

Captive to the Word, Free in the Holy Spirit



Millbrook Messenger

June 2010

"STORIES FROM THE MISSION FIELD"

To speak of stories from the mission field may lead your mind towards exotic and far away places. It may be Malaysia , or, in my case ,the fresh memories of my recent trip to Kenya .

Several emails each week keep such memories alive. It reminds us that the Church belongs to Jesus and can only effectively live in the power of the Holy Spirit. No matter where the Church is, it is called to engage the worldly culture into which it was birthed two thousand years ago. As a result of that divine mandate, the Church, by virtue of its existence, must be at war with the world.

Two forces that the Kenyan Church is facing are tribalism and Islam. The British Colonial system, imposed in years past on much of sub Sahara Africa, did nothing to effectively unite diverse groups of people. The work of missionaries, who often lacked a Kingdom vision, also contributed to spiritual strongholds remaining as a barrier to the flow of God's redeeming love. In the case of Presbyterianism, it remained largely the 'faith' of the Kikuyu people, the single largest tribe in Kenya .

I shared with friends there the story of Peter in Acts 10.His vision on the roof in Joppa, (modern day Jaffa) is a reminder also for us that the Gospel of Jesus is for every tribe and nation. Had God not initiated the vision, the followers of the Messiah from Bethlehem may well have remained essentially ethnically Jewish.

So, today, as for Peter in the past, a Kenyan challenge is to transcend the human prejudices and antipathies towards those who are "not of us" and to engage and embrace them. I am happy to report that the diversity of tribal representatives at Church conferences in Nairobi indicates that the Joppa vision is being lived out.

A second consideration for the East African Church is the growth of Islam. The eastern coastal belt of Kenya is occupied largely by the "Somali" people. Islam is their dominant world view. However, Islam is on the march. A distinct demographic shift shows these people are moving "inland". Today, Nairobi has a large and growing Muslim area that is very distinct and different. Right in the middle of it—and yes, the hostility was very evident—stands the Church. Adjoining the church on one side is a school and community center. Many of the students are Muslim. The parents, knowing that this is a wonderful opportunity to receive a good education, allow "infidels" to tell their children about the prophet Jesus. It could be said that we have successfully exported Pragmatism as well as other products.

On the other side of the church is the inevitable mosque. A clear strategy of "chess" and in "your face" city planning. The Mosque activities, spiritually dead by virtue of its source, do cast a "blanket" over the neighborhoods. It serves as a great reminder of the prayer that Jesus prayed in John 17, expressing His desire for unity and peace. Here we find afresh the strategy for mission and evangelism.

I have learned that in part the expansion of Islam in Kenya is fuelled by funds created through the entrepreneurial efforts of Somalian pirates. Ransoms from captured ships are supporting hotel and mosque building programs.

There are other stories and other mission fields. Yesterday I had coffee with my friend Joseph. He is a low budget missionary. He sleeps on a local church property but returns to his daughter's home for showers and other occasions. We were sitting in Mc Donald's. Looking around, he shared the personal histories of many of the people sitting there. He knew their struggles and their challenges. Joseph also knows the path to overcoming. As people approached our little table to greet him, he was clearly the "Patriarch"; the encouragement to "Keep your eyes on Jesus" flowed convincingly and freely.

These people also belong to a "tribe". In the eyes of many they are the Western "Untouchables". I am glad that the Joppa vision has descended over our local McDonalds and Millbrook as well.

The largest "tribe" that I know around Fresno is the "Lost Tribe". One of its members joined us for a drink recently. A professor of Psychology, he knows a few things about the human mind. As always, such visits are a delight. He challenges me to think through my worldview assumptions. Can a "leopard" change its spots? I know a sinner can become a saint by the power and the person of Jesus Christ and the indwelling of His Spirit. Disagreement when expressed in a civil manner, and motivated by Love, will always return for more dialogue. I look forward to it.

The world, your world, my world, and our world is God's world. Live in it with abandoned joy and freedom. Take every thought "captive", and bring down every stronghold. Share the stories of your mission field experiences. God has too, because...in the fullness of time He sent His son, they call Him Jesus.

Because of Jesus...ruined for the ordinary.

PJ

THANK YOU -THANK YOU -THANK YOU

Friends, thank you for sowing into the His Kingdom in Kenya. You may not know, but several years ago a former moderator of the PCUSA, Susan Andrews, visited Kenya. She insulted the Kenyan church by ridiculing their stance on upholding a Biblical standard for moral/ethical behavior. My friend David Githii, then the Kenyan moderator, indicated they would not be blackmailed in order to receive financial support. Ever since, the support funding for the Kenyan church has declined significantly.

Our "seed money" has gone to support David's work with a special focus on encouraging and training intercessors to gather for effective warfare.

I continue to be in weekly contact with brothers and sisters there, so we can encourage each other to keep our eyes on the "Author and finisher of our faith".

For His name's sake

PJ

Your session has started to meet once a month as a discussion group. We are systematically going through a book called THE HEALTHY SMALL CHURCH

What makes a church a "healthy church?" Or, what makes a church "Unhealthy?"
Then the question, "What are we?" Should anything change?

Here are some of the topics we will be dealing with; How to handle conflict. Transformational worship, Sound theology, Spiritual leadership, Financial health, A sense of Community, to name a few.

Please pray for us, as we seek to "follow the pillar of fire"!!

PJ

I hope that the information regarding elder's general responsibilities was helpful to you last month. I would like to conclude this information with the specific duties of an elder. Again, this information comes directly from the Book of Order, G 16-10.

In maintaining the spiritual supervision of the particular church, the Church Session (the elders) has the following duties and powers:

- A. To monitor the spiritual conduct of the members, and to take action when appropriate according to procedures set forth in the Book of Discipline.
- B. To initiate the ministry of evangelism as the first business of the Church, and to seek to lead persons to an acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
- C. To remind parents of the responsibility of presenting their children for Baptism, and to provide instruction as indicated in the Book of Worship, Section 3-2.G.
- D. To receive members in accordance with Sections 9-2.A, 9-2.B and 9-2.C.
- E. To keep rolls in accordance with Section 9-1.
- F. To dismiss, restore, grant affiliation, or remove members in accordance with Sections 9-4, 9-5, 9-6 and 9-7.
- G. To determine the budget of the church and the benevolence objectives of the congregation.
- H. To oversee the educational program of the congregation, and to determine its literature.
- I. To oversee the work of the Board of Deacons and to review its minutes at least semi annually unless otherwise provided for by the Church Session. It is also desirable for the Church Session to call a joint meeting at least semi annually to discuss matter of common interest, although each body must act separately on matters under its charge.
- J. To fulfill the obligations to those elected to the office of Ruling Elder or Deacon as set forth in Sections 12-3, 13-8, 9 and 10.
- K. To oversee the worship of the congregation in accordance with the Book of Worship, including the time and place of worship, special services, the music program, and the celebration of the sacraments. This shall not infringe on the responsibility of the Pastor in the selection of hymns, Scriptures, sermon administration of the sacraments, or other duties that are incumbent on the office of Pastor.
- L. To determine the policies regarding the use of the property and facilities of the congregation.
- M. When there is no pastor, to convene the people for worship on the Lord's Day, offering prayers, praise, reading the Scriptures and teaching thereof. It is also appropriate for one member to give exhortation or to read a sermon by some Minister of the Word of the Church.
- N. To organize itself for the advancement of the ministry of the Church and the mission of that congregation.
- O. To overture Presbytery on matters it believes vital or helpful to the whole Church, and to observe and carry out the injunctions and instructions of the higher courts. The Church Session shall elect representatives to Presbytery and shall hear a subsequent report on that court.
- P. To order special offerings, special days of prayer and fasting, special days of worship and other matters that benefits the spiritual life of the people.
- Q. To do whatever else may be necessary for the spread of the Gospel, the edification of the members, the well being of the church, the advancement of the Kingdom, and the growth in grace of all.

Well, there you have it. This is what your elected elders do. This is why we covet your prayers and get your input as to how we can best fulfill our duties.

Lee Ault, Clerk of Session

During the regular business meeting of Session on May 18, 2010 the following actions were taken:

1. **approval** of the use of the church facilities for the Summer Wednesday Night Children's Program from June 2, 2010, through September 2, 2010, from 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
2. **approval** of the "Walk With Me" curriculum and Robert Hyatt as the coordinator of the Summer Wednesday Night Children's Program..
3. **approval** of setting up a pay pal icon on the church web site.
4. **approval** of the financial report for April, indicating revenue of \$18,051, expenditures of \$24,747 for a net loss of \$6,696.
5. **approval** of accepting into membership of Chris Pallol on May 23, 2010.
6. **approval** of facility use for Koinania Home School Co-op on Thursdays from noon to 4 p.m. during the school year. They will use the classrooms in Cavitt Hall. The fee will be \$75 per week which will cover the cost of utilities, paper products and wear and tear. They will do their own custodial work using their own cleaning supplies and our vacuum. This arrangement will be reviewed in one year. The agreement is subject to providing proof of insurance.
7. **approval** of removing the probationary period for LOT and are looking forward to working in partnership with LOT over the foreseeable future.
8. **acceptance with regrets** the resignation of Michelle Smith as an elder and the Smith family from membership of Millbrook Presbyterian Church.
9. **approval** of denying the request from Pete Diaz, a neighbor, for permission to park his boat on our parking lot from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. each day while he tries to sell it.

Sometimes that act of committing to something is easier than the actual deed. I used to be the first to raise my hand to volunteer for things until I became overwhelmed with everything I had to do. So now I'm more selective. I want to do things well and only commit to things I have the time to get right.

As Christians we need to commit to others, and our families, to lead by example the way Jesus teaches us. Doing this on a daily basis should be our goal. Do I fail occasionally? You bet! And when I do I scold myself and ask His forgiveness and try again. I think some people think Christians are perfect, but boy are they wrong! We are all sinners and work to walk in Jesus' footsteps everyday.

So what can we do to commit ourselves to Jesus?

Read His Word daily

Enter His house often

Call other believers and try to lift their spirits

Participate in church functions often ie: AWANA, L.O.T., Bible studies

Invite believers and non-believers to church and/or Bible study. In the discussions they will realize that their struggles are the same with all of us but we have guidance and support of our fellow believers.

Proverbs 16:3 says, "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed."

Lou Ann Johnson

This is to all of you from me and my kids, to let you know who our Lord and Savior is, and that we're thankful for everyone here at Millbrook Presbyterian,

Cause you know we be thanking the Lord Jesus for not leaving us alone for blessing us and our home and for freeing us from the Devil's hold and now we're free to roam with Jesus as the center of our souls.

Cause we believe, we believe, we believe

That ever since we received Jesus in our lives we've been given the sight like Jesus healing the blind letting us see the light like we never seen in the times of our lives before like he touched our eyes and said lets go and added our names to the lists where we've been given an everlasting love and life that's priceless giving you a life that's timeless like gripping it with a vice grip with a life that's righteous like giving a life to someone that once was lifeless asking you why don't you try this and you know we more than like it we love it for finally being able to defeat this giant leaving the Devil crying and starting a riot leaving us all excited with us rejoicing in the Lord for life and now we're forever flying with the Lord by our side and our family at Millbrook Presbyterian that's right.

Cause you know we be thanking the Lord Jesus for not leaving us alone for blessing us and our home and for freeing us from the Devil's hold and now we're free to roam with Jesus as the center of our souls.

Cause we believe, we believe, we believe

Now here I am one of God's soldiers with that armor strapped over my shoulders with the boulder removed from my grave like Jesus so now I can show you my face in a new way with us following Jesus cause that's just the way it is just like what it says in John 14:6 and that's how I want to raise my kids with our Lord and Heavenly Father above I'm just letting you know what's up and that we're so thankful for our new family we've gained at Millbrook and for the change the Lord has made in our lives and for His Word we feel shooked real hooked with the book that we're amazed with and you know there's no negotiation our affliction is with God and with our family of Christians across the nation and the world the earth and with Millbrook Presbyterian Church and again the Word.

Cause you know we be thanking the Lord Jesus for not leaving us alone for blessing us and our home and for freeing us from the Devil's hold and now we're free to roam with Jesus as the center of our souls.

Cause we believe, we believe, we believe

The Lord was like a ship that saved us from an island the lion's den a liars ignorance fro thinking we were ignorant and we're so thankful for Him and what we know now after we received Him and what we know now after we received Him and you know we're going to be here every weekend while the unknown are still sleeping wondering what you all breathing to let you know we're breathing the life of Jesus and you know we ain't leaving Him freeing us from them demons grip giving us a reason to live no matter what season it is freeing us like how the Israelites were freed from the Egyptians like freeing us from the Devil's spiritual prison with the Lord giving us a spiritual gift and a vision and we ain't leaving it no secret that I'm ready to leak this cause I want you all to receive this and that I'm going to let everyone at Millbrook Presbyterian know my thanks to all of you is endless with us here on a mission with this new world we've been given it's as beautiful as the sun glistening over a lake of angels swimming in front of Heaven's Kingdom with its golden gates and fences and again I'm so thankful for God, Jesus, and your existence.

Cause you know we be thanking the Lord Jesus for not leaving us alone for blessing us and our home and for freeing us from the Devil's hold and now we're free to roam with Jesus as the center of our souls.

Cause we believe, we believe, we believe

It is 10 PM on a Sunday night; I am standing in the kitchen with my ears plugged into my son's Ipod, listening to "Nice Guys Finish Last", a song by Green Day. Green Day, in case you didn't know, is a Heavy Metal band. I happen to have a lot of free time that time of night, so I thought I might as well use it meaningfully. And at this very moment, listening to my son's favorite type of music is one hundred percent meaningful. It's a *kairos* moment, that's why. It builds *koinonia*—with my son and his world, that is. *Koinonia*, which is Greek, is often translated as "communion". Literally, it means "building communion through intimate participation". And that's exactly what I am doing tonight—building closeness by participating in a part of my son's world that matters to him. Now when it comes to his musical preference, participating for me means going out of my way; doing what I have never done before. I don't usually listen to Heavy Metal. To tell the truth, I generally abhor Heavy Metal, and until now, I used to make it a point of telling my son exactly what I think of his choice of music: brain damage! But as of tonight, I will no longer do so. Sure, Heavy Metal is not my idea of a soul-liberating listening experience; not to mention the packaging—a visual glorification of the dark side, a point commonly made in Christian parenting magazines.

But, as I take the time to listen, I hear diversity. One or two selections are the usual sonic expressions of teenage angst, bellowed out and accented in violent rhythms that paint the whole spectrum of emotional turmoil, from pent-up frustration to torment to belligerence to outrage. Others are on the spaced-out side, with lots of synthesizer and high tech sophistication bordering on the commercial; almost too slick to qualify as rebellion. But then there are those couple of pieces that intrigue me: upbeat, sort of cheery underneath the toughness; I have associations of a movie trailer to an upbeat, semi-serious narrative of disillusioned youth—the kind of movie I would use in a classroom because of its artistic feel and liberal dose of self-irony, to engender some critical thinking about life, society, the God of the universe—what better way to connect with students my son's age? So as for the musical side of the experience, it is nothing short of enlightening; the bits of musical sanity I get to enjoy in between all this metallic stuff are, in a way, reassuring.

But the music itself isn't even the point. The point is the ensuing discussion I have with my son, which turns into a miniature apologetics course for Heavy Metal. Heavy Metal, I learn, has its origin in classical music. Wow. That's like saying Hip Hop has its roots in Shakespeare, as one of my students recently asserted in an English paper (a former gang-banger, he is active in youth ministry, so no wonder). Both statements are far-out to the conventional thinker; preposterous, you might say. In other words, worth exploring! I like discussions of this kind. They help me reassess my views and preconceptions. They also help me connect with the other. I learn what motivates him or her, why he or she behaves in a manner different from me. To me, that's eye-opening, because in the process, I learn to appreciate the other as a separate person. So Heavy Metal is just the means. Our discussion, brief as it is, my listening experience, the connecting, is the end. Never dismiss what you don't know.

That's all very well, you say, but what about the lyrics? Exactly. So what's your impression of the lyrics, I ask my son, to continue with my probing into his thinking. Well, they have a certain undertone, he informs me (Undertone is right! I am thinking to myself). They're not about picking daisies, if that's what I mean. Uh —huh. One song, he volunteers, is about revenge (a great topic for a spiritual discussion, as you probably realize, but it's way past my bedtime, and my brain is in recovery mode). I decide to continue our talk at the next *kairos* moment; my inquiry is far from finished. *Koinonia* takes time.

Now it would be an exaggeration to say that my cross-cultural mini-adventure has turned me into a Heavy Metal fan; not quite. It has, however, caused me to realize that I have prejudged my son's musical taste. In fact, as I reflect on the theological implications of my experience, which involved a good deal of listening and letting the other do the talking, I will go as far as to assert, with all the boldness I am capable of, that God has spoken to me through Heavy Metal (I am saying this with Barthian certainty by the way—if God can speak through a "dead dog", then Heavy Metal is the next best thing; I am sure Karl Barth would understand).

The upshot: I resolve next time to be more careful with my judgments. My son is entitled to his taste, just as I am to mine. What matters is how I, the "mature adult", the one with the claim to greater wisdom, respond. And my response, if it is to be meaningful, constructive, and—dare I say it—glorifying of God, must begin with the realization that it is to be based on love; but love cannot happen without understanding. That takes effort. It's called "engaging". So instead of rushing to judgment, God, who is love, wants me to engage —period. Christian living has to do with connecting, not just vertically and through pious pronouncements—youth, by the way, tend to have allergic reactions to those if my own experience is any indication—but horizontally, at the interpersonal level. Teenagers are persons. And if they are in church, then I have to see them as part of the church. They are the future of the church, if indeed it is to have a future. This, by the way, applies to all those who are new to the Body of Christ, be they young, old, or middle aged. Have I embraced them? Am I willing to accommodate them, in worship, in daily life? Am I willing to engage and change my response, if necessary? Is it love, or is it rejection? Care or indifference? For Christians (not pew sitters, just to be clear), the answer is self-evident.

My Fellow Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We are blessed by the greatest love of all time. Our Lord and Savior was sent by His Father to save us. Because Lord Jesus walked on this Earth and died for our sins, we know His Father's love. In all the world, there is nothing greater.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" John 3:16

As the children of our Father, we should be committed to share His love. We need to let the world know how great He is and about His greatest gift of all, His love for us. He loves us, each and every one of us. How amazing is our God.

How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God
Therefore the children of men put their
trust under the shadow of Your wings.
They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness
of your house,
And You give them drink from the river of
Your pleasures.
For with You the fountain of life;
In Your light we see light.

Psalm 36:7-9

To share His love, we must share His word. Within His word, His love shines through.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8

O LORD, You have searched me and known me.
You know my sitting down and my rising up;
You understand my thought afar off.
You comprehend my path and my lying down,
And are acquainted with all my ways.
For there is not a word on my tongue,
But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.
You have hedged me behind and before,
And laid Your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
It is high, I cannot attain it.

Psalm 139:1-6

Remember too, that we must love others. We are God's ambassadors. Through His children and His word, God's love will always shine through.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

1 John 4:7-8

In His Love, Marie Vierra

JUST TO LET YOU KNOW.....

The Awana program has stopped and resumes with the school year in the Fall. Thank you for all those who have given their time and talents throughout the Semester.

This does not mean that on Wednesday nights there is no activity. Robert and Melissa, Alex and Lizzie will continue with a new exciting program for the kids. Looking at all the arms and legs the other night, it will be a lively time!

Also, the Wednesday night church continues to meet as we follow a study outline with the theme of Discipleship. Essential to Discipleship is to be in the Word and to walk with the Word. Come and share your Mission field stories. Transport is available.

The Mustard Tree is also again planning a Summer reading program that will bless local kids, and give them a "educational boost" for the new school year.

Don't forget to pray for VBS please. Have you signed up to assist in some way?

Some people speak of a "long hot Summer". With all this, and more going on, it will soon be over.

Celebrate Jesus.

PJ

A few weeks ago, on Mother's day, I shared an update on Millbrook finances for the congregation. Since not everyone may have heard the information, I wanted to share in the messenger our current financial status.

There have been many fruitful ministry projects that Millbrook church has supported, both internally and out in the kingdom. The session has always strived to put forth a budget that would cover the funding necessary to cover the costs of all we are called to do. In 2010, year to date, the total spent through April 30, 2010 is \$87,245 and the revenue received from all sources has been \$72,260. This is a deficit of \$14,985. Like Joseph directed the storage during good times so it would be available during the famine, so Millbrook has been blessed with a past reserve. The reserve amount YTD has declined by \$14,076, almost the same amount as our overage in spending.

Our expenses year over year have remained flat. This is due to the generosity of many individuals in this congregation who donate their gifts, talents, time and service to the glory of the Kingdom. The differential in our net for the year is that giving is down 17% from the prior year. This is not a surprise to anyone, as this is a difficult time for many, and for the entire country.

During the service, I offered out to the congregation, that if able, an increase of about 20% spread through the congregation could have significant impact. God is not concerned with the size of your gift, just your heart and spirit in which it is given. Recall the scripture regarding the widow's mite, where her sacrificial gift, although much, much smaller than many, was praised by our Lord, as she gave what she could, and much more from a percentage standpoint than those with more wealth. To explain in simple terms what a 20% approximate increase would look like, if you give \$1 a week, \$1.25 would be 25%; if you give \$10, then \$12 would be 20%; if you give \$100, then \$120 would be 20%, and so on.

The finance committee will evaluate where we stand after the month of June, and report to the congregation, and to the session, and we will prayerfully determine where we go in the final half of the year.

I wanted to stress so importantly, that this was not an attempt to put guilt upon anyone. There are many gifts, as I mentioned earlier, and many of them are not monetary. Gifts of time and service are also of glory to the Lord and are no less important. I just call all of us to prayerfully consider what you can do. 2 Corinthians 9:7 declares "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

God has blessed us in so many ways. All we have truly comes from Him, and we are called to delight in what we are able to give back, in whatever form, or amount, that we can. Be cheerful in your giving.

I was a child of the Sixties, and I remember a song I believe was called "Signs". It was sung by a young man who was discriminated against because of his long hair and how he looked, and how signs blocked him from "trespassing" on some of God's beautiful countryside, but the sign on the church said to come in, everybody welcome. Come in, kneel down and pray. And when they passed around the plate at the end of it all, he didn't have a penny. But he did what he could, he made a sign, "Thank you Lord for thinking about me, I'm alive and doing fine."

Thank you Lord for all you have blessed us with. May we all be living signs that show Jesus to everyone around us. God bless you all,

Larry Reis, Finance Chair

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