteer.

*Vice President,
Gwen Campbell*

Starbucks Evangelism

The Praise Gathering lives on! A couple of the conferences we went to were so pertinent to our time that I took a few notes. Here is some of what Leonard Sweet had to say at a conference titled "Starbucks Evangelism".

We can't get through life without knowing some Italian language like 'pizza' or 'marinara' so we as Christians shouldn't expect to get through life without knowing a bit of Greek. One Greek word is semiotic—comes from semion, which means sign. Jesus said he wanted us to be able to read the signs of the times. Semiotic is 'the ability to read signs.' The ultimate in spiritual illiteracy is the inability to read the handwriting on the wall. God is writing his word all the time and we can't read the signs. As soon as you buy a new car you immediately start seeing that type of car everywhere! You are now in a state of semiotic awareness! The only thing that has changed is you! They haven't made more of

that car since you bought one. Our churches should be the place today bursting with creativity in a state of 'semiotic awareness'-instead many are bastions of boredom.

This is the good news! He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of us. The idea that we are bringing God into the world is the height of theological arrogance. To think that Jesus did not arrive on the scene until we got there is incorrect. The fact that we are in a position like this means that God set it all up in advance-it is a divine appointment! The first thing we have to do is recognize Him! The first thing the disciples had a problem with after the ascension was that Jesus was always appearing in places they didn't expect and they did not always recognize him! Evangelism is not so much joining the church in outreach but joining Jesus in what He is already doing.

Semiotics is also the art and science of "paying attention." One of the problems is the volume of information being thrown at us. We are so inundated with information we soon cease to pay attention to any of it. The condition of extreme attention is Love. How do we pay attention to what God is doing? How do we recognize him? The first recognition of our expected child might have been a sonogram (sound). It is all about hearing a vision. Hearing and listening are absolutely necessary to the type of evangelism where we are joining what Jesus is doing. This is a post-Christian culture. When people think of Christianity their thoughts might not be that good. But if we start with their story we can discern what God is already doing in their life. The fact that they are telling you their story means God is up to something big! We must connect the dots of their story to the greatest story ever told. To do this we must know some of the stories in the Bible. We can't get our story in too soon or it weights the conversation too heavily in our favor and turns the person off.

Ikea is a furniture company-second only to Bill Gates and Microsoft. It is participatory-you get to put the furniture together! The reason why NASCAR is the

fastest growing sport in the US is because they are making it participatory. They have cameras in the car and in the pit-you in effect are participating in the race. Here is another semiotic example using a Starbucks cup! Ten years ago Starbucks started with one location. Today the stock has appreciated 1600%. Last year this coffee company received seven Grammy's-a motto is "Live more musically" you can even download music! There are now 10,000 Starbucks-6000 in USA, 4000 overseas. Beirut, Lebanon has 10 Starbucks, Anderson, IN has one Starbucks. The one little store ten years ago began across from a Farmers Market on a side street in Seattle. Not even on a main highway! The only thing preventing any church from impacting the world is lack of imagination-a fear of taking risks-lack of ambition for God and the gospel.

Why are people willing to spend \$2-3 on a cup of coffee? This is \$30/gallon-it is cheaper to drink gas! Because you are not buying coffee! Nobody is selling a product. It is selling an experience of coffee! This is not a culture searching for something to believe in-they believe in just about anything! It is a culture searching for the experience! It is only an experience with God that can light the fire of the human soul.

Each Starbucks cup of coffee is an EPIC experience! E stands for Experiential, P is participatory, I is image risk and C is connective. The whole idea is to invite your participation. TV creates passive people. The Internet creates interactive people. This is a Karoke culture. From the beginning Starbucks understood this. They even created a whole new language. Why shouldn't the church be able to have its own language? The Starbucks catechism is "Make it your drink" This is the book to teach you the language. There are 11,000 different combinations of ingredients for their coffee. The first drink is in effect your 'baptismal drink.' To be a disciple of Jesus we need to learn the language even a few Greek words like "semiotics". Reality TV is here to stay. Reality TV has nothing to do with reality. It is

making TV interactive-kind of post modernizing it. It is putting Karoke on TV.

Starbucks has a mission statement. Jesus gave us a mission statement –Go into the world and make The image has replaced the word. Do advertisers spend thousands of dollars to give you words? No they want to give you an image. Jesus connected to the people by images (parables). Our mind is made of metaphors. When we try to change people's images we are really doing brain surgery. Jesus reframed Judaism for the Jew.

C is connective. Anything that is working is getting more EPIC! The connective or relationship aspect is the most important. In the 19th century there was a rural to urban migration. Later the urban to suburban migration took place.. Interstate highway system was built as part of the suburban migration. Porches on farmhouses served as a place to connect. This is the real reason for Starbucks. Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks, thought America needed a third place to connect. The porches were the third place for people to connect. When the porches disappeared the third place disappeared. The deck or patio in the back usually came with a fence (privacy). Suddenly in the 70's Howard Schultz realized there was no front porch anymore and he created Starbucks. Places for people to hang out and connect. With every Starbucks that goes up it should be an indictment of the church. If we had been paying attention the church could have become the 'front porch'.

NASCAR unlike tennis is growing so fast because-life is on the line, they have a uniform, microphones are in car-the driver is being interviewed during the race-you can tune in on multiple cameras on the Internet, you can hear the conversation between driver and pit crew, It is participatory! More tickets are scalped to the parking lots than the stadium for a big event. People come days early to tale-gate. They set up generators and satellite dishes and connect with people. It is connective! It is EPIC!

Church –can we learn anything from all of this? See Marshall if you would like to listen to the tape.

New Year's Prayer

"Heavenly Father, for this coming year

Just one request I bring.

I do not pray for happiness or any earthly thing.

I do not ask to understand the way you lead me;

But this I ask—teach me to do the thing that pleases You.

I want to know Your guiding voice,

To walk with you each day.

Heavenly Father,

Make me swift to hear and ready to obey;

And thus the year I now begin

A happy year will be,

If I am seeking just to do

The thing that pleases You."

Anonymous

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me to lie down in green pastures,

He leads me beside quiet waters, He

restores my soul. He guides me in paths of

righteousness for His names sake. Even

though I walk through the valley of the

shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you

are with me, your rod and your staff they

comfort me. You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies. You anoint

my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely

goodness and love will follow me all the days

of my life and I will dwell in the house of the

Lord forever.

Psalms 23

Editor's Note

Thank you for your contribution to this newsletter. Please submit articles by the third Sunday of the month. You may put them in the pocket on the bulletin board in the narthex, in my mailbox or email them to me at billandkaren@mail.com. Thank you!

Karen White, Editor