



### ***Pastor's Column: Growing in God***

In the parsonage I lived in during my pastorate in Vermont there was a rather strange closet in the study. This was an old parsonage, built in 1876 to house a pastor with a large family. It had been the parsonage ever since. It was a wonderful old house with lots of history. The closet was no exception. The pastor emeritus, who was a member of the church and lived in town, asked me what I thought about the closet not long after we had arrived. I told him I had no clue. The strange thing about the small closet was that it had a floor made of slabs of slate. Toward the back there was a second level, almost like a shallow step. So, I asked the retired pastor what the story was. He told me that one of our predecessors who had been pastor there in the early 1900's had taken a particular verse in Matthew literally: "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." (Matt. 6:6, King James Version). The pastor, Rev. Frazier, decided to make the small closet his prayer closet. The NRSV translates the word as "room." With an added touch of devotion to God he put the slate in there so he could "mortify the flesh" (modern translation: "no pain, no gain") while he was kneeling in prayer. I have to admit that I did not follow his example, assuming that it was ok with God if I didn't try to destroy my knees as an act of devotion. I just used the closet for storage, but I was reminded about how one pastor found a way to practice his devotions in a way that he found meaningful.

In the past couple of years I have found meditation to be the best way for me to do this. Prayer is a part of this too, but the context is meditating and simply being in God's presence without talking to God. Clergy talk too much, I have found.

## ***The Newsleaf***

***June, 2007***

**The Newsletter of the Blooming Grove United Church of Christ**

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Rev. Craig L. Cowing, Pastor

Some assume that because I am a pastor that I pray and meditate more than they do. It's quite likely, although I wouldn't know. I try to spend an hour or so in meditation in prayer a day, although it doesn't always work out that way. I do this not because I would hope I would be interested in doing this no matter what I did for a living.

Our society is one in which people find themselves increasingly alienated from each other and themselves. Concerns about privacy and personal safety, although legitimate, have sometimes let to a backlash in the other direction, causing us to be suspicious when it isn't necessary. What people seek more than anything else is a feeling of intimacy, yet don't know how to achieve it. I'm not talking about physical intimacy, necessarily, but intimacy in the sense of the freedom to make oneself vulnerable. This can be difficult enough to do with others—but what about with God?

Intimacy with God may sound strange at first, yet it is at the foundation of all religious experience. Intimacy with God involves of letting go of preconceptions, barriers, excuses, and allowing God's presence to fill us with divine light.

If this sounds nutty, I'll take that chance. I know that for myself, this is what keeps me going. God's presence suffuses everything I do, see and experience. Superficiality doesn't work for me any more. Try finding ways to experience God's presence more fully in your life. As your pastor I am ready to help with that. Come join us for the Harmonic Healing Concert coming up on June 10, for instance. You don't do that sort of thing, you say? Try it and see, for a new experience! God is waiting to break into our lives in new and different ways, just waiting for us to open up!

When people think of meditation, prayer, or another type of private devotion they often assume that the only beneficiaries will be they themselves. Time spent alone with God becomes less time for work, recreation or time with the family. However, time spent alone in such activity will help prepare us for whatever challenges we encounter. For instance, it may seem to be a waste of time to meditate for an hour each day, but such time will prepare us for encountering others. I find that when I have had a good time of meditation that I am more able to be present to whomever I encounter. As a result, time alone translates into more productive time with others. Jesus knew this. A number of times we find references in the gospels about how he would go off by himself for prayer—sometimes all night.

This even relates to the thing we are most concerned about with our church, growth. In her book, *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, Diana Butler Bass explores why it is that some churches thrive while others do not. She does not look at the large megachurches with thousands of attendees every Sunday. Instead she looks at small mainline churches like ours. She finds that the churches that are hosting a new generation of active members are those who have a clear spiritual focus that can't be resisted. It doesn't have to be entertaining or high-tech, she notes—just genuine!

In Christ,



## CHURCH CALENDAR JUNE 2007

Tues June 5	6:30 PM	Church Night at the Country Store	Country Store Thrift Shop
Sun., June 10	11:15 AM	Craig will be on vacation. Barbara Rhudy will be leading worship	
Sun., June 10	8 PM	Harmonic Healing Concert	Chapel
Wed. June 13	7:30 PM	Choir Rehearsal	Sanctuary
Sun. June 17	11:15AM	Choir sings in worship	Sanctuary
Sat. June 30	6:30 PM	Ethnic Potluck: Scandinavian	Fellowship Hall

### Mary Merriam Flower Calendar

#### HARMONIC HEALING CONCERT

#### SUNDAY, JUNE 10 AT 8 PM

The concert will be in the chapel and will feature the harmonic and stress-relieving sounds of antique Tibetan singing bowls.

**Free of charge *Informal - come as you are!***

***Bring a pillow if you would like!***

Please call 845-496-9311 or 496-1393 for more information or email [ccowing@frontiernet.net](mailto:ccowing@frontiernet.net)



There are currently openings for the summer and fall. If you would like to have flowers dedicated in memory or in honor of someone, please mail a check for \$50 to Sharen Casazza at PO Box 101, Blooming Grove NY 10914.

### Our 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2008!

Next year we will celebrate the two hundred fiftieth anniversary of our church. The interesting thing is that we don't actually know when the church was founded. The earliest documentation we have is the deed for the land that the present church building stands on. This land was purchased by the congregation on November 20, 1758 from Jacob Blackwell, a land speculator who owned large tracts of land in the area. In the deed the



congregation is named as the "Presbyterian Congregation of Blooming Grove," indicating that it had already been formed by that date. It is likely that the congregation had been meeting in homes for a year or two prior to their purchase of the land.

We have several things planned for next year to celebrate this significant anniversary. On Memorial Day weekend we hope to have a float in the local parade that celebrates the church's anniversary. There will be a special worship service on the afternoon of June 15, 2008. We hope to invite former clergy and members to be present and take part.

At the end of September we are planning to have a special presentation by the Classic Choral Society which began in our church almost fifty years ago. As a part of this program there will be readings from documents related to the history of the church.

An organ recital is tentatively planned for November 2. The artist for this has not been chosen yet. And, to top off the year, we are planning a party of some sort on January 2, 2009 to celebrate the beginning of our 251<sup>st</sup> year!

Other events will include several special worship services throughout the year with themes from the church's history. Craig is also planning to give a talk on the history of the church building, and other talks may be scheduled as well.

Another feature of our anniversary is that John Spear of the Orange County Post has enthusiastically agreed to having a weekly column in the paper about our church's history. These columns will be drawn from past history columns in the Newsleaf. The weekly columns will start in November, one year from our anniversary. This will be an excellent way to publicize our church and tell our story!

This will be an exciting year for us, and we hope you will plan ahead for these events. Please speak to Craig if you have any ideas about these events or others.

## ***Enough, Already!***

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How much is enough? That's a tough question. It has practical dimensions, and many moral and spiritual facets. There is no easy, clear-cut answer.

In fact, that simple query is really raising two very different -- but intertwined -- questions. "How much is enough?" needs to be explored quite differently if the topic is the poor of the world, or the rich.

Both sides of the question are engaged in the ethical norm of "sufficiency." (This Lent, my weekly meditations are stepping through the four core norms of

an eco-justice ethic: solidarity, sustainability, sufficiency, participation. And, yes, that will be on the test). "How much is enough?" is one of the central questions for those who seek eco-justice in the world.

Let's start by considering the poor. For them, enough is about survival.

Sufficiency demands that all people have a bare minimum of food, water, clothing, shelter and health care. In today's world, the standards for that bare minimum of resources and services are pretty bare.

The UN's Millenium Development Goals define eight areas where the world's governments have agreed to work for sufficiency, for "enough", by 2015. At the top of the list is a five word challenge: "Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger." The specifics of that goal set two benchmarks: (1) Reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day, and (2) Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

Meeting those goals would change a lot of lives. In round figures, one sixth of the world's population lives on less than a dollar a day. That's around a billion people who now live in the most extreme forms of poverty. In 2003, an estimated 824 million people in the developing world were affected by chronic hunger, "lacking the food needed to meet their daily needs." This is the sort of hunger which leads to malnutrition, to permanent and debilitating health effects, and to death.

How much is enough? It isn't much at all. By UN standards, two dollars a day, or one adequate meal a day, might do it. Over one-fifth of the human population can't reach that standard, though. The ethical principle of sufficiency tells us that -- at the very least -- all people should be able to have enough food to fend off starvation, and enough income to meet the most basic of human needs.

Sufficiency for the poor people of the world meshes well with basic Christian (and human) principles of compassion and justice. We don't want people to starve. The norm of sufficiency becomes far more challenging when it is extended beyond the human situation. A broad interpretation of sufficiency insists that all species have a right to what they need to survive -- food, habitat, and migration routes. The epidemic of extinction is clear evidence that large sections of the biosphere are not being allowed sufficient means for survival.

"Enough" is a very different consideration for those of us who are among the world's affluent. We most often encounter "enough" in terms of our wants, instead of our needs. It has to do with satiation, not survival.

For the wealthy, enough is that fuzzy line that defines the start of "too much." We experience enough when anything more would get in our way -- physically or spiritually. Surveys have revealed that most people in the US, at all income levels, consider themselves just short of having "enough." We want a bit more income, a slightly larger house, a few more luxury goods. Just a bit more, we tell the pollsters, and we'd be happy.

For us, asking a serious question about how much is enough is often a first step toward cutting back our consumption. Pondering sufficiency brings us back to a consideration of definable needs, instead of insatiable wants. Even when we'd like to have more, we can realize that what we have now is more than sufficient in meeting our needs.

In our consumer culture, acknowledging that we have enough is a spiritual act, which brings a new balance to our relationships with God, with people, and with stuff.

In a world of infinite resources, these two divergent approaches to "enough" might have little interaction. Ensuring that all have enough for survival would have little bearing on the ever-expanding wants of the wealthy.

But our world does not have infinite resources. It is true that some of the problem of hunger comes from distribution, not shortages -- people do starve when there are full warehouses. But the world's growing population and growing consumption has brought us into a time when we are using up more than the world can produce. There is a finite amount of cropland, and a limited number of fish in the sea. Urban sprawl destroys essential habitat. The *unsustainable* way of life of the more affluent is taking away the possibility of a *sufficient* way of life for the poor, and for countless other species.

How much is enough? Enough is a baseline of survival for the billion people who don't have enough of anything, and for the species that are being crowded out of existence. And enough is an upper boundary on the wants of the affluent, to ensure that there are sustainable resources to meet the needs of all.

As we hold firmly to the norm of sufficiency, our ethical call needs to be "Enough, already!" Provide enough for those in need, and admit "enough" for those with too much.

*Shalom!*

Rev. Peter Sawtell  
Executive Director, Eco-Justice Ministries

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## Darfur crisis sparked off over water; smaller water conflicts also lethal says water conference

By Fredrick Nzwili (\*)

(from the World Council of Churches website:  
<http://www.oikoumene.org>)

**From Darfur in western Sudan to Mt Elgon in Kenya, the absence of water for rural communities is emerging as a major cause of conflict on the African continent. In Darfur, the story is one of pain and desperation for the nearly two million displaced persons. And the organizations that work in the area are convinced that it is battles for water and pasture that sparked it off.**

"It all started when the *Janjaweed* began burning villages, before taking control of the water points," says Ismail Algazouli, an engineer with the Sudan Social Development Organization (SUDO). SUDO, together with Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) and the Sudan Council of Churches, with support from Action by Churches Together (ACT) and Caritas Internationalis, have been providing water and education in Darfur.

According to Algazouli, who is attending the Ecumenical Water Network (EWN) conference from 21-25 May, in Entebbe, Uganda, the conflict was triggered off by clashes over access to water and pasture between small groups of black African farmers and Arab pastoralist communities. Gradually the groups grew bigger and the clashes more frequent. The turning point came in 2003 when powerful leaders in the *Janjaweed* sought help from their government allies, giving the conflict a new dimension.

"The militia, who are believed to have the support of the government, would frighten off the local people. Once they fled their homes, the *Janjaweed* would take possession of the water points for their own livestock," says Algazouli. "They have millions of animals and it is not easy to find enough water for them," he explains.

For nearly three years the *Janjaweed* - "the men on horseback" - have clashed with members of local communities, causing thousands of people to seek refuge in camps on Sudan's border with Chad.

### A rising tide of "small clashes"

But although Darfur might seem to be an isolated case, experts at the conference warn that the danger of similar conflicts elsewhere cannot be ignored. Church delegates working with the grassroots report that they have to grapple with the fear of bigger conflicts, and

that small clashes have increased.

Only eight months ago, a violent conflict over land and resources was sparked off in a settlement scheme known as Chepyuk in the Mt Elgon region of Kenya. "The conflict is around access to land and water, which is fast diminishing," says Rev. Maritim Rirei, an Anglican Church of Kenya programme coordinator in the Eldoret region. His church has been running peace programmes in the area.

Over this short period, an estimated 60,000 people have been displaced, hundreds of homes destroyed and 35 schools closed down. About 200 people have been killed and 300 arrested in government attempts to settle the conflict. "This means that members of these displaced communities will lack access to safe and sufficient quantities of water," says Rirei.

Over the last 30 years, the population has doubled in the region, exerting pressure on the limited resources. In the same period, streams and rivers in the area have diminished in volume, forcing a community known as Soy, for example, to move up the mountain where soil is more fertile and springs are still fresh. Between 1965 and 1989, the community was twice moved down the mountain by the government, leaving the slopes to the Dorobo, a hunter-gatherer community, subsisting on honey and wild fruits, and pasturing a few animals on the mountain moorland.

"There has been a craze to have land on the mountain. The catalyst has been the abundant springs, fertile soils and good rains," explains Rirei. "This is a water catchment area that serves the people in western Kenya."

Rirei says that due to the visible negative impact on water sources on the mountain, the government began to resettle the mountain communities, triggering off the conflict. About 1700 households have been resettled, but another 5800 are lacking land. Youth from the communities which received land have grouped themselves into a militia called the Saboat Land Defence Force, whose violent actions are destabilizing the area.

According to the peace programme coordinator, both women and children have been attacked while drawing water, or watering their animals at springs or shallow wells, forcing them to abandon their homes and seek refuge in churches and schools.

"Those who are fighting want to remain in the forested areas, and keep moving up the mountain," says Rirei. "Today you see destroyed houses, overgrown with grass. Elephants roam where once there were homesteads."

The churches, according to Rirei, are carrying the burden of having to protect water sources and, at the same time, resettle the displaced people. "We are in

double jeopardy. We have to work in such a way that we can protect the water catchment areas and, at the same time, help these people," Rirei told participants at the EWN conference, in a presentation entitled "Mediating conflicts around water and natural resources".

### **Nile waters**

Having witnessed the impacts of small conflicts, church leaders and related organizations are worried about Africa's large fresh water masses. It is feared that the Nile waters, for example, could spark off a regional conflict, as countries attempt to pipe the water or generate development projects around it. "The waters of the Nile are extremely sensitive," says Mr Abiy Hailu of Christian Aid.

Hailu explains that while ten countries in Africa share the water of Nile, Egypt appears to enjoy exclusive rights to this immense resource. "Any time a country plans to use the water, tensions rise," he says, explaining that a 1929 agreement between the British and Egypt required that any country seeking to use the water must first seek consent from Egypt. Another agreement was signed in 1959 between Sudan and Egypt, where they agreed to share the water.

Despite the mounting tensions around water resources, conference participants emphasized that non-violent solutions to present and future conflicts over water are feasible. Such tensions can also be seen as opportunities for peaceful co-operation and joint problem-solving. Church leaders are convinced that even the Nile waters can be a unifying element for the countries through which the river passes.

"We must not forget that water has always connected people and brought them together," said Danuta Sacher, head of the policy and campaigns department at Bread for the World (Germany). In a final statement, the conference participants affirmed that to settle conflicts, solutions need to be sought together with affected populations, and be based on mutual respect for the right to water of all people involved. They warned that much will depend on the willingness of governments to deal openly and fairly with water issues, prioritizing the rights of the poorest and most vulnerable people, and exploring ways for peaceful collaboration and sharing among and within states.

*(\* Fredrick Nzwilli is a freelance journalist from Kenya. He is currently a correspondent for Ecumenical News International (ENI) based in the country's capital, Nairobi.*

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*In this issue of The Newsleaf:  
 Lots of Church News!  
 Our 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
 ... and more!*

**Revised Common  
 Lectionary Texts for June  
 and July, 2007**

**3 June 2007:**

Trinity Sunday  
 Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31  
 Psalm 8  
 Romans 5:1-5  
 John 16:12-15

**10 June 2007:**

1 Kings 17:8-16  
 Psalm 146  
 Galatians 1:11-24  
 Luke 7:11-17

**17 June 2007:**

1 King 21:1-21a  
 Psalm 5:1-8  
 Galatians 2:15-21  
 Luke 7:36-8:3

**24 June 2007:**

1 Kings 19:1-15a  
 Psalm 42  
 Galatians 3:23-29  
 Luke 8:26-39

**1 July 2007:**

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14  
 Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20  
 Galatians 5:1, 13-25  
 Luke 9:51-62

**8 July 2007**

2 Kings 5:1-4 Psalm 30 Galatians  
 6:(1-6), 7-16 Luke 10:1-11,16-  
 20

**15 July 2007:**

Amos 7:7-17  
 Psalm 82  
 Colossians 1:1-14  
 Luke 10:25-37

**22 July 2007:**

Amos 8:1-12

Psalm 52  
 Colossians 1:15-28  
 Luke 10:38-42

**29 July 2007:**

Hosea 1:2-10  
 Psalm 85  
 Colossians 2:6-15  
 Luke 11:1-13