

Metro Chicago

eWind

*Suddenly there was...a strong wind blowing, and...
they were all filled with the Holy Spirit... (Acts 2:2-3, TEV)*

Weekly Electronic Newsletter of the American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago
A patchwork of varied news and announcements
from our churches, communities, denomination and other organizations,
covering a wide variety of interests reflecting the diversity of our region

July 22, 2009



Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all God's benefits:
who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.
(Psalm 103:2,5)

In this Issue

ABCMC NEWS	2
Hispanic Pastors' Dinner This Saturday Evening	2
Hold the Date: Vitalizing Congregational Ministries, October 3, 2009	2
Family Council Meeting	2
Family Council Hearing.....	3
Thinking Theologically.....	4
NEWS FROM ABCMC CONGREGATIONS	4
Religions around the World	4
COMMUNITY NEWS	4
Kirk Opposes Health Care System Reform	4

ABCUSA NEWS.....	6
From the General Secretary	6
ABCUSA Delegates Pass Statements on Hospitality and the Economy	7
HEALTH CARE NEWS.....	7
Insurance Industry Doesn't Need Protection	7
News Media Imbalance.....	8
Vacation or Health Care?.....	8
Health Care Justice Action Week and Faith	9
PRAYER REQUESTS.....	11
CALENDAR.....	12
THINKING THEOLOGICALLY ABOUT THE COMMON GOOD	13
“Getting the Point”.....	13

ABCMC NEWS

Hispanic Pastors' Dinner This Saturday Evening

Hispanic pastors and their spouses will gather at the lakefront Ramada Inn Restaurant in Hyde Park-Kenwood for dinner and fellowship on Saturday evening, July 25, beginning at 6:00 p.m.

The pastors meet on the first Monday evening of every month in a different church or home for a time of prayer, fellowship, and planning. But this dinner gathering will provide an opportunity for mutual enjoyment and sharing of ideas for work together in the Region, according to the Rev. Shakespeare Osorio, the Region's Hispanic Coordinator.

The hotel restaurant is located at 4900 S. Lake Shore Drive.

Hold the Date: Vitalizing Congregational Ministries, October 3, 2009

Earlier this year the Ministers Council and ABCMC sponsored a day with Dr. C. Jeff Woods (Associate General Secretary of the American Baptist Churches USA) to assess "trends in ministry."

Those who attended insisted that we invite Jeff back to Metro Chicago, but this time to involve both clergy and lay leaders, to draw on his expertise on vitalizing the ministries of congregations.

This will be a highly beneficial gathering for churches that want to move ahead with new direction and energy. Location will be announced later, but please mark it on your calendar now.

Family Council Meeting

The next Family Council meeting will take place on Saturday, August 22 at Garfield Park Baptist Church, 4100 W Jackson Boulevard, Chicago. A packet of meeting-related materials will be mailed in advance to Family Council members. Please contact Tony Rake at the ABCMC office, 773-804-1655, or tony@abcmc.org no later than August 14 to let him know of your attendance plans, and whether you will stay for lunch. Check-in will open at 8:30 a.m. The meeting will begin with worship at 9 a.m., and be followed by lunch at noon. The suggested donation for lunch is \$5.

Family Council Hearing



**American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago
7035 W. Grand Avenue, Suite 102
Chicago, Illinois 60707**

Email: office@abcmc.org

July 22, 2009

TO: Clergy and Representatives to the ABCMC Family Council

FROM: Denise Janssen, President, ABCMC
Larry Greenfield, Executive Minister

RE: Special Hearing at August 22 Family Council Meeting
Garfield Park Baptist Church

The Region is beginning to develop its programs and budget for 2010. Official action will be taken on these matters at the Annual Meeting, which will be held on Saturday, November 14.

But this year we want to go about this differently: we are going to devote time at the August Family Council meeting to hear and discuss what congregations suggest should be our program and budget priorities, within the resources we have available.

Remember: the Region exists: (1) to help churches do together what they can't do (as well) by themselves (so we are particularly interested in things churches could do in partnerships or as a region-as-a-whole), and (2) to do better what the church can only do by itself (for example, sharing creative ideas that could work effectively in numerous congregational settings).

Also, keep in mind that we have earlier identified the following five areas as priorities (but we are not limited to them):

Worship and Christian Experience
Christian Education and Spiritual Development
Congregational Development: Growth in Mutuality, Strength, and Size
Stewardship
Justice, Peace, and Compassion

Another request: that you also give thought to ways in which more funds could be secured in the coming year for our work together.

We urge you to attend this "hearing" so we can benefit from your counsel and suggestions.

Going Green in ABCMC



GREEN GRAM

UNPLUG—plugged-in appliances consume energy. This is known as the “phantom load.” Unplug appliances when you are not using them, and avoid 1250 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions, and save over \$256 a year.

Thinking Theologically

ABCMC’s Executive Minister Larry Greenfield writes a biweekly column for the electronic newsletter of Protestants for the Common Good. This week’s column is at the end of this issue of *eWind*.

NEWS FROM ABCMC CONGREGATIONS

Religions around the World



Explore Religions from Around The World at The South Church, August 3-6, 6-8 p.m.

Come explore religions from around the world at Vacation Bible School at The South Church, Mount Prospect. Children pre-school thru fifth grade - four nights of music, dance, art, stories and games. Dinner will be served. For registration info - call 847-253-0501 or visit thesouthchurch.com

COMMUNITY NEWS

Kirk Opposes Health Care System Reform

This report is from Lynne Kelley, ABCMC’s communication coordinator.



With former Illinois Governor Jim Edgar, an American Baptist who is a member of Central Baptist Church in Springfield, standing nearby, Illinois tenth district congressman announced on Monday that he will seek the Republican nomination to run in 2010 for the U.S. Senate seat formerly held by President Barack Obama and currently held by Roland Burris, an American Baptist who is a member of Saint John Church – Baptist in Chicago. The American Baptist Churches are non-partisan, and do not endorse candidates. Probably every political party in our nation contains American Baptists.

Roland Burris, who will not run for election in 2010, supports the reform of our nation's health care system. He supports the position of Health Care for America Now, which is endorsed by the American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago. ABCMC voted to endorse that position at the May, 2009 Family Council meeting, because it mirrored the long-standing policy statement of the American Baptist Churches USA. Mark Kirk disagrees with the position. Health Care for America Now advocates affordable, quality, accessible health care with a system that offers choices, including a public insurance option—not socialized medicine. This is what ABCUSA's long-standing policy statement (published in last week's *eWind*, which is available on our web site www.abcmc.org) calls for.



A group of people attending Kirk's announcement held up signs asking for health care reform, and they chanted "Health Care Now!" In his speech, Kirk incorrectly referred to the chanters as Democrats, but they were not from any political party. They were health care reform advocates from Health Care for America now. A number of Kirk's supporters cursed at the chanters, called them communists, told them to go away, and tried to block their signs from view. The chanting continued. There was no disturbance, and there were no arrests.

Not everybody from Health Care for America Now was chanting, however. Some were standing quietly in the yard of Kirk's mother's house, and hoping for an opportunity to speak with the candidate after his announcement, which he made while standing on his mother's front porch. Once Kirk had finished his announcement and posed for photographs, reform advocate Jan Raczynski, a volunteer for Health Care for America Now, reached out and shook Kirk's hand, and asked him a question. She reported afterwards, "I asked him why he won't support a public health care option and he answered 'because I don't want to spend a trillion dollars on it.'"

Perhaps Kirk was aware that his response was a *non sequitor*. It is important for Illinois voters to be aware of that, however, and not be misled by a glib comment from a candidate. Since the proposed public health care option is a not-for-profit health insurance program, it would not cost the United States a trillion dollars. It would be paid for with premiums from its policy holders, just like private health insurance programs, but without the outrageous bonuses for CEO's. Public records indicate that in 2008 the health care industry, which consists mostly of health insurance companies, was one of the largest financial contributor's to Kirk's campaign fund. The for-profit health insurance industry has made it clear that they do not want competition for a not-for-profit health insurance program. Kirk may have a conflict of interests regarding health care reform.

To pay for part of an overhaul of the health care system, President Obama is proposing tax increases **only** for those Americans (like himself) with an annual income in excess of \$350,000. These Americans will not be hurt by a tax increase. These are some of the same folks to whom Kirk voted to give a tax cut while he voted to reduce government funding of programs for the poor. (This was covered in an *eWind* article in the February 2, 2006 issue.)

We would welcome your comments about this important national debate, which we will publish in future issues of *eWind*.

ABCUSA NEWS

Other articles from the American Baptist News Service are available at <http://www.abc-usa.org/Resources/AmericanBaptistNewsService/tabid/79/Default.aspx>

From the General Secretary

This letter is from the ABC-USA web site, www.abc-usa.org



In 2005, National Ministries published an issue of *The Christian Citizen* on "The Church and the Challenge of Health Care," a resource that is as relevant today as it was four years ago. That issue presented broad principles and goals for seeking health care reform, such as transcending political and ideological differences to focus not on particular models, but on the objective of access to healthcare services. It also pointed the way toward a variety of specific actions, such as observing a Health Care Sabbath, that allow for the diversity of opinion and conviction that is within the church, while honoring the church's distinctive orientation toward and crucial role in public life.

Articles included "A Primer—Key Facts About Americans without Health Insurance" and "Health Care for All: What Does Faith Require of Us." Also included are worship resources such as a children's sermon and a litany based on Psalm 30. As noted by Curtis Ramsey-Lucas of National Ministries, "Health care is an issue that touches every family. Its importance to American Baptists is evidenced by the fact that our General Board has repeatedly spoken to the issue through such formal policy statements and resolutions as the *American Baptist Policy Statement on Health Care*, the *American Baptist Policy Statement on Health, Healing and Wholeness*, the *American Baptist Resolution on Health Care for All*, and the *American Baptist Resolution on Mental Illness*. Although the health care issue is dynamic—constantly changing and requiring redefinition—at heart it remains the same: how might we bring healing and wholeness to everyone?"

"The Church and the Challenge of Health Care" is again available as a downloadable resource and can be found on the [National Ministries website](#).

American Baptists may also be interested in reviewing American Baptist Policy Statements and Resolutions that speak prophetically to the issues of health care access and health care reform which are also available on the site.

Finally, those who are interested in advocating their concerns with public policy makers will find links to organizations such as Faithful Reform in Health Care, PICO, and Children's Defense Fund, that can facilitate their response. I commend these resources to American Baptist for study, reflection, and action.

Centered in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "A. Roy Medley". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.

Rev. Dr. A. Roy Medley
General Secretary

ABCUSA Delegates Pass Statements on Hospitality and the Economy

VALLEY FORGE, PA (ABNS – 7/17/09)—At the Saturday afternoon gathering of the American Baptist Biennial meeting in Pasadena, CA, June 27, delegates overwhelmingly accepted the two Statements of Concern brought to them by the Statements of Concern Committee.

The first Statement is a response to one of the significant challenges of our era: immigrations and internal displacement. “With displacement due to natural disasters, famine, and war, as well as immigration for economic advancement, people are resettling in the United States in ways that both enhance and disrupt established communities,” the Statement acknowledges.

It calls upon American Baptists, as individuals and congregations, to “welcome all people with Christ’s compassion in the expectation that we may be entertaining angels unaware.”

The Statement specifically urges American Baptists to “educate and equip ourselves to engage people, who are religiously, culturally and ethnically diverse, through suitable programs for improved mutual understanding,” and to develop and use the gift of hospitality to greet others and to learn from them. The second Statement calls American Baptists to recommit themselves to working and advocating “for economic justice on the local, state and national level while listening to those who feel their voices are unheard or ignored amidst the clamor of political agendas.”

The Statement also gets personal. It asks American Baptists to look at their personal financial management, to be supportive of those going through tough financial times, and use our budgets (family, church, state and national) to “ensure the just treatment of all people.”

A group of delegates also brought a Signature Statement on “The Public Witness of American Baptists” to the floor for discussion.

The delegates asked that, as the denomination continued to consider a new structure, to include “space for the public registration of minority dissent” and make certain that these discussions and debates continue to come before Biennial delegates.

Having received 150 verified delegate signatures, the statement could be discussed without vote. It was then forwarded to the General Board.

Statements of Concern are adopted by delegates to the Biennial Meeting of American Baptist Churches. They seek the opinion of those delegates on moral, spiritual, political, economic, social, denominational and ecumenical matters to American Baptists and to the rest of society and reflects the position of those gathered.

The full statements are available on the ABC website: www.abc-usa.org.

HEALTH CARE NEWS

Insurance Industry Doesn’t Need Protection

This article is from Health Care for America Now.

What’s often lost in the debate over the public option, competition, and insurance regulation is that the insurance industry is taking in record profits. Case-in-point, [UnitedHealth’s second quarter profit skyrocketed](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/07/21/AR2009072100574_2.html) (http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/07/21/AR2009072100574_2.html) :

The Minnetonka, Minn.-based company said its profit more than doubled compared to the same quarter last year, when hefty legal charges weighed down earnings. UnitedHealth also said revenue rose 7 percent, as it saw strong growth in its public and senior health insurance.

Why the huge profits?

Revenue rose to \$21.66 billion from \$20.27 billion on increased premiums, which grew partly due to price increases. UnitedHealth is the largest commercial health insurer based on revenue.

We're in the middle of a recession. People are losing their jobs every day. And yet, UnitedHealth, [which dominates the market in some areas](http://healthcareforamericanow.org/site/content/new_report_private_insurers_consolidate_and_control_prices) (http://healthcareforamericanow.org/site/content/new_report_private_insurers_consolidate_and_control_prices), continues to raise prices so it can generate record profits.

And, clearly, that's all they care about: Profits and maximizing returns for their stockholders. Not health care, not you or me. It's all about money.

So, [while the Chamber of Commerce hyperventilates about a public health insurance option](http://tpmdc.talkingpointsmemo.com/2009/07/us-chamber-to-launch-campaign-fighting-public-option.php) (<http://tpmdc.talkingpointsmemo.com/2009/07/us-chamber-to-launch-campaign-fighting-public-option.php>), the insurance industry is doing just fine squeezing you and me for our hard-earned money. They can stand a little competition, because their CEOs really don't need another bonus.

News Media Imbalance

This article is from Health Care for America Now

In their health care reform coverage, media have repeatedly given considerably more attention to perceived setbacks to progressive reform efforts than to events that signal progress for those efforts. A *Media Matters for America* analysis of transcripts available in the Nexis database has found that broadcast and cable news featured almost twice as many segments mentioning the American Medical Association's (AMA's) reported opposition to a public insurance plan as segments mentioning the AMA's recent announcement that it supported the House Democrats' health care reform bill, which includes a public plan.

That finding is consistent with an earlier *Media Matters* study showing that the number of cable news segments in Nexis mentioning an initial Congressional Budget Office (CBO) analysis of an incomplete version of a Senate health committee draft bill was far greater than the number of segments mentioning a later CBO analysis. That later analysis showed that an updated version of the bill would cover more people for less than the earlier scoring had suggested. *Media Matters* has also documented a pattern in which media suggest that President Obama's reform effort is in serious jeopardy, despite events — including the AMA endorsement and revised CBO score — that indicate reform efforts have made substantial progress.

That's twice now that the media has failed to cover the upsides of health reform, preferring the downside. Of course, they're all out for ratings, so reporting the drama is probably better for the bottom line than reporting the progress. It just happens to be unbalanced.

Vacation or Health Care?

This article is from the Illinois Campaign for Better Health Care. Be sure to read the cited articles.

What would you choose - going on vacation or passing health care reform?

That is the choice facing the House of Representatives, who are nearing a vote on historic health reform legislation but are scheduled to *go on vacation* at the end of next week.

I think the choice is fairly obvious: **The House should keep working until they pass a health reform bill - health care is more important than vacation.**

[The blog Firedoglake has created a petition asking the House to stay in session to pass health reform. Click here to sign the petition.](#)

Firedoglake will be delivering your petition signatures to the House at the end of this week.

There is a **real human cost** for going on vacation, even for three weeks. Three weeks in America without health care means:

- 143,250 people will *lose their health insurance coverage*¹
- 53,507 people will *file for bankruptcy* because they can't pay their medical bills²
- 1,265 people *will die* because they lack coverage³

The House is so close to passing a health reform bill - **they should not go on vacation now when thousands are losing their health care or worse every day.**

[Click here to sign the petition and ask the House to stay in session to pass health care instead of going on vacation.](#)

Health care just can't wait.

1. [The Clock Is Ticking](#) [pdf] (<http://www.familiesusa.org/assets/pdfs/health-reform/clock-is-ticking.pdf>) - Families USA
2. [Medical Bills Prompt more than 60 Percent of US Bankruptcies](#) (<http://www.cnn.com/2009/HEALTH/06/05/bankruptcy.medical.bills/>) - CNN
3. [Dying for Coverage](#) (<http://www.familiesusa.org/issues/uninsured/publications/dying-for-coverage.html>) - Families USA

Health Care Justice Action Week and Faith

**Health Care Justice
ACTION Week
July 24 - Aug 2, 2009**

**Let Your Members of Congress Know:
We Want Lower Costs, More Choices, and Coverage We Can
Count On!**

Right now, it is probable that the U.S. House will be voting on health care reform before their Aug. 1 recess, and the U.S. Senate will do the same before Aug. 8. Let your Congressperson know that you expect them to put their vacation off until this is done! Tell them to support health care reform providing access to quality, affordable care to everyone, and the freedom to choose between a private plan or a quality public plan.

**Every Day This Week:
CALL YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS!
1-866-210-3678**

You can visit the [CBHC Action Center](http://www.cbhconline.org/action.html) (<http://www.cbhconline.org/action.html>) for daily updates.

FRIDAY, JULY 24 - SUNDAY, AUGUST 2
Faith Inspired Vision of Health Care

The HCJC Faith Caucus is spotlighting the human reality of the health care crisis for thousands of congregants across the state.

Find the bulletin insert at services this weekend or download it [here](http://www.cbhconline.org/issues/hcjc/bulletins.html).
(<http://www.cbhconline.org/issues/hcjc/bulletins.html>)

Sign on to the Faith Inspired Vision of Health Care statement [here](http://www.cbhconline.org/issues/hcjc/faith-vision.html).
(<http://www.cbhconline.org/issues/hcjc/faith-vision.html>)



MONDAY, JULY 27
Statewide Coordinated ACTION Conference Call

[Register online](#) for our weekly conference call and get the latest legislative updates, timelines, and next steps!

ACTION: Visit the [CBHC Action Center](#) for Monday's message and call your member of Congress at 1-866-210-3678!

TUESDAY, JULY 28
Story Sharing Drop Off and Email ACTION

Share your health care story with the Campaign for Better Health Care and your member of Congress!

Bring your personal story to the office of your Congressperson so they understand exactly why quality, affordable health care for all is important in their district, and [send a copy to CBHC](#) for the Story Blog.

Or, [submit it directly](#) to CBHC for inclusion in the Story Blog and we will make sure your Congressperson gets it.

ACTION: Visit the [CBHC Action Center](#) for Tuesday's message and call your member of Congress at 1-866-210-3678! This is a national call in day, so call early & often!

WEDNESDAY, JULY 29 Out In Front ACTION

Congressional District Committee groups around the state will be holding Out In Front events, including evening vigils and afternoon gatherings. For more information, please visit the [CBHC Action Center](#).

ACTION: Visit the [CBHC Action Center](#) for Wednesday's message and call your member of Congress at 1-866-210-3678!



THURSDAY, JULY 30 Get Your Voice Into the Media ACTION

Get the message about quality, affordable health care for all into the media today! Advocates across the state will be calling radio talk shows and responding to newspaper articles on health care. For more information, please visit the [CBHC Action Center](#).

ACTION: Visit the [CBHC Action Center](#) for Thursday's message and call your member of Congress at 1-866-210-3678!

PRAYER REQUESTS

Please pray for world peace.

Please pray for God's guidance to those who are seeking to reform our health care system.

Please pray and take action for real reform of the health care system in the United States.

Please pray for ABC's volunteers in mission all around the world.

Please pray for ABC missionary Ruth Mooney. Ruth's ministry is Christian Education. She has been on U.S./Puerto Rico assignment for this past year and will return to Costa Rica on July 29.

Please pray for ABC missionaries John and Tomoko Armagost, ministering in Japan.

Please pray for God's guidance for the leaders of our state and nation.

CALENDAR

NOW—Please take action—phone calls, emails, letters to the editor—for health care reform.

July 25—Hispanic Pastors' Dinner, Ramada Inn Restaurant, 4900 S. Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, 6 p.m.

July 25-31—National AB Women's Conference, Lake Williamson Christian Center, Carlinville, Illinois.

July 26—Tony Rake preaches at Federated Church of Wauconda, 200 S. Barrington Road, Wauconda, 9 a.m.

July 26—ABCMC Sunday with Larry Greenfield preaching, Community Church of Wilmette, 1020 Forest Avenue, Wilmette, 10:30 a.m.

July 28-29—2009 Ministry in Hard Times Event, Geist Christian Church, 12756 Promise Road, Fishers, Indiana. Register at https://21stcenturystrategiesinc.com/cart/index.php?main_page=product_info&cPath=33&products_id=381&zenid=af0c4a158b8b285942b5e05e8e642f84

July 30—Memorial service for Rev. Julian C. Herrin, Olin T. Binkley Memorial Baptist Church, 1712 Willow Drive, Chapel Hill, NC.

August 3-6—Vacation Bible School, The South Church, 501 S. Emerson Street, Mount Prospect, 6-8 p.m. For registration info - call 847-253-0501 or visit thesouthchurch.com

August 3-7—Mediation Skills Training Institute for Church Leaders, presented by Lombard Mennonite Peace Center at St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, 22W 415 Butterfield Road, Glen Ellyn. For information, please visit www.LMPeaceCenter.org.

August 3-14—Vacation Bible School, Irving Park Baptist Church, 4401 W. Irving Park Road, Chicago, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

August 11—Faith and Health Convergence: Connecting to Transform Our Communities, UIC Student Center East, Illinois Rooms A and B, 750 S. Halsted Street, Chicago, 1:30-8:30 p.m.

August 18—Property and Finance Committee meeting, 3 p.m.

August 22—Family Council meeting Garfield Park Baptist Church, 4100 W Jackson Boulevard, Chicago. Check-in opens at 8:30 a.m.; meeting begins at 9 a.m. Please register in advance, no later than August 18.

September 6—ABCMC Sunday with Larry Greenfield preaching, Emmanuel Baptist Church, 8301 S. Damen Avenue, Chicago, 11 a.m..

September 12—ABCMC Stewardship Seminar, 10 a.m.

September 15—Kids Hope United 19th Annual Golf Outing, Bonnie Brook Golf Course, Waukegan.

October 3—ABCMC gathering with Jeff Woods. Save the date! More information to come.

November 3-7—2009 Black Church Conference, Holiday Inn Hotel and Conference Center, 500 Holiday Plaza Drive, Matteson, Illinois.

November 14—ABCMC Annual Meeting

November 3-12, 2010—Journey through the Land of Israel with Irving Park Baptist Church.

The Metro Chicago *eWind* is an electronic communication intended for the people of the American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago. The events publicized herein do not necessarily express the opinions of the American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago. We email the newsletter each Wednesday. We welcome your news, prayer requests and comments. Please email your communications to the editor, Lynne Kelley, at lynne@abcmc.org. If you spot a typographical error or other mistake in *eWind*, please let us know at the ABCMC office, 773-804-1655. The ABCMC office is at 7035 W. Grand Avenue, Suite 102, Chicago, Illinois 60707

THINKING THEOLOGICALLY ABOUT THE COMMON GOOD

July 23, 2009

Larry L. Greenfield

“Getting the Point”

The theologian who wrote the Gospel of John was clearly trying to cover a lot of bases. So the reader can assume that there’s probably not just one point going on in any one text, but several.

To assert that this Gospel was authored by a theologian – and a fine one at that! – isn’t, of course, to suggest that the three Synoptic Gospels were written by non-theologians or without theological bias. Nor is it to suggest that, at times, the authors of Mark, Matthew, and Luke couldn’t play with numerous themes in any particular text, making it strenuous to identify their central point. By now, in the history of biblical interpretation, it’s taken for granted that every writer of scripture brings a theological perspective to her or his narratives.

But among the Gospel-writers, the Johannine theologian clearly is unmatched in the capacity to pack in the most interpretive freight.

All of this can be seen in the only major story from Jesus’ ministry that is common to all four Gospels (except those deal with Jesus’ last days): the feeding of the thousands – or as the traditional summary phrase names it: the Multiplication.

It is widely assumed that even though Mark, the earliest Gospel, and John, the latest, share a lot of common material, there is enough difference between them to hold that the writers relied on two independent sources (with Matthew and Luke drawing on Mark), dealing with the same incident in the life of Jesus.

The bare bones version of the incident goes something like this for all four of the accounts:

- Jesus continues to attract crowds with his teaching and healing, even when he and the disciples try to get away for some time by themselves.
- On one such occasion, the crowds stick around although it’s near the time of the evening meal and there’s no place to find food anywhere near.
- A panicky question arises about how the crowd will be fed.
- A disciple remarks that only five loaves and a few fish can be found in the entire crowd.

- Jesus has the disciples bring the loaves and fishes to him; he looks to heaven and blesses the food, then breaks the bread and divides the fishes.
- There is enough food for everyone to be satisfied and still there are twelve full baskets of leftovers.

Anyone who knows the four versions of this story realizes that each Gospel author spins the barebones of it to make one or more interpretive points (and maybe also to juice up the narrative a bit to make it more interesting).

But John's Gospel is the most juiced up of them all. Unlike the three Synoptic Gospels, in which the *disciples* take the initiative of asking what should be done to feed the people, the narrator in the Gospel of John has *Jesus* ask the disciple Philip where they should purchase bread for the people to eat, and then the Gospel-writer parenthetically adds that: "Actually, of course, he [Jesus] was perfectly aware of what he was going to do, but he asked this to test Philip's reaction." Philip tells Jesus that they don't have enough cash on hand to buy the bread that would give everyone just a mouthful.

Moreover, to connect Jesus with the Hebrew scriptures, there are also allusions to Moses on the mountain and possibly the prophets Elijah and Elisha; and there are hints of Jesus' messiahship to be fully revealed at the forthcoming Passover celebration; and there are suggestions about what would become the Eucharist by references to the broken bread.

And then at end of the Johannine narrative it is reported that given what the people had seen ("the sign he had performed") they were sure that Jesus was the promised prophet or messiah. And in response, the text reports, "Jesus realized that they [the people] would come and carry him off to make him king, so he fled back to the mountain alone."

There's no question that there is a lot of theology going on here.

All of this "interpretive freight," however, can obscure what is rather obviously the central point of the bare bones narrative that all four of the Gospels share: *that everyone of the hungry people get fully fed and yet there are leftovers.*

Yes, Jesus performs the miracle – the Multiplication – but the purpose of it is that *the needs of the people are more than met.*

If there is a theological point to make, it is that, in Jesus' world, God's provisions for the world's life are abundant – even more than abundant. It follows, then, that out of that divine abundance we are to do God's will and work to be sure that the needs of all are met. Like Jesus, we are to turn to God, seek God's blessing, and take responsibility for distributing God's abundant provisions for everyone.

Understand, I'm not arguing that all the *other* theological points about this shared narrative that the author of John and the other Gospel-writers are making turn out to be wrong or irrelevant.

My only concern is that those other theological points not distract or diminish our getting *the* point.

And that, it seems to me, has particular pertinence to time a when people are hungry, or suffering, or losing their jobs and their homes or their health insurance, or whatever they need in order to have the lift that God intends for them.

Especially now, we need to get that point.

The national debate on health care reform, it turns out, is not whether there is enough money to cover everyone. There clearly is enough, and more. The debate is about whether some people and professions and industries should be able to keep a lot of their money at the expense of the health and life of others who don't have enough to secure health coverage, or if the abundance of money should be distributed in ways that everyone is covered.

The debate in the states is similar: even in a time of national and global economic distress, whether taxes should be raised on those with abundant income and wealth so that children can receive the kind of education they need, so that families can receive the kind of services they need, so that institutions and organizations can receive the funds to help people stay healthy and sane and productive.

In short, we do not, even in these distressful economic times, face a global problem of famine or scarcity; we face a global problem of how we will deal with the problem of abundance so unequally divided.

So we really shouldn't read about the Multiplication in any of the four Gospels and get distracted by the variety of theological points being set forth. We need, instead, to get *the* point.