

NewsBrief

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

September, 2004

From the Pastor's Pen-Cell

The Olympics will probably be over by the time you read this, but my mind is focused on the games and the need for training and confidence as we anticipate the fall season. The Summer Games in Athens have given us an opportunity to return to New Testament roots, embrace the people of faith who have gone before us, and carry forward the tradition of record-breaking reliance on God.

Rosa Gutierrez has been on the run. She has completed the Gasparilla 15k race and the Rotary Mission Ten. She runs between 80 and 90 miles a week, plus regular swimming and weight training. She covers long distances at the impressive pace of six minutes per mile. She has prepared for the marathon at the 2004 Olympic Games. Throughout her training, Rosa has kept one of our summer Bible passages in mind: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1).

When Rosa runs she remembers the faithful who have gone before her including her mother and father. They moved from Mexico to the United States with nothing in their pockets, but managed to raise 11 children. They are, for Rosa, witnesses of what it means to overcome life's obstacles by faith and trust in God. That's why Rosa is dreaming of something besides gold medals and personal glory. Her highest aspirations are spiritual growth, drawing others to the Lord, and the glorification of God in everything she does. It is Rosa's faith that is at the core of her being.

Throughout these Olympics values such as tolerance, solidarity, peace and friendship are being highlighted. The athletes show us their confidence, perseverance, and endurance. The Olympic record for endurance may be found at the Olympic games of 1912 where Estonian Martin Klein and Finn Alfred Asikainen endured a Greco-Roman middleweight wrestling match lasting 11 hours and 40 minutes — the longest match in Olympic history. Unfortunately, Klein, the favorite to win the gold, was too exhausted to compete in the final and ended up with a silver medal; Asikainen took home the bronze. These athletes trained and disciplined themselves to receive a prize that even though gold, is perishable. People of faith are to confidently train to receive an imperishable prize. In the church, we do not do the training alone.

In his hot-off-the-press book, *The Millennium Matrix*, Rex Miller focuses on community as a key characteristic of a living church in the years to come. Looking at contemporary culture, he notices that there is an intoxicating mix of fellowship, celebration and enterprise in Harley Davidson gatherings, folk-arts festivals, Grateful Dead revival concerts, MAC World, Bill Gaither concerts and even Mary Kay and Amway conventions. He notices that each of these gatherings has consistently grown over the past 15 years, and they have been unusually effective because of the synergy of interaction and fellowship.

As we have pursued a place to worship for the coming months, we have been equally concerned to find a place for us to gather together in fellowship, too. Sometimes we are really too agenda-driven in the life of the church. We can see community as the by-product of our gatherings, not the reason for them. But if we reclaim the image of the church as the community of faith — the body of Christ — and come together in ways that help us to remain connected in our daily lives, then we may feel a surge of new vitality. Miller believes that in the future, congregations will look like extended spiritual families where people open themselves to mission and relationship. Perhaps the church is really an Olympic village. Extended family. Complex interaction. Common interests. Shared faith.

We begin a new year this fall with plans that you find in this newsletter. Many are still being formulated as we begin our "Nazareth Year" as a journey of faith. Join us "at the track" which will be the chapel at Nazareth College beginning September 12. God promises "gold" to all who join the race. All who "race" faithfully receive the prize. Let us not be disqualified because we have been "doping" with that which is not pleasing to God. The apostle Paul put it far more eloquently than I.

(1 Cor 9:24-27 NRSV) Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. {25} Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. {26} So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; {27} but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.

Prayerfully Pondering

Instinct and Intentionality...

What comes naturally to us? What do we do on instinct? As I watch newborn Piper Lyn Wilson, I see her instinctively searching for the comfort and love Keith and Betsy can give her. Like a newborn, we each seek that as well – and many of us find it when we are at church. Now that our sanctuary is burned, circumstances are forcing us to think through what used to be “instinctive” behavior.

At first blush, we might be inclined to look upon all this change as a royal pain. I know I have found myself feeling that way several times this summer as the uncertainty of where worship or programming would occur became overwhelming. (Answers to many of those questions are contained in this *Newsbrief*.) As I was able to move through the anxiety, I began to see it as an opportunity – even an invitation. Think of how many times each of us has said to ourselves, “if only.” If only there weren’t so many meetings, I could spend more time with my family. If only we tried worship differently, we would be able to attract more young adults, college students and newcomers. I am certain you can come up with your own, “if only...”

A wise person once said, “If you do what you’ve always done, you’ll get what you’ve always gotten.” As we complement our instinctive behaviors with greater intentionality, we are certainly getting something different – and promisingly improved!

During the November 2003 Session retreat, our elders learned about being a “Missional Church.” This church of the 21st century is very much like the church of the 1st century in that it intentionally seeks to carry out the Great Commission of Jesus in the particular circumstances in which it finds itself. Determining our church’s mission entails a process called “appreciative inquiry.” Rather than bemoaning the “if onlys” and the things we regret or do not like, appreciative inquiry is a four-step process (initiate, inquire, imagine, innovate) of hopeful discovery.¹ The Good News is we were on that path even before the lightning struck!

Our leadership invites each one of us to intentionally initiate (1) this process of appreciative inquiry. We can inquire (2) of ourselves, “What do I treasure about being a member of First Presbyterian Church?” And we can imagine (3) what our church community would be like with other things we would appreciate intentionally incorporated into our practices. During the adventuresome time we are having at Nazareth, we have the ideal opportunity to be innovative (4)!

In case all this language of innovation becomes threatening, remember this is *appreciative* inquiry. We begin not with a clean slate, but with almost 200 years of history at this particular church; and more than 2000 years of being The Church.

¹ Mark Lau Branson. *Memories, Hopes and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change*. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2004.

I imagine – for example – Christmas services on the Nazareth campus in this gorgeously renovated sanctuary with the snow lightly falling, the lights gently flickering, voices raised harmoniously in song, and people of many generations gathering to praise God. To me, that is a glimpse of the Kingdom of Heaven. A well-noted Presbyterian pastor and author, Frederick Buechner, imagines it this way.

“As a poet, Jesus is maybe his best in describing the feeling you get when you glimpse the Kingdom itself. It’s like finding a million dollars in a field, he says, or a jewel worth a king’s ransom. It’s like finding something you hated to lose and thought you would never find again – an old keepsake, a stray sheep, a missing child. When the kingdom really comes, it’s as if the thing you lost and thought you’d never find again is you.”²

Finding ourselves reminds me of the lyrics to “Amazing Grace.” “I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.” Alleluia! God’s grace is indeed amazing and appreciative inquiry is one of the ways we can encounter it.

During this time we are on an adventure worshipping at Nazareth, I pray we each follow our instincts that led us to be in communion with God and one another. And I pray we will each intentionally search for our unique identity as a child of God.

Blessings, Carrie

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“These are the lectionary texts for the month of September. We welcome you to study in advance of their being incorporated into the Sunday worship services. Beginning September 29th, please join us for Bible Study on Wednesdays at 9:30am and again at 7:00pm to discuss the upcoming Sunday’s texts. No preparation is necessary – bring yourself and your questions. The morning class will meet in the Masonic Lodge and the evening class will meet in the Library. Notice in the schedule below who is teaching and which weeks we are meeting.”

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Week of Sept. 1 – Jer. 18:1-11; Ps. 139:1-6, 13-18;
Philemon 1-21; Luke 14:25-33

Week of Sept. 12 – Jer. 4:11-12, 22-28; Ps. 14;
1 Tim. 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-10

Week of Sept. 19 – Jer. 8:18-9:1; Ps. 79:1-9;
1 Tim. 2:1-7; Luke 16:1-13

Week of Sept. 26 – Jer. 32:1-3a, 6-15; Ps. 91:1-6, 14-16
1 Tim. 6:6-19; Luke 16:19-31

² Frederick Buechner. *Listening to Your Life: Daily Meditations*. (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992) 217.