

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

November 4, 2009



Surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD,
plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.
Jeremiah 29:12

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ABCMC NEWS

Thank You, Tony

Friday, October 30 was Tony Rake's last day as ABCMC's office assistant. The rest of the staff will greatly miss working with Tony. From Tony's perspective, he is retiring to pursue his vocation as a curmudgeon. But those of us who know him recognize that he has limited skills in that arena, and we know he will continue to be a kind helper to others, and to make people laugh.



Tony grew up in the Federated Church of Wauconda, where he is still an active member. Tony holds bachelors and masters degrees in library science. He was for many years a high school librarian. Following his retirement from that career, he attended Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he earned a Master of Divinity Degree. For two separate periods of time Tony has served as interim pastor at the Federated Church.

Tony joined the ABCMC staff in the summer of 2006. His attention to detail, his Christian spirit and his commitment to the region have been a blessing to all of us. His sense of humor has seen us through some challenges. We are grateful that he has been with us.

We are not telling Tony good-bye, however. He is still his church's representative to ABCMC's Family Council. We look forward to seeing him at meetings, and continuing to share ministries with him.

Thank you, Tony, for all that you have been and done for us. We love and appreciate you.

Call to Meeting

TO: American Baptists in Metro Chicago
FROM: Larry Greenfield, Executive Minister, ABCMC
RE: **2009 Annual Meeting**
Saturday, November 14
8:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
North Shore Baptist Church, 5244 N. Lakewood Avenue, Chicago

There's hardly any debate about what will be the next big debate in our nation – that is, after the debate about health care gets settled one way or another in the coming weeks.

Virtually everyone agrees that the next big debate will be on **immigration policy**. It might begin yet this year, but surely will be the dominant public issue in 2010.

As a democratic nation (now mostly) of immigrants built (at least in stated ideals) on the rights and dignity of each and every human being, much is at stake in this forthcoming debate.

Christians have even more at stake, given what the whole Bible and Jesus in particular teaches about welcoming and caring for the stranger, the alien, the foreigner (although in some cases those so-called have an ancestry that is native to this continent).

And that's even more the case for American Baptists in this metropolitan area – in city and suburbs often originally constituted by immigrant communities. Our history as American Baptists here is filled with stories of immigrant churches, of ministries directed toward helping immigrants, of refugee resettlement.

This matter of immigration is in our genetic make-up. So we can't skirt this issue without denying who we have been, and are, and will become. And that's why the theme of our Annual Meeting this year is:

A HISTORIC MISSION RENEWED: THE IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE CHALLENGE

We can't escape the public policy dimensions of this issue that will be swirling around us in the coming year. We need to have voice – and voices – in that public debate. But, for us, this isn't just about public policy. It's also about all the other dimensions of our Christian ministry.

The Annual Meeting will get us started.

We have outstanding resources lined up. Many of them, of course, are our sisters and brothers in the Region who can and will give personal testimony about what refugees and immigrants face today. And our own Dr. Alvaro Nieves of the Community Baptist Church of Warrenville (and the Department of Sociology of Wheaton College) will be bringing us a understanding of the immigration "context" in the metro Chicago region.

And then we have the incredible good fortune of the Rev. Dr. Miguel A. De La Torre, Professor and Director of the Justice and Peace Institute at Iliff Seminary in Denver, being a featured presenter.

Dr. De La Torre is an ordained Southern Baptist minister who gives a lot of Southern Baptists fits because of his creative and courageous insights about living the Christian life in today's world. But in the world beyond the SBC he is recognized as one of the most important voices in theology and ethics in the country today.



Miguel A. De La Torre

He is the author of more than a dozen groundbreaking books – groundbreaking because he admittedly thinks and writes "from the margins" as once an undocumented immigrant and one who can speak out of his own experience and deep learning.

His most recent book (released just this last week in October) is exactly on our theme: "Trails of Hope and Terror: Testimonies on Immigration" – a simply terrific book that has tremendous relevance for the churches.

We build the morning program in such a way that all of us can learn from and engage him directly. And toward the end of the morning session we'll devote time to thinking about what we can do distinctively in our various congregations and together as a region.

I urge – that's the word, *urge* – you to be a part of this Annual Meeting because of its biblical, theological, and ministerial substance and its relevance to the world in which God has placed us.

We will be treated to Burmese cuisine for lunch, prepared by our relative recent arrived Karen sisters and brothers. And at the lunch we do some recognitions and celebratory things that will be fun and fulfilling (the "filling" part, obviously relates also to the meal!)

The annual business meeting will take place immediately after lunch.

Please share this news and invitation with other members of your congregation. And please make reservations by faxing or emailing the office (fax: 773-804-1656; email: office@abcmc.org).

Regional Office

In the near future, ABCMC will become an office-less region. ABCMC's new mailing address will be at

Greater Bethesda Baptist Church, 109 E. 53rd Street, Chicago, IL 60615-3303. More information will be forthcoming in eWind. We thank the Pastor David Watkins and the church for allowing the region to use space in the church building for files and office equipment.

Fall Dinner

The Cook County Jail Ministry's annual fall dinner will take place on Saturday, November 7 at 6 p.m. The event will be at the First Baptist Church of Oak Park, 820 Ontario Street, Oak Park. Valet parking will be available.



All are invited to come and participate in this evening of fellowship, prayer and music, as well as a delicious meal. All tickets are to be purchased at the door. The cost is \$15 per adult or \$5 per child under 12. A table for 8 will cost \$100.

Be sure to attend the event and support this important ministry with inmates at the Cook County Jail.

Retired Ministers and Missionaries Offering

This is the time of year when American Baptists bring an offering that says we remember with love and give with gratitude. Since the Great Depression of the 1930's American Baptist congregations have contributed to special offerings to provide financial support to retired ministers and missionaries and their widowed spouses. The Retired Ministers and Missionaries Offering (RMMO) was established in 1977 to continue this tradition.

The RMMO provides you with a tangible way by which to honor, say "thank you" and provide financial assistance to retired American Baptist ministers, missionaries and their widowed spouses who supported you in times of need, guided you on your spiritual journey and provided inspiration.

Recipients of Thank You checks and emergency and other financial assistance express gratitude not only for the gift but for less tangible benefits, such as evidence of God's providential care, encouragement, hope and assurance that they have not been forgotten by their ABC family.

NEWS FROM ABCMC CONGREGATIONS

Guest Speaker at Lake Street Church

On Sunday, November 8 Joan Borysenko will be Lake Street Church's guest speaker at the 10:30 a.m. service at 607 W. Lake Street, Evanston. Borysenko will sign copies of her most recent book, *It's Not the End of the World: Developing Resilience in Times of Change*, following worship.

A distinguished pioneer in integrative medicine, Borysenko is a world-renowned expert in the mind/body connection. Her work has been foundational in an international health-care revolution that recognizes the role of meaning, and the spiritual dimensions of life, as an integral part of health and healing. Eloquent and inspiring in settings that range from hospitals to hospices, from theaters to conference venues, and from boardrooms to houses of worship, she is a credible bridge between faith and reason. Her brilliance, humor, and authenticity—in combination with the latest research—make her a compelling and inspiring speaker and writer.

Her web address is www.joanborysenko.com.

For more information, please contact Lake Street Church at 847-864-2181.

South Church Craft Fair

Find great gifts for friends, family and yourself. Crafts, jewelry, food and more will be available.. The 2nd Annual South Church Craft & Vendor Fair is Saturday, November 14 from 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. Call 847-253-0501 or email mciske@earthlink.net for details. The South Church is at 501 S. Emerson Street, Mount Prospect.

Tea and Symphony

Woodside Church is committed to supporting the arts throughout Flint and the surrounding area. The congregation and its leadership believe the talent that resides throughout our community is truly a blessing. Therefore, the church designed a series of four special events corresponding to performances by the Flint Symphony—High Tea & Symphony. This is a pre-concert event including fine dining, music and art.

The first event of the 2009-2010 series will be held on Friday, November 14 and centered on the theme, "Star Gazing." The evening includes a gourmet four-course dinner served in the style of high tea in an intimate art gallery setting. The menu has been designed to cater to a variety of tastes and includes vegetarian options. Dinner begins at 5:30 p.m. and will conclude at approximately 7:15 p.m., with plenty of time to make the Flint Symphony's performance.

Music and artwork enhance the experience. Dr. Quincy Dobbs, Minister of Music and Fine Arts, will perform musical selections based on the evening's theme and diners will be surrounded by the artwork of local artists such as photography, paintings and sculpture.

Woodside invites anyone who shares an appreciation of the fine arts in our community to enjoy elegant dining, wonderful music and beautiful art to attend this wonderful event. The recommended donation is \$30 per person, which does not include tickets to the concert. Similarly, it is not necessary to be attending the symphony to attend this dinner.

Reservations are required and must be made by the Monday prior to the event by calling the church: 810-767-4911. Please contact Dr. Quincy Dobbs at 810-767-4911 or visit www.woodsidechurch.net for more information.

The donation will be \$30 per person. Symphony tickets are not included. One does not have to be attending the symphony to participate

Please mark your calendars for the next three events, which will take place in 2010: January 23: Winter Solstice; February 20: Celestial Creations; April 17: Here Comes the Sun

Jazz Vespers

All are invited to Jazz Vespers on Friday, November 20—beginning at 6:00 p.m. This monthly event is designed to be spiritually uplifting with some of the area's best jazz musicians adding their musical interpretation to a selection of readings—classic to contemporary—creating a unique experience. For November, Woodside welcomes E J Joier from Bushnell Congregational Church and some of his talented friends. There will be a splendid mix of music, sure to enhance the service.

Jazz Vespers is presented in a coffee house setting at Woodside Church, 1509 East Court Street in Flint, right next to Mott Community College. Refreshments will be served.

Mark Your Calendars for the Entire Season

Mark your calendars for all of the Jazz Vespers services, all beginning at 6:00 p.m.: December 18, January 15, February 19, March 19, April 16, May 21 and June 18.

No admission is charged. Please call the church at 810-767-4911 or visit www.woodsidechurch.net for more information.

COMMUNITY NEWS

Preaching Conference

This announcement is from the Beatitudes Society.

The Beatitudes Society is pleased to announce

Shaping Sermons to Nurture Justice: A Conference on Prophetic Preaching, a regional conference for seminarians and recent seminary graduates. It will take place in the Chicago area April 9-12, 2010.

"Preach the Gospel by all means; and if necessary, use words."

This often-quoted line from St. Francis of Assisi is an important reminder that the pursuit of justice involves "walking the walk," not just "talking the talk." But talk is important too—particularly in the context of Christian worship. The formation of a faith community both intentional and skilled in Beatitude practice requires sustained and effective preaching. How do we understand that? How do we undertake it?

"Prophetic preaching" is frequently characterized (and sometimes implemented!) as a toxic mixture of guilt-imposing denunciation and doomsday prediction. Rightly practiced, it is announcing the Beatitudes with insight, clarity, and evocative power—easier said than done! More is involved than a combination of courage and candor. Prophetic preaching is daunting—a homiletical challenge, no less than a moral challenge. While often a lonely undertaking, it cannot be effectively sustained as a solitary task.

If you discern such preaching to be a central part of your vocation, we invite you to apply for participation in one of our regional preaching conferences. The first conference will be held March 5-8, 2010 in Berkeley, CA at Easton Hall on the campus of the Church Divinity School of the Pacific. The second conference will be held April 9-12, 2010 near Chicago, at Techny Towers in Techny, IL. The conferences will focus on a collegial listening of one another into graceful prophetic speech.

- Participants will be limited to 12 for each conference, selected on the basis of two submitted sermons and a brief [application](#). **Deadline January 15, 2010.**
- The conference will emphasize peer learning. Mentors will facilitate group process, and foster skill development. The conference will honor the gifts of each participant. Imagination and innovation will be encouraged.
- Participants will bring to the conference the first draft of a sermon they are preparing to preach (or envision preaching) during Pentecost, Year C—employing one or more of the Scripture lessons in the Revised Common Lectionary for a Sunday in that liturgical season. This "sermon in process" (a not-ready-for-prime-time sermon) will be shared during the conference, in the hope that the conference will contribute to the sermon's further preparation.
- Mentors will preach briefly at community worship, and will be available throughout the conference for individual and small group consultation.
- Workshop fees, meals, and lodging will be provided.
- **Scholarship recipients are responsible for their travel expenses to the conference.**
- We are holding two regional workshops this year so that we are able to offer more access to this sought-after resource.

Celebrate National Mental Health Awareness Month: Learn Mental Health First Aid

Worried that someone you love is depressed, or suffering from addiction? You can learn the facts about mental illness and substance use and what you can do to help by enrolling in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA.)

Offered by Community Counseling Centers of Chicago (C4), MHFA is a 12-hour training targeted to the general public and taught by certified mental health professionals. Through interactive exercises and films, participants learn the symptoms and how to help people find resources to treat depression, anxiety disorders, bi-polar disorder, schizophrenia, substance use, eating disorders and self-injury. Participants also learn how to help people experiencing psychiatric crises until professional help arrives.

Dates for the next trainings are: November 16-17; December 10-11 and the program will take place at C4 Clark, 4740 N. Clark, or C4 Broadway, 5710 N. Broadway from 9 am to 4 pm.

Cost per participant is \$150 for materials, lunches and snacks. Limited scholarship aid is available.

For more information, please contact Marta Gomez at 773-765-0824 or marta.gomez@c4chicago.org or visit www.c4chicago.org.

Ecumenical Advocacy Days in 2010

We are all invited to participate next spring in Ecumenical Advocacy Days, March 19-22, 2010 in Washington D.C. The theme for this conference will be:

"A Place to Call Home: Immigrants, Refugees, and Displaced Peoples"

It is particularly appropriate for ABCMC folks to participate in this event, considering the focus of this year's annual meeting and our plans for ministry in 2010. This will be an opportunity to connect many of 8th Day's issues from Immigration, War, and Climate Change to name a few. 8th Day friends and members will gather. Time and day of 8th Day gathering is TBD.

For more information on EAD go to <http://advocacydays.org/>

ABCUSA NEWS

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

Essay Contest

This announcement is from the Baptist Joint Committee on Religious Liberty.

The Religious Liberty Council of the Baptist Joint Committee announces the 5th annual Religious Liberty Essay Scholarship Contest, which is open to all high school students in the graduating classes of 2010 and 2011. This year's contest will commemorate the 50th anniversary of John F. Kennedy's landmark speech about the relationship between his religion and his politics and the separation of church and state.

The scholarship contest offers a grand prize of \$1,000 and a trip for two to Washington, D.C. Second prize is \$500, and third prize is \$100.

To read this year's topic and to download entry forms, visit www.BJConline.org/contest . Entries are due March 1, 2010.

Secretary Clinton Issues Religious Freedom Report, Condemns “Defamation” Laws

This article is from the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty.

Written by Don Byrd; Monday, October 26, 2009

Each year the State Department issues a comprehensive report on religious freedom around the world. Today marks the first such [report from the Obama administration](#). In her [remarks](#), Secretary Clinton voiced strong opposition to misguided laws that would restrict free speech [under the guise](#) of protecting religious liberty.

I obviously believe that our country has been strengthened by its long tradition of religious pluralism. From the largest denominations to the very smallest congregations, American religious bodies and faith-based organizations have helped to create a more just and compassionate society. Now, some claim that the best way to protect the freedom of religion is to implement so-called anti-defamation policies that would restrict freedom of expression and the freedom of religion. I strongly disagree. The United States will always seek to counter negative stereotypes of individuals based on their religion and will stand against discrimination and persecution.

But an individual’s ability to practice his or her religion has no bearing on others’ freedom of speech. The protection of speech about religion is particularly important since persons of different faiths will inevitably hold divergent views on religious questions. These differences should be met with tolerance, not with the suppression of discourse.

You can read the Executive Summary of the report at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127215.htm>.

A table of contents with links to individual country reports is [here](#). Comment from the US Commission on International Religious Freedom is at http://www.uscirf.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2793&Itemid=1.

Honoring Valentine Royal-Thomas



The Rev. Valentine Royal-Thomas will be honored for her leadership and advocacy of American Baptist Women in Ministry during the Together in the Lord Conference in Orlando, Florida January 4-7, 2010. This conference will be presented by the American Baptist Churches USA and the Ministers Council. It will take place at the Wyndham Resort and Conference Center, 8001 International Drive, Orlando, Florida.

Register now: www.ministercouncil.org



MINISTERS COUNCIL NEWS

Ministers Meeting in Chicago on Friday, November 13

As you read in earlier announcements about ABCMC's Annual Meeting, Dr. Miguel De La Torre will be with us for the weekend of November 13-15. We have arranged for the Ministers Council to have a conversation with him centering on his book *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins*. This gathering will be from 1 to 3 p.m. at Central Spanish Baptist Church, 2417 N. Campbell, Chicago. As you know, the book has been recognized as a very important contribution to contemporary Christian ethics. (You don't need to have read the book to participate in the conversation, but is available in book stores and online.)

Linda Tossey, pastor of Community Baptist Church in Warrenville, sent us the following message related to the speaker at both the Ministers Council Meeting on November 13 and ABCMC's Annual Meeting on November 14:

I am thrilled that Miguel De La Torre will be sharing more about his book, *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins* at the upcoming Ministers Council. This book was required reading in my Christian Ethics class at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities. All I can say is "Wow!" De La Torre speaks from the margins for the marginalized and right from the heart of the gospel. This is a wonderful opportunity for all of us in ABCMC to interact with this highly respected ethicist who calls us to have "eyes to see" through a critically important lens if we are to authentically respond to the gospel imperatives of Christ.

All ABCMC's ministers are invited and encouraged to attend a Ministers Council meeting on Friday, November 13. You are welcome to bring a guest or two, but our colleague and host Shakespeare Osorio would like to have a count, so please email Larry at larry@abcmc.org or phone him at 312-497-0688 to indicate whether you will be attending and how many will be in your group.



Below is some biographical information on Dr. De La Torre.

Born in Cuba, Miguel De La Torre has lived in the United States since he was 6 months old, when his parents fled their native land shortly after Fidel Castro came into power. He became a Southern Baptist as a young adult. He earned his M.Div. at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. After serving for a time as a pastor in rural Kentucky, he continued in graduate school and earned a doctorate in social ethics from Temple University in 1999.

He taught Christian Ethics for several years at Hope College in Michigan. Since 2006 he has taught social ethics at Iliff School of Theology in Colorado.

He is author of numerous articles and several books. In addition to his academic training, his writings draw on his experiences as a Hispanic immigrant in the United States. We are blessed to have him as our guest.

Come to Orlando

TOGETHER IN THE LORD

Ministry Renewal Conference

Presented by American Baptist Churches USA January 4 - 7, 2010, Orlando

To be held at the [Wyndham Resort and Conference Center](#)

Keynote Speakers:

Miroslav Volf (Yale Divinity School)

Miroslav Volf teaches at Yale Divinity School.

His well-known work in the field of forgiveness and reconciliation has had a transforming impact on thousands of people around the world.

Watch his sermon in a recent Sunday Morning edition of "The Hour of Power" by clicking here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ymml6rYjflo>

Shane Claybourne (The Simple Way)

Watch Shane Claiborne speaking at a "Fusion Youth" gathering:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPANKUHabx4>

Inspired Preachers:

Trinette McCray

Ordained in 1981 by the late civil rights leader, Rev. Dr. Ralph D. Abernathy, the Milwaukee-based Rev. Dr. McCray has over 25 years experience in local and national ministry and holds the distinction of being the first clergywoman to be elected president of the American Baptist Churches, USA. As an instructor in

Urban Ministry at Cardinal Stritch University, McCray is the executive director of the Center for Calling and Engagement which includes programming that furthers partnerships in Milwaukee's social justice and urban transformation efforts through churches and faith based organizations.

Marvin McMickle

Marvin McMickle is the pastor of The Antioch Baptist Church in Cleveland Ohio and is a "best-selling" author for Judson Press.

Click here to watch Marvin preach at an outdoor rally in Cleveland:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTxkpSmzjmM&feature=channel>

Registration Ends Soon



Join us in Orlando for “Together in the Lord”, January 4-7, 2010

A Ministry Renewal Conference presented by American Baptist Churches USA and the Ministers Council

Registration will be closing soon, so don't forget to sign-up and plan on attending this fulfilling event!

- **Worship led by Brad Berglund** will refresh your soul.
- **World Class speakers led by Shane Claiborne and Miroslav Volf** will stimulate your minds and hearts.
- **An outstanding line-up of workshop leaders** will inform and revitalize your ministry.
- **The company of colleagues** will allow for networking and growing your direct community.
- **The change of pace and the Orlando setting** will rest and renew your body following the excitement and intensity of Advent and Christmas.
- **Disney prices are at their lowest** during this season.

Register now for Together in the Lord, at

www.ministerscouncil.org/Together%20in%20the%20Lord/TITLinfo.aspx. You may qualify for a \$300.00 scholarship through National Ministries that will help offset the cost. For more information, go to www.nationalministries.org/education/financial_aid/ministerial_info.cfm and click the link for "Cultivating New Life Grant Application", then follow the instructions given there.

Check it Out

This recommendation comes from Joe Kutter, Acting Executive Director of the Ministers Council of the ABCUSA.

FAITHFUL REFORM IN HEALTH CARE

Over 45, 000 people die each year because they lack the insurance they need for adequate health care. This is a moral issue that we, as people of faith must respond to. National Ministries (The American Baptist Home Mission Society) has signed on to Faithful Reform In Health Care in order to help facilitate American Baptist action on behalf of the 40 million people in this country who lack health care insurance. Please visit the web site at <http://www.faithfulreform.org>

HEALTH CARE NEWS

Preached Word about Health Care Reform

As the debate on health care reform intensifies in the Congress, we have included a sermon by Rev. Linda Tossey, pastor of Community Baptist Church in Warrentonville. Linda brings into the discussion on health care reform the matter of the Christian faith. Please take a few minutes to read and contemplate the sermon that Linda preached to her congregation several weeks ago.

“Straining the Quality of Mercy” Luke 10: 25-37

Which of these three, do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers? He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

At the core of it, at the crux of it, above everything else, this parable is about showing mercy, not whether or not it's deserved, not whether a person is identified as one who qualifies by their income, their social standing, their ethnicity, their employment record, or in some way that we've decide they should qualify. In this teaching from Jesus, as theologian R. Alan Culpepper states, the only thing that identifies this man in the ditch is his need. His need identified and qualified him for kindness, for care, for love, for

mercy. Jesus does not equivocate on this point. Jesus does not base this bold instruction to us on any other law or tradition or long-held belief, but this: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself. And in case the listener or the hearer of this story didn't quite get what they were supposed to learn. . Jesus makes the point again with crystalline clarity, "Go and do likewise."

Often, our first tendency, when we hear this parable is to demonize the priest and the Levite. Yet we need to remember that in their life in the temple, in their circle of living a holy life, the purity code was everything. Being in compliance with the purity code and the holiness code counted for more than anything else, so that is where they placed their utmost value. Those codes framed and drove everything they did and every decision they made. They were not to defile themselves by touching a dead body and perhaps that is what they thought about the man in the ditch.

Even though the law said that if they came across corpse, they were to bury it, the law also required them to do three days of an elaborate cleansing ritual before they could enter the temple again or continue with their duties. Stopping for the man in the ditch could have really played havoc with all the other important things they were on their way to do. A three-day absence may have negatively affected the lives of many others. Maybe they had a family they needed to get home to. Maybe they were on their way to perform a ritual in the temple. Maybe they were the ones to do the sacrifice that day. The writer of Luke doesn't have Jesus tell us, but I think the priest and the Levite would have their side to the story. Perhaps, for them, it was a case of competing goods. Yes, perhaps they thought, it would have been good to take care of the man in the ditch, but there were many things that seemed more important; other things on which they placed their upmost value.

But Jesus . . . Jesus said there was something more fundamental than any argument that could be brought forth, even if they were good ones. Above the argument of tradition and long-held beliefs, above the argument of the purity codes, which certainly the listeners of the time would have known about, above all else, Jesus makes it clear what the better choice was.

It was the one made by the Samaritan. A man who the Jewish listeners of this story would have thought incapable. One who was despised because he was a Samaritan and not holy or pure in the way the Jews of Israel were holy and pure. Jews, according to John 4, did not share things in common with Samaritans. Samaritans, were "less than." And in just one short story, Jesus shatters the boundaries and redefines who and what a neighbor is.

Who was the neighbor? Who loved God with his all of his heart and soul and strength and mind? The Samaritan who sought nothing for himself. The Samaritan who must have been delayed on *his* journey and fulfilling *his* obligations, who probably had plenty of good arguments to do something else. Jesus tells us he made the better choice because he placed his utmost value on love, on kindness, on compassion. His utmost value was placed on mercy. And Jesus? Jesus instructs us all, "Go and do likewise."

The utmost value is mercy. Mercy: that word that is central to relationship with God and is mentioned in some form more than 300 times in scripture. Mercy, meaning compassion, love, and kindness. Mercy, that quality we hope that God will extend to us, not because we deserve it, or have earned it, but because we are in need. Many of us still today, when we feel like *we* are in the ditch, plead and whisper to God that ancient, poignant prayer, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner."

In Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*, there is a beautiful line about mercy. Portia, a woman who dresses like a man in order to impersonate a law clerk, makes the argument for mercy from Shylock. Shylock had loaned money to the man that she is defending, Money the man cannot repay. Portia begs him for mercy for this man because, based on his legal agreement with Shylock, he owed him literally a pound of flesh for nonpayment of the loan.

Portia says this: "The quality of mercy is not strain'd, (*meaning not constrained or held back*) . . . It is twice blest. It blesseth him that gives and him that takes."

Mercy is not to be constrained or held back. Mercy blesses. Mercy blesses the one who gives and the one who receives. This parable teaches us that it is this quality of mercy that we are compelled by Christ to give. It teaches us not to constrain or hold back for other reasons.

It clearly demonstrates for us where we are to place our utmost value.

This parable also teaches something else. As people of faith it teaches about decision-making in even in the difficult places. And even about controversial issues . . . like the debate raging all around us right now about health care.

I want to preface what I'm going to say with two comments: First of all I want to note that good, caring, sane people of faith come to this issue from different perspectives. The fact that we may disagree with them doesn't mean they're a Nazi, or a socialist, or an unfeeling, insensitive, hypocrite. Let's get the name-calling, the demeaning terms, the distortions, and the hysteria out of the way and talk to each other civilly and with respect.

Secondly, this is how *I* come to the issue from my place of faith, from my relationship with God and my walk with Christ. Fundamental to my journey is this parable of mercy and love of neighbor and what this parable has taught me about coming to difficult issues. But as Baptists, we all disagree with each other anyway, so please . . . feel free.

When we look at this parable the priest and the Levite acted in the way they did because of what they valued most. That is what defined the issue for them and the choice they made. We are not so different. We define issues and decisions all of the time based on where we place our utmost value.

In this debate on health care we have some choices about where we will do that. For instance, we could place our utmost value on:

1) **Politics**. For some, politics are the most important. Which party is backing what? Whom do I like, believe, or trust? While it isn't always crystal clear who the good guys are, we want to put our trust in those who express many of the same values we do, especially if they are in a position of power and influence over our laws and policies.

Consequently, there *are* many good reasons to put value on this.

But it can be a ugly too can't it? As illustrated for us lately. Several years ago I was at a small gathering and one of the guests was a political adviser to a major party. I asked him why some of the tactics used are outright lies or distortions to discredit the opponent or an issue. His answer was, "Because they work." He quoted someone who once said, "It doesn't have to be true. We just have plant the seed to make people think it could be."

The other ugliness about politics is in the use of anger and fear. Psychologists tell us that those two emotions have proven to be the ones that will motivate people to action more than anything else. Whether the information is true or not, if you can make people angry and afraid, this strategy will work to support your side.

While there are good things in placing our value on the politics of an issue, it would serve us well to take the time to do the research, go to websites that are non-partisan, the ones who do fact checking and myth busting like *snopes.com*, before we become angry and afraid. Politics in this country are important to many people. And of course, it is a good decision to value and trust the people we put in power. **The question becomes, are politics where we place our utmost value?**

Perhaps you know someone who places all of their value this:

2)Economics. Maybe for you or someone you know, nothing counts more than how health care reform or health care for everyone affects the deficit, how it affects taxes, how it affects personal finances. A couple of weeks ago I heard a man argue vehemently against health care reform. He said it was going to cost him more taxes and that was the bottom line for him. (This also meant he made more \$250,000 a year, which I didn't exactly relate to), but by his passion it certainly was the issue of utmost value to him.

You should know that other research indicates that health care for all, that is a combination of private insurance, Medicaid, and a public option in the long run will be less costly to the country as a whole. Some will say differently than that. Either way, if our utmost value is based on the economics, then we should truly research it. I would, however, suggest that listening to ranting and screaming people on radio or television is not research. We need to find places that can give us the nonpartisan facts and assessments, and weigh them for ourselves. And, if our utmost value is placed in purely on economics, then some solid research might help us make our decision. **The question becomes, however, are**

economics where we place our utmost value?

Here's another area where I hear people saying they are placing their trust, their value:

3) **How Healthcare works in other Countries.** Perhaps your utmost value might be placed on whether there are any good examples out there in other countries where everyone gets health care. You may know someone who says they can't support health care for everyone because the government would run it. Taking a look at Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands might give us some information we didn't have before, because they are *all* countries that cover everyone, without exception . . . all with private insurance companies. So if this one is your biggest determiner, do the research and then ask, is this where I place my utmost value?

And then, for me, there is this:

4) **My Faith. And it is here where I must place my utmost value above anything else.** You see this issue of health care is a case of competing goods, too. None of these areas we have considered stand alone. Like many issues that take pondering and thinking, and wisdom like we talked about last week, they might all matter to some degree, but the question is, what is the most fundamental? What must count above all the rest? And for me, the core of it, the crux of it, above everything else, it is about showing mercy. It is about loving God with all your heart and soul and strength and mind and your neighbor as yourself. That is where I place my utmost value: mercy that is not strained or constrained, or held back, or based on whether or not someone qualifies or deserves it.

The only thing that identified and qualified that beaten, half dead traveler in the ditch was his need. And that is my starting place and the foundation. I don't throw out the political or economic arguments, because there are many things to consider when looking at a complicated issue. But I must start first with the uncompromising bright blue line of God's mercy, love, kindness and compassion demonstrated in Christ and particularly in this parable. And when I do, it causes me to ask, "Are any of my neighbors in the ditch?"

Well, it seems, some of them are. I hear the number 46 million, again and again as the number who are uninsured. Then someone said well that includes the ones on Medicaid, so it isn't really 46 million. Ok, so take them out. Then I heard someone on television say that 20% of uninsured people don't want insurance for one reason or the other. Ok, so, take them out too. And maybe we end up with 28 million people, or 25 million, or 20 million. Regardless, that's still way too many people that have no access to medical care. That's way too many people in the ditch. Eighteen thousand people die every year in this country because they do not have access to quality, affordable health care. And that, for me, is way too many people in the ditch. When I hear this instruction from Christ to show mercy to go and do likewise, for me it means nobody should be left lying in the ditch because they couldn't get health care, especially in the richest country in the world.

But who are they, these people in the ditch? They are our neighbors. They are the people that work part-time. The people who are self-employed and can't afford health care. They are people who work two part time jobs. They are people you know. They are the people who once had coverage but have been dropped for one reason or another. They are the people who have declared bankruptcy because of their medical bills: 60% of them had health insurance that didn't cover their health care costs. They are the 23- and 24 year-old college graduate who no longer qualifies for their parent's insurance, but who has not yet found a job with health care benefits of their own. Pray they don't get sick or have an accident. Pray there is enough in our bank account and in our home and in our 401K if they do. When it is our daughter or son, or granddaughter, or grandson, or sister, or brother in the ditch, no matter where we stand on this issue, we tragically discover that it is one person too many.

When it comes to competing goods, my utmost value of God's love for all outweighs all the other arguments. For me it is the better choice and that is where I must stand. But am I a lone wolf out here as a person of faith? Are there other pastors, religious leaders, denominations, people of faith who see this as an issue of the gospel of love and mercy? (*Demonstrate packet handed out including: ABC Statement on human rights, ABC Statement on Health Care, Religious Leaders document, Sojourners' Document.*) All of these faith leaders call for health care for everyone as a right and not a privilege.

Someone recently mentioned to me that a friend of theirs who is a deeply devout Christian quoted

a bible verse about needing to earn what is given to you and that's why they didn't support healthcare reform, because some people haven't earned it. I'm not sure where that verse is found, but I do know this: there are more than 900 exhortations in the Bible to help those in need. I do know this: in the Older Testament and in the Newer Testament, we are called again and again to help the little, the lost, the least and the last. I do know this: we are to help those with no access to the resources to live full and decent lives, people whom the scriptures identify as the widows and their children. And why? Because in that society, once the husband was gone there was no access for the widow and her children to the basic necessities of life. The rest of society was to care for those without access to the basic necessities. Health care is a basic necessity. I also know this: the ministry of Christ again and again was about healing and wholeness. And, I know this: we are to go and do likewise.

I also know that you may disagree with what I have said here today. So I invite you into the conversation at my home, Tuesday evening at 6:30. There is a sign-up sheet in the Fellowship Hall. I invite you all who agree and disagree to the conversation.

We should not strain or constrain the quality of mercy that Christ compels us to show to one another. Mercy blesses the one that gives and the one that takes. Do we need our pound of flesh? We need to reach down to everyone in the ditch. We all need to pray "Lord be merciful to me," because it just might be us or someone we love who ends up there. When we wrestle with the competing goods of all these arguments, we must decide which is of the utmost value and where we will make our stand. We must ask ourselves what is it the better choice that God would have us make?

It is interesting, that immediately following the story of the Good Samaritan, we come to this next passage. It is a short story of competing goods and where we place our utmost value:

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.'

Let us all who sit at the feet of Christ . . . choose the better part.

AMEN.

Please Sign on Declaration for Public Option

This request is from Laura Leon, Director of Faith Initiatives for the Campaign for Better Health Care.

Declaration for Public Option:

We're writing to every Illinois organization whom we think shares our interest in achieving affordable, comprehensive, high quality health care for all Americans--including organizations whose main focus is not health reform--and asking them to sign on in support of including a strong public option in the health reform bills pending in Congress.

Our colleagues at the Campaign for Better Health Care are collecting the names of supporting organizations. CBHC will send letters listing these groups to all members of the Illinois Congressional Delegation in the next week or so and issue a press release.

Please consider signing on for your organization. Your signing on will help Illinois senators and representatives see how broad and deep support for a strong public option is.

Here's the link to CBHC's website page for signing on.

<http://www.cbhconline.org/publicoption.html>

Gracias

Campaign for Better Health Care 20th Anniversary and Annual Meeting

The Illinois Campaign for Better Health Care is observing its 20th anniversary with special events at its annual meeting November 18-20. The entire program will take place at Holiday Inn Mart Plaza, 350 N. Orleans, Chicago.

[Sponsorship](#) and [ad book opportunities](#) are available for all these events! Combined [tickets](#) (both Wednesday's Illinois Gubernatorial Candidate Debate and Thursday's Illinois Health Care Forum) are available for \$65. [Order yours today](#), or contact [Kathleen Duffy](#) at (312) 913-9449. Tickets will cost \$65. Separate \$25 tickets for the debate may be purchased for \$25 if you can't attend the whole program.

Illinois Gubernatorial Candidate Debate

On Wednesday, November 18 from 3-5 p.m. there will be a debate among candidates for the governor of Illinois. Elizabeth Brackett (NewsHour, PBS) will moderate a debate focused on health care in Illinois with Gov. Quinn (confirmed), Dan Hynes (confirmed), State Sen. Bill Brady (invited), State Sen. Kirk Dillard (invited), and Andy McKenna (invited). Candidates will discuss how to implement federal reforms in Illinois, how to address the gaps in federal reform plans, how to protect existing programs, and how to manage revenue needs.

The event will take place at Holiday Inn Mart Plaza, 350 N. Orleans, Chicago. Tickets will cost \$25. Seats are limited.

CBHC's Illinois Health Care Roundtable Reception

From 6 to 7:30 p.m. on November 18, following the gubernatorial candidate debate, there will be a reception. This event will be at the same location with a national health care reform leader as special guest.

Illinois Health Care Forum

CBHC's annual meeting will include a Health Care Forum on Thursday, November 19 from 9 a.m. to noon. National health care leaders and representatives from a diverse group of state and national organizations come together for a morning forum to discuss the status of federal health care reform, what still needs to happen to carry us to victory, and what needs to happen in Illinois in 2010.

The forum will take place at the Holiday Inn Mart Plaza, 350 N. Orleans, Chicago. Tickets for this event only will cost \$50, or admission to the forum will be covered with the purchase of a ticket for the whole two days of events.

PEACE NEWS

Community Forum on the War in Afghanistan

The Northwest Suburban Peace and Education Project (NWSPEP) invites us all to a community forum on the war in Afghanistan. This gathering will take place at the Arlington Heights library, 500 N. Dunton Avenue, Arlington Heights on Friday, December 18 at 7 p.m.. This event is free and open to the public. The program will feature the documentary film *Rethink Afghanistan*.

The film is a ground-breaking, full-length documentary focusing on the key issues surrounding the war. The program will raise critical questions regarding Afghanistan—concerns that Congress must address in oversight hearings, which inform the public and challenge policy makers.

Discussion will follow the viewing of the film. Everyone is welcome to participate.

PRAYER REQUESTS

Please pray for world peace.

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

Please pray for ABC missionaries David and Leslie Turley in Okinawa, Japan. David works with the Okinawa Baptist Convention, teaching Bible classes, doing pulpit supply, and working in leadership development. Leslie is an administrator at Okinawa Christian School International (OCSI), and also assists with convention activities.

Please remember in prayer Jan and Larry Martin, who have a rural-based ministry in a small town in Northern Thailand.

Please pray for Tony Rake as he leaves the ABCMC staff and embarks on a new chapter in his life. If you see him at the Annual Meeting, please thank him for all the good work he did on the ABCMC staff.

CALENDAR

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

November 8—Cook County Jail Ministry fall dinner, First Baptist Church, 820 Ontario Street, Oak Park, 6 p.m.

November 8-9—Hidden Treasures: Spiritual Wisdom through the Voices of Women in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Catholic Theological Union, 5416 S. Cornell, Chicago. For more information and registration, please call the Bernardin Center at Catholic Theological Union, 773-371-5432, or visit www.ctu.edu

November 13—Ministers Council meeting with Miguel De La Torre, Central Spanish Baptist Church, 2417 N. Campbell, Chicago 1-3 p.m.

November 14—ABCMC 174th Annual Meeting, North Shore Baptist Church, 5244 N. Lakewood Avenue, Chicago. See above article for more information.

November 18-20—Campaign for Better Health Care's 20th anniversary celebration and annual meeting, Holiday Inn Mart Plaza, 350 N. Orleans, Chicago.

November 18—Illinois gubernatorial candidate debate, Holiday Inn Mart Plaza, 350 N. Orleans, Chicago, 3-5 p.m..

November 18—Campaign for Better Health Care's Health Care Round Table Reception, Holiday Inn Mart Plaza, 350 N. Orleans, Chicago, 6-7:30 p.m.

November 19—Illinois Health Care Forum, Holiday Inn Mart Plaza, 350 N. Orleans, Chicago, 9 a.m.-noon.

December 12—ABCMC's 3rd annual Advent and Christmas Music Festival, Irving Park Baptist Church, 4401 W. Irving Park Road, Chicago, 3 p.m.

December 18—Community Forum hosted by Northwest Suburban Peace and Education Project, Arlington Heights Memorial Library, 500 N. Dunton Avenue, Arlington Heights, 7 p.m. The program will feature the documentary film *Rethink Afghanistan*.

January 4-7—Together in the Lord ministry renewal conference, Orlando, Florida. Please go to <http://www.ministerscouncil.org/Together%20in%20the%20Lord/TITLinfopage.aspx> for online registration and more information.

March 1, 2010—Deadline for entries for BJC's essay contest.

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