

TO THE POINT

*A letter from Rev. Stephen Hoffman,
Pastor of First United Methodist Church
of Palmetto*

www.fumcpalmetto.org

14 March 2009

***“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit,
says the Lord of hosts.” Zechariah 4:6***

Dear Friends,

The more I live seeking to be a disciple of Jesus Christ the more I am convinced of the wisdom of always looking at myself as a beginner who has just gotten started. By that, I mean that I really do have a personal need to practice how Jesus asks me to live, and I really do have so much more to learn about what it means to love God with all my heart, all my soul, and all my mind and to love my neighbor as myself.

At our Ash Wednesday service on 28 February we took part in an invitation to Lenten Discipline. During the service we looked at a small, simple booklet called “What You Should Know About Lent.” It was written in very simple terms as if it was meant for beginners. I liked that, and I hope you found it meaningful. It talked about traditional Lenten practices of Fasting, Special Commitments (which means giving up something for a greater good), Good Deeds and Almsgiving, and Prayer and Reflection.

I was interested to hear how others have accepted this invitation to Lenten Discipline so at the beginning of worship last Sunday (March 8) I asked for people to write on a slip of paper how they are observing Lent. I received a number of responses:

- ◆ Yes, I am. Helping Others. Let God shine through me. Pray together as a family. To pray more for those less fortunate. I gave up cream in my coffee. I am not eating between meals. I have quietness in my mind (trying) to work up to ten minutes a day - the voices in my mind sometimes don't want to help me! 40 Days to a Closer Walk with God. Food - decrease. Finances - increase. No put-downs - God attitude. Yes, I am observing Lent. Making a serious effort to speak kindly to and about others. Swearing. Daily Lectio Divina. Reading more of the Bible than just weekly scriptures. All things in moderation. A water fast: drinking only water as a beverage. Daily writing a note to someone in my life and letting them know what a blessing they are to me.

I find that a very encouraging list. Thank you to each of you who took time to anonymously share them. My continuing prayer is that each of these practices will have the fruit of

drawing us closer to God and closer to each other. I don't know about you, but I need a lot of encouragement in spiritual practices. That is one reason why being a part of the Body of Christ is so important. That is what we each have to offer one another. We offer one another the encouragement that is a fruit of the Holy Spirit working within and among us. Mutual encouragement is a vital part of our life together. Encouragement is a precious treasure to share with one another.

Leadership and 'treasure in clay jars'

This spirit of encouragement is just one aspect of the life of faith we share in this community called the church. Many of you contribute in many ways. Right now I am not going to even try to begin to list all the ways so many of you serve Christ by serving in the ministries of this church and in our community as well. But I am going to lift up those who are willing to serve in a leadership capacity in our congregation.

You will find a listing of the leaders of our church for 2009 in this letter. I hope you will take the time to read through it prayerfully giving thanks for each one listed there. I want to also give a special word of thanks to several people that are not listed in this year's leadership.

Thanks to Eileen Hoffner

They are ones who have served this church for several years and have now decided that they must step aside to give room for others to serve as well. Eileen Hoffner served as Treasurer for several years. In fact, when I was appointed Pastor here in July 2006 Eileen was not only serving as Treasurer but also, in order to fill a need, she also functioned as Financial Secretary, and at that time this church did not have a Chair of the Finance Committee either, so that made for additional responsibilities. She was wearing multiple hats. During her tenure the church's financial records gained a new level of accuracy and attention to detail and last year for the first time in several years a complete audit was done of the church's financial records. Eileen originally felt the need to resign at the end of 2007 but at the request of the Finance Committee agreed to serve for an additional year, so it is clear that she has gone the extra mile. So this comes with much gratitude for all the ways she has served.

Leadership Committee seeks Treasurer and other positions

You will also notice that the position of Treasurer has not yet been filled. It is the responsibility of the Lay Leadership Committee to enable and empower people to use their gifts to serve Christ in the various ministries of the church. I hope you will give this need serious consideration and be in touch with me if you desire additional information. Our Counting Committee is also another significant place to serve.

In the meantime we are very grateful for those who are being very faithful to the Counting Committee and also to members of the Finance Committee who not only come to the office regularly to sign checks but also carefully peruse them always looking for ways we can be more efficient and responsible stewards.

We can all be proud of the many ministries of this church and all the ways we are engaged in outreach to our community with the grace and generosity and encouragement of Christ. That is the treasure of the gospel we have to share, but it is also true that leaders have responsibility for stewardship of the clay jar which is a way of referring to the institution of the church. The Financial ministry of our church is entrusted in part with this very important role. I am trusting that the Holy Spirit will encourage some people with the appropriate gifts to step forward.

Sacramental Ministry

While I am expressing gratitude I also want to mention two women who have served very faithfully and with great love as Communion Stewards. **They are Betty Thomas and Betty Smith.** They served for many years in this vital ministry that has the responsibility for preparing the elements for Holy Communion each month. They have done so with great love and humbleness so it is with real regret that they were also allowed to step down.

At the same time we are appreciative that Michelle Mercurio has enthusiastically agreed to assume servant leadership in this ministry. Again, if you are interested in being a part of this group be sure to contact Michelle through the church office to express your interest.

The Full Joy of Easter

Even now, many in our church are beginning to make our church's plans to celebrate Easter. Easter is a time of such great joy. The quality of our joy together will be enhanced in direct proportion to the degree to which we have given ourselves to our spiritual disciplines.

Easter not only comes in April, but April is also the month that is observed as National Poetry Month, a particular interest of mine. I would love to have the time to more fully enter in to that, but I had decided that I just didn't have the time this year. Then something amazing happened this morning at the end of Sunday School (March 15). I was sitting in on Wendy's class. (I like to alternate between the two classes.) Right at the end of class one of the class members Calvin Leader stood up and asked to recite a poem. I think he does this from time to time but this was the first time I had heard him. And he proceeded to perfectly recite "A Psalm of Life" by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Listening to him, a beautiful light went on in my heart. Look up the poem. It will be worth your time. I will quote just one stanza here that speaks to me of the full joy of Easter:

Trust no Future, how'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act, - act in the living Present!
Hart within, and God o'er head!

We are blessed to serve in this ministry together and I continue to be proud and humbled to serve as your Pastor.

Grace and peace,

Stephen



We wish a Happy Birthday in April

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 3 - Carolyn Brown, Lydia Gordon | 17 - Savannah Foil |
| 4 - Bob Marble | 20 - Spencer Pascoe |
| 6 - Myron Huntzinger | 21 - Sam Miller |
| 7 - Eileen Hoffner | 22 - Jean McCormack, Carley Mercurio |
| 8 - Evelyn Page | 24 - Jack Hersh, Linda Jones |
| 10 - David Lopez | 25 - Helen Grant, Rev. Stephen Hoffman,
Carolyn Rogers |
| 12 - Rick Barber | 29 - Dale Hoffner |
| 13 - Alec Hoffner | 30 - Michele Jurgensen |
| 14 - Kay Guthrie | |
| 15 - Eric Gianiottes-McClary | |

Celebrating Wedding Anniversaries in April

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 5 - M/M Ken Brasfield | 22 - M/M Martin Lawson |
| 11 - M/M Bud Van Sickle | 23 - M/M Robert Walwork |
| 12 - M/M Doug Bloodworth | 25 - M/M Harry Doyle |
| 13 - M/M Jiles Kirkland, Jr. | |



Experience Holy Week and the Full Joy of Easter!

Palm Sunday, April 5 at both worship services.

Our Chancel Choir under the direction of Mary Shields presents the Cantata, **'Who Is This King?'** by Lloyd Larson and Joseph M Martin. It offers a distinctive look at the ministry and final days of Jesus' life. Creative choral settings, utilizing both new and familiar melodies and texts, make this an inspiring cantata as we consider afresh who Jesus is for us—Royal Servant, Rejected Friend, or Risen Christ.

Maundy Thursday, April 9 at 6:30 PM in the Fellowship Hall.

We will share in a foot washing and communion service to observe how Jesus spent his last evening with his disciples. It will be a service of meditative prayer. Each person will be invited to participate at whatever level they feel comfortable

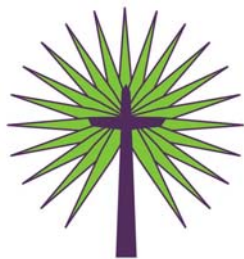
Good Friday, April 10 at 6:30 PM in the Sanctuary

We will be led by our Lay Speakers in meditations on the **Seven Last Words of Christ**. Entering in to the depth of the love expressed by Christ on the cross gives full expression to full joy we experience together on Easter.

Family Promise Week

During Holy Week we will also be hosting the families from Family Promise. This opportunity for service will give added significance to our worship services during this week. Please contact the church





First United Methodist Church
PALMETTO

330 11th Avenue West
Palmetto, FL 34221

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Return Service Requested

We are instruments of God called to be neighbors in this community and world through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ based on quality worship, spiritual growth, and effective service.

Sunday Morning Worship: 8:30 & 10:45 a.m. ~ Saturday & Sunday Evening Hispanic Worship 6:30 p.m.

Senior Pastor
Rev. Stephen Hoffman

Music Director/Organist
Mary Shields

Pianist
Michele Jurgensen

Administrative Assistant
Noni Hammerstrand

Giovanni Palacios
Pastor of Hispanic Mission

Church Office Hours:

9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Monday - Friday

Phone: (941) 722-1812

Fax: (941) 723-0082

Email:

fumcpalmetto@yahoo.com

YES, I CAN!

I cannot alleviate poverty, but I can feed one hungry person.

I cannot end war, but I can extend a branch of peace to my neighbor.

I cannot prevent death, but I can hold the hand of a dying man.

That may not seem like much, but it is far harder than to devise schemes for social betterment, and it is everything.

Christ said, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40, NIV).

