

NewsBrief

♥For the members and friends of the First Presbyterian Church of Pittsford ♥

February, 2004

From the Pastor's Pen-Cell

Michelle (not her real name according to writer Henry Brinton) is a Michigan woman who works at a 7-11. She wanted an unforgettable wedding. She loves her customers, her work and her fiancé. So she married him on the asphalt outside the 7-11 on 7/11 — July 11th — carrying her bouquet in a Super Big Gulp cup. At the reception, hot dogs and Slurpees were served at reduced prices.

No, this is not “wedding season,” but in February we will have a pair of Marriage Enrichment events at First Presbyterian Church that follow on the heels of The Amazing. Carrie and I looked over the calendar and pondered over what to do with Valentine’s Day stuck in the middle of winter. Might this be a good time to pause and look at how love is expressed in the most intimate of relationships? Might we respond to the requests of some of our Wednesday Bible Study people who have asked that we provide special focus on this subject?

Unforgettable weddings usually have an unpredictable facet — like a fainting bride, or a cold-footed no-show groom, or a bridesmaid who fell in the mud on the way in the door, or a smiling minister who repeatedly and confidently calls the bride and groom by the wrong names. Most all pastors have wedding stories to tell about dropped rings, forgotten vows, fainting bridesmaids and their own *faux pas*.

Japan’s population is less than 2 percent Christian, but a recent poll says that more than 60 percent of Japanese couples have Christian-style weddings. It is not a religious experience that people seek in a Christian-style wedding, “but to make a fashion statement,” said one wedding company spokeswoman, according to *Christianity Today* (March 2003). “Neither the participants nor venues actually want the ceremony to have religious meaning.” What a sad commentary this is. Weddings with style to be preferred over substance?

If a couple truly wants to make a fashion statement they could fly to Jamaica. According to a magazine report, a Jamaican resort is planning some unusual wedding ceremonies on Valentine’s Day, with couples saying “I do” in the nude. The government’s response: “Please don’t.” Jamaican tourism officials say the event is improper and offensive. *The Gleaner* newspaper quotes Tourism Minister Portia Simpson Miller as saying that “this type of activity is not in keeping with our marketing strategy for Jamaica.” Would this lack of attire make a wedding unforgettable? It would certainly save the cost of gowns and tuxes. It would make a “non-fashion” statement.

Now that Ryan and Trista have confirmed their “pink” nuptials on screen and in the tabloids for all to see there will probably be a run on “sand ceremonies.” A conversation with a recent bride (who has decided not to get married here in Pittsford) indicated that she wanted the uniqueness of her wedding to make a statement. “The vows won’t last,” she said, “but the memory of how we do our wedding will.” The hope is for the inverse of this for it is faithfulness, and promise, and commitment, and sacrifice, and forgiveness that are truly at the root of making a statement.

There is a risk in offering a marriage enrichment opportunity. The risk is that those whose marriages are in crisis, those whose marriages have failed, those who have chosen never to marry, those who have lost a spouse . . . indeed a host of people could choose to be offended that this would exclude them. We hope that the class will be open enough so that all might find some help and encouragement. Indeed, it may suggest other specific needs that our congregation should be addressing – such as young single adults who may feel very much out of touch within our faith community.

It is comforting and yet challenging to read literature that says “marriage is good for both men and women, markedly better than being single, cohabiting or getting divorced. Married people have more satisfying sexual lives, both physically and emotionally. They live significantly longer, healthier, happier lives and recover more quickly from illness. They are much less likely to slap, hit and abuse each other than some have suggested. Marriage protects men and women from suicide and mental illness as well.” (Glenn T. Stanton, “The social experiment that failed,” *Christianity Today*, February 5, 2001, 73.)

If we were to look at snippets of advice we would hear people like actress Simone Signoret, “Chains do not hold a marriage together. It is threads, hundreds of tiny threads that sew people together through the years.” Or some may be tuning in to a radio talk show host who says, “I always remind people that you don’t fall in love and get married. You get married and you learn to love over many years.” (Dr. Laura Schlessinger)

As Valentine’s Day sneaks up on us, we will encounter many who need an affirming word, a comforting and encouraging touch, and a kiss of affection. Those who desperately need these expressions of love may be lonely in a nursing home, our children who see their lives changing, a neighbor who fears the medical report. To the best of our knowledge, Jesus was never married and yet there was never a greater lover. “For God so loved the world that . . . ” Now that is unforgettable!

Bruce



Prayerfully Pondering Valentine's Day...

There are varying opinions as to the origin of Valentine's Day. Some state that it was named for St. Valentine, a Roman martyred for defying Emperor Claudius II. He died on February 14, 269 C.E., the same day that had been devoted to love lotteries in pagan tradition. Legend also says that St. Valentine left a farewell note for the jailer's daughter, who had become his friend, and signed it "From Your Valentine". Under the rule of Claudius the Cruel, Rome was involved in many bloody and unpopular campaigns. Not surprisingly, the Emperor was having a difficult time getting soldiers to join the military and he attributed the attrition of his forces to their ardor for home and hearth. As a result, Claudius cancelled all marriages and engagements in Rome. St. Valentine secretly married couples and suffered martyrdom for his ministry. Gradually, February 14 became the date for exchanging love messages. In the United States, commercial valentines were introduced in the 1800's and little red boxes, fuzzy teddy bears, and chocolate hearts have seemingly become ubiquitous since then.

While the trappings for celebrating Valentine's Day may continue to become more elaborate, the meaning behind the day remains basic: love is worth an effort to preserve. In John's first letter – often nicknamed the letter of love for the word's frequent repetition – we are told, "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God."¹ John also says, "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another."² That passage from death to life is not always easy, but we have Jesus as a marvelous example before us as well as a community of faith around us that is eager to help us.

One way we can help one another is by practicing loving skills. Think how good each of us feels when someone thanks us for a small kindness we have done. Or remember the joy felt when helping someone else. A sincere compliment can make a person's heart sing for hours and smiles require less facial muscles than frowns. We can teach our children, grandchildren, and young people around us these life-long loving skills and delight in reaping the benefits.

Sometimes these skills become rusty. Our spirits, battered by our recent freezing

temperatures, wind, rain and other biting elements, lose the flexibility necessary to enliven the people God created us to be. Even when we lose that resilience, God abides in us and is faithful to us. How can we become aware of God's loving presence? We can heighten our awareness through practice.

Bruce and I invite you to be a part of two practice sessions. On Sunday, February 1st and 8th between 4 and 5:30, we will have a Marriage Enrichment Event. We invite couples of all kinds to join us for interactive exercises, sharing of resources, and affirmations of the love God intends us to share with one another. Let these two sessions be a gift-filled prelude to your own Valentine's Day celebration the following weekend.

And know that these life-long loving skills are not limited to couples. Each one of us has the Spirit of God abiding in us, calling us forth to love one another. Each one of us can share in the spirit of Valentine's Day by remembering a brother or sister in Christ and exercising the love that God has shared with us. For those struggling with a brother or sister, cry out and seek help. I remember the pain of divorce. Others in this loving community have known the grief of losing a spouse. Valentine's Day can be a painful reminder of lost love, but it need not be a day on the journey spent miserably alone.

St. Valentine was martyred for his passion. Thankfully, our chances of that happening are slim; nonetheless, we can learn from his example. Love is worth the effort to preserve. May we each find creative, inspiring and rewarding ways to share it lavishly around us.

Love, *Carrie*

February

- Week of February 1 – Jer. 1:4-10; Ps. 71:1-6
1 Cor. 13:1-13; Luke 4:21-30
- Week of February 8 – Isa. 6:1-8 (9-13); Pa. 138
1 Cor. 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11
- Week of February 15 – Jer. 17:5-10; Ps. 1; 1 Cor. 15:12-20
Luke 9:28-36 (37-43)
- Week of February 22 – Exod. 34:29-35; Ps. 99
2 Cor. 3:12-4:2
Luke 9:28-36 (37-43)
- Week of February 29 – Deut. 26:1-11; Ps. 91:1-2, 9-16
Rom. 10:8b-13; Luke 4:1-13

¹ 1 John 4:16b

² 1 John 3:14a

NOTES FROM JAMES



A Note of Appreciation!

Thank you to the music staff and the members of the music ensembles of our church for the many hours of time, talent, and energy spent in leading the music of our church in the Advent and Christmas services. Thanks to Tom Hughes for assisting with the coordination of the brass ensemble for our services on December 21 and Christmas Eve, as well as the Henderson/Harrison family who offered their vehicle and energy to move the borrowed timpani from Pittsford Mendon High School to our choir loft and back again. The instruments added a special touch in accompanying the choir and congregational hymns for both services. Also, thank you to so many members of the congregation who expressed their appreciation to us. Our musicians are a dedicated group. It is nice to know that we have provided a well appreciated and received ministry. We always welcome your comments and feedback.

Technology and the Choir!

The idea of the church choir goes all the way back to the Middle Ages. As the art developed, music was handwritten onto manuscripts called part books. The books were large volumes with parts for the choir members written around each side of the page. Members would stand around one book in a square arrangement and read the side of the page pertaining to their part. Of course, as the printing press developed, it became easier to mass-produce musical scores for performance. As the new year began, our music ministry embraced the technology of the 21st century to aide in our endeavors. I thought it might be appropriate to have a women's choir for the service led by the Presbyterian Women. I searched on the Internet and found a wealth of music that could be downloaded and copied for free. Additionally, potential members of the ensemble could go to the Internet, print their own score and even listen to an MP3 version of the anthem to rehearse in their own home. I sent the information to Carrie who forwarded it to her email list of Presbyterian Women, many of whom joined the women of the Chancel Choir to present the choral music for the service. We've come a long way from the part books!

Start the New Year on a New Note!

As you set your goals for personal growth during the coming year, why not join one of the music ensembles of our church music ministry? The schedule for all of the groups can be found on the church webpage (updated by our skilled webmaster Larry Cooper) or in our printed materials. All of the groups welcome new members with varying talents and abilities. The church music program provides not only a service for the church, but for its participants as well. The time of fellowship and learning which we experience in every rehearsal binds us in a unique link as we seek to serve the church in worship and song. Please feel free to contact me or any member of the church music staff if you have questions concerning the various musical groups. Coming soon, you'll see a music interest inventory that will be used to identify musicians throughout our congregation who might provide instrumental or vocal talents in our service music. Our ensembles are eager to welcome new members!



2004 CHURCH SCHOOL MISSION PROJECT: HEIFER PROJECT INTERNATIONAL from Roxanne Skuse



This will be our 6th year working with Heifer Project International. Last year we raised \$3158.50 for the organization, which translated into 1 cow, 5 sheep, 4 pigs, 13 flocks of chicks, 5 goats, 5 trios of rabbits, and 3 sets of tree seedlings. This was only possible through the generous support of our members, and the hard work of our Sunday School teachers and the youth of this congregation! The Heifer Fair is scheduled for February 8 this year. We will set up our "wares" in Fellowship Hall as always, and will also be selling shares on Sunday, January 25 and Sunday, February 1 for any who are interested in supporting this worthwhile organization. Those who have not yet witnessed the creativity and enthusiasm of the students and teachers displayed at the fair are in for a treat! See you at the fair!



STEPHEN
MINISTRIES
AT FIRST
PRESBYTERI
AN CHURCH
Over the next
few weeks
we will be
telling you a
little about
the Stephen
Ministry
Program.

There are Stephen Ministers at First Presbyterian Church who are trained listeners. A phone call to Rev. Boak or Rev. Mitchell will put you in touch with one of these special helpers when you face the burdens of stress pressure, loneliness, recovery, grief, emptiness, and the pile-up of every day living. (585) 586-5688

- Founded in 1975
- Not-for-profit organization
- Based in St. Louis, Missouri
- Has a staff of about 45 dedicated people--pastors and laity--from a variety of denominational backgrounds
- Produces high-quality training and resources for equipping ministry
- Delivers and supports two major ministry systems: the Stephen Series system of one-to-one caring ministry and the ChristCare Series system of small group ministry
- Produces books, videos, courses, and other resources to enhance ministry in congregations
- Conducts seven one-week training courses every year for 3,000 pastors and lay leaders
- Conducts 80 half-day caring ministry workshops annually across North America
- More than 8,000 congregations involved in one or both of the Stephen Ministries ministry systems
- More than 300,000 Stephen Ministers (lay caregivers) trained

- Approximately one million people have been the formal recipients of the one-to-one care of Stephen Ministers, while millions of others have received the care of a Stephen Minister in a less formal way
- Nearly 700 congregations involved in ChristCare Small Group Ministry, with tens of thousands of people growing as disciples of Jesus and caring for one another in ChristCare Groups

LOGOS

January 21 - NO LOGOS - Come to the
Amazing

January 28 - SURPRISE NIGHT
The word is aware

February 4 - I Scream for ice-cream!"
The word is social

February 11 - Psalm 51:10 Create in us a
new Heart

The word is Love
February 18 - NO LOGOS - Happy
Winter Break

February 25 - Follow the Leader
(Ash Wednesday Service)
The word is follow.

Sylvia

IN MEMORIAM

Barbara D. Rab, 43 Wheatstone Circle,
Fairport, NY was entrusted to God on Tuesday,
January 6 (Epiphany) at White Haven Cemetery.

OFFERINGS

2004 envelope boxes are available for pick-up in
the table in Lobby

NEEDED

Ernie is in need of rags for cleaning, he could use
undershirts, towels, etc., but no sheets, blankets or
pillowcases.

LOST AND FOUND

If you have lost anything this past year, please check
the phone room off the lobby. Everything left will be
donated to Cameron Community.

