



TO THE POINT

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

www.fumcpalmetto.org

September 17, 2008

“SACRED SPACE”

Dear Members and Friends,

Reminders. I need as many reminders as I can get. My wife has to remind me to take my daily pill for allergies. My calendar reminds me of appointments I have. Reading scripture reminds me of the holiness of the God who loves us. Praying reminds me that, by faith, God is always fully present in our lives. The fellowship of the church reminds me that I am not alone.

Aha Moments. Do you ever have little “Aha!” moments when things become clear that were right in front of you all the time but you had taken for granted. I have those all the time. One of the rich blessings of this part of Florida is the absolutely beautiful sunsets we have. There is a beauty and rich diversity in them that no two are alike, each evening is a new “main event.” That is what sunsets are called in Key West. I call them “sacred moments.”

Five among many. I want to tell you of five, not sunsets but “sacred moments” when I was able to see God at work through people right in front of me. Don’t think that there are only five! This church is actually full of them. They just happen to be five whose gleam caught my eye. Perhaps like when you are walking on the beach and bend over every once in a while to pick up a sea shell. Why does one catch your eye rather than another? Who knows? We are just grateful to have the capacity to see a blessing right in front of us.

In the kitchen. A week ago Wednesday evening we had our first Fellowship Meal of the season. We are doing things just a bit different by selling tickets rather than making reservations and then everyone making a donation. Selling tickets is a way for those who prepare the meal to be able to plan more accurately. If the cost is a difficulty for anyone we are very willing to make arrangements. Lyn and Lisa do a super job, but they are always willing for others to help, so please do not hesitate to offer your services if you have the gift of hospitality.

More than just the food we eat, the fellowship we share is what is really important, and

the way we eat together is very important as well. Acts 2:46 tells us that the early church ate together “with glad and generous hearts.” I want to encourage each of you to make a special effort to be a part of the fellowship meals at church. These occasions are an important aspect of our ministry. The meals are prepared and served with much love!

I don't just say that because it is the nice thing to do. It is very true. I am going to embarrass Lisa and Lyn and tell on them. Wednesday evening I popped my head in the kitchen on the way to Bible Study (which is held at 4:30) to see how Lisa and Lyn were doing. When I went into the kitchen Lisa had her purse out and so did Lyn. They were both paying for their meals that they had been preparing all afternoon in the kitchen. They had planned the meal together. They had shopped for the ingredients. Now they were paying for their meals. I protested to them, “You shouldn't do that! After all you have done!”

“No,” they replied, “We do this out of love!” All I could say is, “I am very proud to be your Pastor.” There may be fancier restaurants in town, but I doubt there is another where the cooks pay full price for their meals. That is because this isn't a restaurant. It is a ministry, and that means it is done with love. It is not just the cooking but the motivation behind the cooking that makes this a ministry.

The bush doesn't prune itself! As you enter the church from the parking lot side, on your left is a nice little garden place with some nice bushes. The garden was first put in as a Memorial to Bill and Irene Boyd, two members I never had the privilege of meeting. For several years it has been a joyful part of Judy Lemanski's ministry. to care for this garden but over the last year she has needed to stay close to home to help care for Russ, in an even more joyful ministry.

But the bushes here at church have missed her. I was noticing for awhile that they were getting a little wild looking and had been thinking that I needed to put my hedge trimmers in the back of my car and trim them up. I was away for a few days, and when I returned, all of a sudden, the bushes had been nicely shaped and pruned, just like that!

Well, if you have been around here for very long you can probably guess who was at work. Yes, George did it just like he does so many things, very quietly just gets on with it. What makes it ministry is that it is done with love. Several of us could put our heads together and make a list of all the things George does around here, and even working together there is no way we could come up with a complete list. That is because he does so many things without even talking about it. Accomplishing much without seeking credit is a humble spirit at work. That is evidence of the Holy Spirit.

How did I find out that it was George who pruned the bushes? Christine and I were visiting with Russ and Judy, and they told us that George had been to see them and had brought them some fresh fish that Judy was fixing for supper, and oh, by the way, he had pruned the bushes at church. That is love in action. Love in action is what characterizes all ministry done in the name of Jesus.

The Heart of Christian Ministry. The Discipline of the United Methodist Church is the book that we reference to keep us clear on our identity as disciples of Jesus Christ who call ourselves Methodist. In Paragraph 125 I found this statement that summarizes what ministry is all about: “Christian ministry is the expression of the mind and mission of Christ by a community of Christians that demonstrate a common life of gratitude and devotion, witness and service, celebration and discipleship.”

A Celebration and a Poem. On September 28 we will celebrate Laity Sunday with special worship services planned and led by the Laity of this congregation. Our Lay Leader Bob Marble along with the Chair of our Church Council Tim Mercurio have been working together to plan this service. Several from our congregation have been asked to share their witness. That is why I wanted to witness to how I see the Laity of our church serving in many ways with an attitude of love and joy.

There is a poem by Elizabeth Barrett Browning that is an inspiration to me to look for God's "love in action" everyday in every circumstance:

Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God.
But only he who sees,
Takes off his shoes —
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.

That is a reminder that is more important than anything. When circumstances begin to frustrate me or the challenges in front of me seem to provoke me I am tempted to just see myself sitting and "plucking blackberries" and asking myself "What does God have to do with this?" But it is the Holy Spirit who reminds me that those feelings say more about me than God's absence. God hasn't gone anywhere, but is alive and present and active in every situation. In fact, as the poem says, God is "crammed" into life! It is my eyes that need enlightened.

It is a joy for me to serve Christ with you in this church! Thank you for all the reminders you give me.

Grace and peace,

Stephen



We wish a Happy Birthday in October to

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|---|------------------------------------|
| 2 - Kiery Galindres, Lindsey Gordon | 14 - Ralph Jones, Kurt Thoreson |
| 5 - Frank Wolfe, Jr. | 15 - Olive Channell, Martin Lawson |
| 8 - Jacob Elston, Linda Kubecka, Mickey Sepa | 20 - Coby Gaulien |
| 9 - Ted McClary, Wylene Rickly | 23 - Annabel Russo |
| 10 - Jacob Courtney, J.P. Willingham, Jr. | 24 - Jean Swihart |
| 12 - Jane Touchton | 25 - Annette Marble |
| 13 - Luke Langford, Marie Shelley,
Bill Thomas | 27 - Mick McCormack, Bob Thompson |
| | 29 - David Marble, Kenneth Maynard |

Celebrating Wedding Anniversaries in October.

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| 1 - M/M Don Kubecka | 20 - M/M Lee Bandeen |
| 12 - M/M Clay Thomas | |



First United Methodist Church
PALMETTO

330 11th Avenue West
Palmetto, FL 34221

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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

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“Many people treat prayer as a means to an end, and neglect the very power of prayer for its own sake. A Desert Father put it this way, “First learn to pray and then you will easily perform all the good works. Acquire the mother and she will bear all of your children.”

— from *The Way of a Pilgrim*