



Pastor's Column: Do Things Ever Change?

Recently Anita and I saw a film entitled “Amazing Grace” about the abolition of the African slave trade in England. At the time England monopolized the slave trade and reaped tremendous profit from it. With the inspiration and warning of John Newton, (a slave trader who became a minister and the author of many hymns including “Amazing Grace,” William Wilberforce, a member of the nobility who served in the House of Lords, began a crusade to end the slave trade. He and his fellow abolitionists met stiff opposition from members of Parliament who had a great deal to lose should the slave trade be abolished. After twenty years of intensive work Wilberforce succeeded in getting abolition through Parliament.

The historical context is important. The United States Constitution, adopted in 1787, prohibited Congress from abolishing the slave trade before 1808. Abolitionists in several states in the north abolished the importation of slaves into their states prior to that. In 1808 Thomas Jefferson signed a bill abolishing the slave trade after it had worked its way through several sessions of Congress. Clearly they had the news of the British abolition in their minds.

So here is a question—does slavery still exist? When I was growing up I was proud that an ancestor of mine had taken part in the American Civil War which brought legal slavery to an end in the United States. I am still proud of that, although I now realized that although legal slavery in the US ended it did not end around the world. In fact, it exists today. In a number of places in Africa slavery exists in unstable countries where enforcement of law is difficult or non-existent. In other places in the world slavery exists. It even exists in our own country, where people are still forced to work against their will in intolerable conditions.

Were the efforts of abolitionists wasted? Of course not. Slavery came to an end because enough people were convinced that it was wrong. Before that time

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 Church of Christ**
 P.O Box 101
 Blooming Grove NY 10914
 www.bgucc.com
 Tel. 845-496-9311 (office) 845-496-1393
 (parsonage)
 Email: ccowing@frontiernet.net
 bgucc@frontiernet.net
 Rev. Craig L. Cowing, Pastor

many did not see the harm in enslaving others.

Change, it seems, has to come about in incremental steps. Sometimes it comes all at once. Many times, though, it starts slowly and builds up to a groundswell that can't be stopped. It can take a long time, however. Even after the disparity between wages of men and women in the same jobs came to the awareness of our society decades ago, there are still many instances in which men are paid more than women, and stereotypes about women in the workplace still abound.

At times it seems as though society takes a step backwards. We like to think of ourselves, as human beings, as being reasonable and civilized until something like the massacre at Virginia Tech happens. How is it that a person can be so out of control as to take the lives of 32 people as well as his own life?

I wonder at times what our civilization will look like a century from now. The entertainment industry abounds with images of the future, some realistic, some not. Some images of the future are optimistic—that we will be able to have a world where international disagreements are settled peaceably instead of through war, and in which poverty is a thing of the past. On the other hand, some images of the future are very negative, suggesting that the world of the future will be very hostile and unsafe, a world in which people will have to be on their guard all the time lest someone hurt them or take advantage of them.

What is the church's role in the future of society? I would suggest it is to manifest God's love through Christ. It is to live out the meaning of compassion. Only through compassion will the world be saved from violence and oppression. It's a tall order, but the task awaits us.

In Christ,

CHURCH CALENDAR MAY 2007

Tues May 1	6:30 PM	Church Night at the Country Store	Country Store Thrift Shop
Sun., May 13	8 PM	Harmonic Healing Concert	Chapel
Thurs. May 16	7:30 PM	Choir Rehearsal	Sanctuary
Sat. May 19	6:30 PM	Ethnic Potluck: Middle Eastern	Fellowship Hall
Sun. May 20	11:15AM	Choir sings in worship	Sanctuary
Sun. May 20	4 PM	Classic Choral Society	Sanctuary
Tues. May 22	6:30 PM	Growth Committee	Church office
Tues. May 22	7:30 PM	Church Council	Chapel
Wed. May 30	7:30 PM	Choir rehearsal	Sanctuary

Classic Choral Society MAY PERFORMANCES

Sunday, May 13 (Mother's Day) at
4:00pm
First Presbyterian Church, Goshen NY

Sunday, May 20 at 4:00pm
United Church of Christ, Blooming
Grove, NY

Program:

Leonard Bernstein: "Chichester
Psalms" (sung in Hebrew)
Ralph Vaughan Williams: "Dona
Nobis Pacem" (based on Walt
Whitman poems)

Mary Merriam Flower Calendar

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 250th 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 251st 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.

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.

Washingtonville Singing Society Document Donated to the Church

The following document has been donated to the church by the family of E.J. McLaughlin III, a well-known historian of Washingtonville who died a number of years ago. It is a wonderful window into the culture of early nineteenth century America. The society appears to have met in the store of Samuel Moffat who was also the choirmaster of our church for many years

Singing societies were a common feature of community life in early nineteenth century America. They started appearing just after the American Revolution. During the period of the Second Great Awakening in the early nineteenth century they provided a wholesome alternative for young people to drinking and carousing. They were sometimes associated with churches, but as it appears with the one in Washingtonville, church associations were often at best tenuous. It wouldn't be surprising if Moffat used the school to draw people into the church, however. With Samuel Moffat's name as first on the committee it is likely that there was at least some association with our church since he was the choirmaster here for decades. It was in his memory that his son David gave the organ to the church in 1902, and had the Moffat library built on the site of their home at the center of Washingtonville.

The atrocious spelling has been preserved in this transcription:

March 16 1820

Washington Ville Singing Society

We the Subscribers have thought proper to Form A Singing Society for the purpose of practising in Singing by Rule Do Hereby and Moreon Sereenly and Jointly agree to the Resolutions Here in Laid Down:

1^d To Commence on Thursday the 16th Inst. And Continue one night in Each Week which will be Thursday Night—at Mr. Samuel Moffats Long Room in Washington Ville at which place It is understood the above Named Society Is to continue their meeting unless they should have some Reason to Remove It: and they are to appoint their Leeders as they may think proper.

2^d It is Further understood that Each Gentleman belonging to this Society Shall Bear an Equal part in defraying the Expencc of candleliting and others should there be any.

3^d and there shall be a committee of three persons appointed For this Society Whose duty It shall be at all times to keep good order or to provide some measures

to What Effect—so that there is good order kept in the society and they shall collect so much money as will defray the above mentioned Expencc

4th We Now most Earnestly solisit those who are singers and would wish to have Good order kept in this Society to attend and Join us as there will be None considered members of this society or Entited to the priviledges ofIt withoug having their Names sined underneath.

Spectators will be admitted provided they make No Disturbance but Should It so happen that they make any disturbance or Behave disorderly It Shall then be the duty of the Committee to desire them to with draw and take such measures as they May Deem nessessary with them. And should It so happen that any Should Join us in this society who do not Behave Orderly and wish to keep Good order in this society It shall Be the Duty of the Committee to strike out their Names and No more Consider them as members of this society.

Gentleman Names

Committee

Samuel Moffat

Isaac Still

John Jaques

Committee

Ladees Names

It is clear that the organizers of the Washingtonville Singing Society saw their mission as providing a wholesome activity, with a strong emphasis on the importance of good behavior. One has to wonder exactly what sort of bad behavior they were anticipating!

The singing school tradition started in northern New England and spread across the region in the later years of the eighteenth century. The earliest tunes were written by British composers in the period around the American Revolution, and their books were used early on. A notable early American composer was William Billings, whose books and tunes were popular. Sometimes local musicians would start singing schools, and itinerant singing masters would travel from town to town, spending a few weeks or months establishing a singing school and training a singing master before moving on to the next town. Some of these singing masters such as Jeremiah Ingalls, Daniel Read and Jonathan Morgan published their own collections of tunes.

In the tradition of early American hymnody, tunes and hymns were separate. Each would be written in meter, such as Common Meter, Long Meter, Short Meter, and others. The same was true with words. Any hymn written in the same meter as a tune could be sung to that tune. Shape note hymns were called by the tune name, and words would be in the books with the tunes,

although it was not unusual to have different sets of words to the same tune in different books. Words by Isaac Watts were commonly sung although hymns by many other writers were used as well.

The form of music taught became known as “shape note” music in the southern United States. In this school of hymnody the notes were different shapes depending on the position in the scale. Many early shape note books had four shapes, such as a diamond, square, circle and triangle. Later traditions added other shapes. The advantage was that a person did not need to have a sense of pitch. The music could be sung in any key since there was no key signature and no sharps and flats. The leader would start, as they still do today, by suggesting a starting pitch. If it was too low or high for the singers they could simply go up or down depending on the needs of the group. As a result, the music was adaptable to the range of the group of singers and was a good way to teach musically illiterate people to sing.

Shape note hymns are characterized by bold melodies, tight harmonies and fugues. The schools developed the tradition of sitting in a square, with each part (soprano, alto, tenor and bass) forming one side of the square. There could be only a few people for each part, or many. If a singer chose, he or she could sit in one of the other groups—such as a tenor singing with the sopranos, only an octave down, or an alto singing with the basses, only an octave above. There would be a leader standing in the middle of the square keeping time with their hand and cueing the different parts as they came in. A tradition also developed of the singers also keeping time with their hands as they sang. In a shape note group today you will still see singers raising and lowering their hands as they sing. Tapping or stomping the feet is also a common way of keeping time. The singers were not expected to sing as singers are taught today, with vibrato. A good shape note session is loud, energetic and almost boisterous.

By 1820 the shape note tradition had largely faded out in the northeastern United States as the new harmonic style of singing championed by Lowell Mason took over. Mason was educated in a more “refined” style of singing, reflecting a European influence. The shape note tradition, by comparison, was home-grown and rustic. Mason and his followers effectively quashed the shape note tradition in the north, but it migrated south. Today there are many shape note traditions in the south. In the last twenty years or so there has been a revival of interest and singing schools have sprung up in the Northeast again after an absence of well over a century.

Tunes and hymns from the shape note or “Sacred Harp” tradition have made their way into the wider

hymn tradition in this country. Examples found in the New Century Hymnal include:

- #397, “Pleading Savior,” from the Christian Lyre, 1831
- #192 “When Jesus Wept,” from William Billings’ New England Psalm Singer, 1770
- #568 “Kendron,” attributed to Elkanah Kelsey Dare in Amos Pilsbury’s United States Harmony, 1799
- #156 “Walker,” from Southern Harmony, 1835
- #312 “St. Thomas,” from Williams’ New Universal Psalmist, 1770
- #89 “Morning Song,” from Kentucky Harmony, 1816

Race, Toxic Waste, and Church

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This week's issue of *Eco-Justice Notes* is [underwritten](#) by **Dr. Charles Burrows, of Honolulu, Hawaii**. His generous support helps make this publication possible.

In 1987, the Commission for Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ (UCC) released a report titled *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States*. It was a detailed statistical analysis of census data, meticulously cross-matched with information on the location of toxic waste sites.

A document with page after page of tables and charts -- with lists of complicated numbers, and subtle definitions about statistical significance -- is not likely to make the best seller lists, and this one didn't. But such a report doesn't need to have a mass readership to be important, and this one was very important, indeed.

The 1987 report from the United Church of Christ is widely recognized as a foundational document in the environmental justice movement in the United States, and in shaping similar efforts around the world. It made the well-documented assertion that the environmental risk from hazardous waste is more strongly correlated with race than with economics.

On this 20th anniversary of *Toxic Wastes and Race*, an important new report has been issued by the UCC. ***Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty: 1987-2007*** revisits the statistical analysis with more sophisticated tools, and finds that "by better matching the locations of people and hazardous sites, racial and socioeconomic disparities around the nation's hazardous waste facilities are found to be far greater than what previous studies have shown."

This new report is available for [free download from the United Church of Christ website](#). I highly recommend this new report for your reading and study. The 175 page document is 6.5 Mb, so plan on a lengthy download time.

The 2007 report has lots of charts and graphs, but I hope that those sections of data don't scare away non-technical readers. Much of the report will be appealing and enlightening to the statistically challenged. Even if you never ponder the data about population characteristics or research methods, there are important and very readable sections about history and policy which will be valuable to all of us.

In particular, chapter 1 (Environmental Justice in the Twenty-First Century) and chapter 2 (Environmental Justice Timeline -- Milestones 1987-2007) provide a concise and accessible introduction to the entire issue of environmental justice. Chapter 5 (Impact of *Toxic Wastes and Race* on the EJ Movement: Speaking for Ourselves) is a marvelous collection of "short quotes, statements and essays written by an interdisciplinary group of civil rights activists, academics, policy analysts, scientists, elected officials, lawyers, educators and health professionals who share their views on the 'impact' of the 1987 *Toxic Wastes and Race* report on environmental justice in the United States and abroad."

I do encourage you to download a copy of the report, and to take seriously its findings.

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Since 1987, there have been many studies about environmental racism which build on the UCC report in considering the disproportionate impacts of pollution on communities of color. Academics have analyzed the data, pondered the moral and legal implications, and proposed many options for public policy. Important policy changes have taken place. The Environmental Protection Agency of the US has special mandates to consider factors of environmental justice, and a 1994 Executive Order from President Clinton required all agencies of the US government to take into account the environmental justice consequences of their actions.

What was remarkable news about environmental disparities in 1987 is now commonly accepted as the basis of law and policy. The hope, of course, was that this awareness would bring about constructive change for the affected communities.

Despite all of this scholarly, legal and political attention, though, "significant racial and socioeconomic disparities persist in the distribution of the nation's commercial hazardous waste facilities." The conclusion

of the 2007 report names and documents these continuing realities:

- Race matters.
- Place matters.
- Unequal protection places communities of color at special risk.
- Polluting industries still follow the path of least resistance.
- The current environmental protection apparatus is "broken" and needs to be "fixed."
- Slow government response to environmental contamination and toxic threats unnecessarily endangers the health of the most vulnerable populations in our society.
- In light of those findings, the authors of the report provide an extensive list of recommendations for actions by Congress, the Executive branch, state and local governments, non-governmental organizations and industry.

There is still much to be done in addressing the racial and economic inequalities from pollution in the US. The UCC's 2007 report once again provides a solid basis in facts and values for doing that work for justice.

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On June 21, 2007, there will be a very special opportunity to engage a faith perspective on environmental justice. In Hartford, CT, on the day before the UCC's General Synod convenes, an all-day conference will feature Charles Lee, the author of the 1987 report, and Robert Bullard, one of the most prominent researchers and authors in the field of environmental justice. **"CARING FOR EARTH: Linking Faith, Hope, Love, Justice and Action in our Churches"** is open to all interested people. Workshops will deal with a wide range of ways in which churches can address the environmental crisis. More information and registration details are on the brand-new website of the UCC's national Environment and Energy Task Force: www.uccEcoAction.org.

Shalom!

Rev. Peter Sawtell
Executive Director, Eco-Justice Ministries

Blooming Grove United Church of Christ
PO Box 101
Blooming Grove NY 10914-0101

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

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

6 May 2007:

Acts 11:1-18
 Psalm 148
 Revelation 21:1-6
 John 13: 31-35

13 May 2007:

Acts 16:9-15
 Psalm 67
 Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5
 John 14:23-29

20 May 2007:

Ascension of the Lord
 Memorial Day (USA)
 Acts 16:16-34
 Psalm 97
 Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21
 John 17:20-26

27 May 2007:

Day of Pentecost
 Acts 2:1-21 or Genesis 11:1-9
 Psalm 104: 24-34, 35b
 Romans 8:14-17 or Acts 2:1-21
 John 14:8-17 (25-27)

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