



FROM THE PASTOR

The first weekend of March I attended a conference at Vienna Presbyterian Church led by the author Brian McLaren, the founding pastor of Cedar Ridge Community Church in Spencerville, Maryland. McLaren, who began his professional life as a professor of English, is a prolific author, and now spends his time writing and speaking rather than pastoring. He is associated with the movement in evangelical circles called the “Emergent Church.”

The Emergent Church is a loosely associated group of church leaders grappling with how to express the gospel in compelling and appropriate ways in our postmodern culture. While earlier generations of evangelical churches felt the best way to reach modern people was to eschew the trappings of traditional Christianity (such as symbols and sacraments), the Emergent churches have immersed themselves in ancient practices, and sought to reclaim a healthy sense of mystery. So while you might still see a big screen and a praise band, you might also see candles and icons, a font and a table. While coming at it from different angles, our worship renewal at Pilgrims has much in common with the Emergent project.

One of the ancient practices that Emergent leaders have sought to reclaim is a balance between evangelism and social justice. The focus of the conference I attended was McLaren’s recent book, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crisis, and a Revolution of Hope*. In the book he writes about the central crises facing our world, including war, poverty, and the environment. He then writes with great

passion about what the Christian faith has to say about these issues.

A central thesis of the book is that Jesus’ message was not primarily about getting to heaven after we die but about transforming the world here and now to reflect God’s will. Here is what struck me at the conference: McLaren’s message was presented as if this were a new idea!

New to his audience, perhaps, but certainly not new to us at Pilgrims. Read the articles in this issue of *The Pilgrim* alone, and a consistent message merges: The renewal of our souls and the renewal of the world are deeply intertwined, from the ancient practice of fasting to the contemporary practice of political action. Jesus invites us to live in a new way, which not only turns our lives upside down, but the world as well.

What I found hopeful about McLaren’s speaking tour is that he was connecting with passion to a young evangelical audience, inviting them to reconfigure their faith in a new way, inspiring a passion for the world that is often missing in their own churches. This opens promising new pathways for collective action across the evangelical and ecumenical divide.

Commenting in the conclusion of his book on Jesus’ exhortation to his disciples in Matthew 17:20, “For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it

will move; and nothing will be impossible for you,” McLaren writes:

Jesus is not interested in the geographical rearrangement of mountains. It is the societal map of greed, lust, arrogance, fear, racism, domination, oppression, revenge, and injustice that he wants to redraw. He wants his disciples to move mountains of injustice and make new rivers of creativity and compassion flow... He wants his followers to do the impossible: to label as unacceptable, unnatural, and changeable a world where



homeless children beg outside the sprawling estates of the super rich, whose luxuries are protected by walls and fences topped with razor-wire and patrolled by vicious dogs, dogs that eat better than the street children from whom they serve as protection... a world where families

subsist as scavengers on garbage dumps while the producers of the garbage drink cocktails and watch reality shows on TV... a world that could tithe its weapons budget and so feed, clothe, and shelter the poor.

It’s interesting—astonishing, really—that Jesus doesn’t simply say, “Nothing will be impossible for me,” or “Nothing will be impossible for God.” Instead he says, “Nothing will be impossible for you.” This is our call to action, our invitation to move mountains and so reshape the social and spiritual landscape of our world.

Peace,
Jeff

“Meditation and the Hard Questions for an Authentic Life”

April 6, 13, 27 at 9:30 a.m.
Upstairs Education Room
Led Stan Lou

This three-week class is based on the book, *The Hard Questions for an Authentic Life: 100 Essential Questions for Designing Your Life by the Inside Out* by Susan Piver. Piver defines living authentically as “what you’re doing when you find congruence between your inner world – your feelings, values, gifts, needs, spirituality, and passions – and your outer world – your job, relationships, home, and community. When you live an authentic life, these things support and synergize each other.

For three Sundays, we will work through some of the 100 questions Piver poses and incorporate the practice of meditation. Piver believes meditation clear our minds so that we may be open to identifying the voices inside of us offering thoughts, sensations, hopes, and fears that can establish unique qualities, direction, and real value. This class has a level of accountability. We hope participants will practice meditation through the week; and, the class will have some reflection homework based on the questions. †



CHRISTIAN
EDUCATION
IN APRIL

“Reinhold Niebuhr— A Theologian for This Time”

April 6, 13, 27 at 9:30 a.m.
Downstairs in the Bird Room
Led by Jerry McPike

Reinhold Niebuhr was the most famous and influential theologian in American history. Niebuhr (B.1892, D. 1971) was a theologian who had no interest in discussing the Trinity or the dual nature of Jesus. His focus was on the events in this world and particularly the issue of social justice.

Much of his writing dealt with the inadequacies of theologies and ideologies which, although pro-social justice, were flawed to an extent that impeded any move toward a more just society. He emphasized the imperfections and sins that existed in our societal structures and our philosophies about the human situation. Self interest, in his opinion, permeated all our activities, and was the basic factor limiting any movement toward the kingdom of God.

In the latter half of his career his focus moved toward foreign policy and he became a leader in the “realist” school of foreign policy. Much of what he had to say regarding both foreign and domestic policy has great applicability in our own time.

This three-week class will examine and discuss the work of Reinhold Niebuhr. †

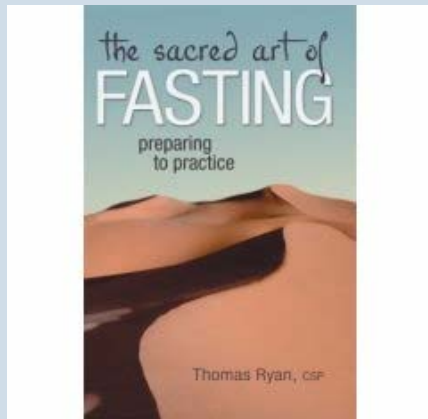
After his baptism, Jesus retreated to the desert for a 40-day fast.

Later he taught the crowds from the mountain top: “whenever you fast, do not look dismal . . .” Clearly fasting was a spiritual discipline Jesus practiced himself and he expected his followers to practice it also. Christians, especially Protestants, have tended to lose contact with that discipline.

At the suggestion of Elder Doris Hendershot and with the leadership of Parish Associate Rev. Margee Iddings, a group of Pilgrims covenanted to fast during Lent 2008. Using as a resource a book by Paulist Father Thomas Ryan (cover art shown), members first discerned how they would fast, and then covenanted with the group, in writing, to follow that discipline.

Some chose the traditional fast of not eating one or more meals each week. Others chose to forego a food item, such as Diet Coke, Regular Coke, chocolate, wine, or coffee. Yet others

Lenten Fasting at Pilgrims: Revisiting an Ancient Spiritual Discipline



chose a “fast of the ears or eyes,” foregoing superfluous and mindless television or radio.

Fasting means not only *giving up* the things that enslave us, but also *filling up* with the good things God offers us. Group members covenanted to practice other spiritual disciplines during lent,

such as prayer, meditation, or journaling, all focused on their fasting experience.

Finally, members covenanted to meet on Sundays during Lent to support one another in their fasting experience. To place the Christian fasting experience in context, Margee taught each week about the spiritual role of fasting in other World Religions.

Margee told the group that fasting could change us as individuals. But even more importantly, she said, when a group of persons within a congregation covenants to fast together, it can change the whole of the congregation.

Among those in the covenant fasting group, in addition to Margee, were **Alice Gigax, Anne Womeldorf, Calva Leonard, Doris Hendershot, Gerry Hendershot, Jeff Fox, Jeff Pittman, Lynn Wagner, Mary Lib Pate, Mitch Fulton, and Stan Lou.** †

Pilgrims Hosts Political Action with Councilman Jack Evans

Reporting and photos by Gerry Hendershot

About 250 people from DC's Ward 2 congregations filled Pilgrims' sanctuary on the evening of Wednesday, March 12 for a Public Accountability Action sponsored by the Washington Interfaith Network (WIN). The Action held DC Councilman C.M. ("Jack") Evans accountable for his promises to support WIN's "Neighborhoods First" agenda, especially the goals of Ward 2, which Evans represents.

Pastor **Jeff Krehbiel**, speaking on behalf of WIN's Ward 2 congregations, asked Evans if he would insure (1) an *additional* \$117 million for affordable housing, (2) funds for 350 *supported housing* units for downtown, (3) funds for *emergency* beds for 150 downtown homeless people, and (4) funds to provide free IDs and birth certificates for homeless people who need them to obtain services.



With the crowd roaring its approval after each answer, Evans answered a strong "yes" to all four questions. Evans' support is important because he chairs the Council's powerful Committee on Fi-

nance and Revenue. WIN's agenda already has strong support from Mayor Adrian Fenty, but it needed a champion on the Council, a mantle Evans has now accepted.

An emotional high point of the Action was the story Cheryl Barnes told about her difficulties living on the streets until she acquired a home of her own at N-Street Village, a supportive housing program connected with Luther Place Memorial Church near Thomas Circle. Barnes spoke directly to Evans, who sat only a few feet from the lectern. Later, when Evans began to speak, he thanked Barnes for sharing her story and then went to her and gave her a hug.

As host to the Action, Pilgrims had a prominent role in the proceedings. In addition to interrogating Evans, Jeff Krehbiel led the opening prayer; **Jean Stewart** spoke about WIN's Ward 2 agenda; **Nancy Daugherty** welcomed guests at the door; and **Pat Goeldner**, **Shannon Smythe Fleischman**, and **Ashley Goff** registered participants. Pilgrims staffers **Rolando Quintanilla** and **Paul Reuther** handled behind-the-scenes logistics.

A set piece at WIN Actions is "rounds"—a representative of each congregation announces the number of persons they had pledged to attend and the number actually there. "Rounds" holds member congregations accountable and demonstrates to city officials WIN's ability to organize people for power. **Gihani Perera** "did the rounds" for Pilgrims, proudly announcing that 25 Pilgrims were present, five more than the 20 that were pledged! †

Downtown Cluster of Churches: 2007 Report, Part 1

[Church of the Pilgrims has been a member of the Downtown Cluster of Churches (DCC) since the 1970s. There are now 43 member congregations. Our dues are \$1,000 a year. Jack Womeldorf has been secretary of DCC and on its Board since the 80s. Office space for the Director and the three social workers is contributed by New York Presbyterian. This shortened report focuses on homelessness; the full annual report, can be found at downtowncluster.org/2007annualreport. Part 2 of this report, focusing on other DCC activities, will be published later.]

Council of Government studies showed homelessness actually fell 6.5% in 2007 for Washington, D.C., from 6,157 in 2006 to 5,757 in 2007. This number of homeless represents almost 50% of the homeless in the region, which was estimated at 12,126 overall. Permanent housing placements in the city grew as well, from 3,212 in 2006 to 3,542 in 2007. There continued to be great concern about the number of working poor who were homeless - some 25% of homeless individuals in the region were employed and 43% of adults in homeless families were employed. Hence the ability to find affordable housing remained a primary issue in the region. There also remained great concern over the number of homeless who are veterans. The National Alliance to End Homelessness reported a quarter of the homeless population in the country were veterans, and that 7.5% of the nearly 32,000 veterans in the city were homeless - making DC one of the highest such rates in the country. The study showed 2,400 homeless veterans in DC in 2005. It was in this context that the Homeless Services Unit continued its outreach efforts for the 21st straight year. This team of 3 Outreach Workers rotated between 8 congregation-based sites as well as canvassed parks, commercial areas, and other public spaces where the homeless are found. The staff saw 1365 persons - 404 women and 961 men. Women were 30 % of those served. The staff provided 1600+ emergency aid referrals for food, clothing, and shelter. The team was able to provide follow-up, in-depth case-management services to 190 persons. 700+ applications were made for Food Stamps, Social Security Benefits, Medicaid, and other assistance. Over 530 of these applications were successful; numerous others are pending. Over 200 persons were referred for substance abuse treatment, of which 92 received treatment. Over 150 persons were referred for mental health treatment, of which 86 actually received such care. 373 persons were referred for general medical care. 350 applications were made for transitional and permanent housing, of which 80 persons were placed into such housing. 379 persons were referred for job training and placement, of which 121 obtained jobs, and 118 received training. The goal of the Homeless Services Unit is to assist each person to meet life-threatening emergency needs, while addressing long-term needs in order to break the cycle of homelessness or poverty. This is achieved by the staff forging a working partnership with each person and family, and allowing them to identify and implement the steps necessary to regain control over their lives. †

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Join us Sundays:
Sunday School 9:30 A.M.
Worship 11:00 A.M.

Father Bruno to Visit April 20

Father Jean Monique Bruno, an Episcopal Priest from Haiti, with whom Church of the Pilgrims has had a long-term mission relationship, will be preaching during worship Sunday, April 20, and sharing during Adult Education at 9:30 a.m. Pilgrims contributed to the building of a vocational high school in Haiti, and participated in several mission trips to Haiti in the 80's and 90's. †

Though January and February are typically slower months in terms of capacity at the Pilgrimage, they have been extremely productive in terms of activity. Every group has impressed me with their desire to serve, learn and grow in their faith. It has been a rewarding and educational first two months.

To pick out some highlights is more difficult than I thought; not because of the lack of examples but because

UPDATE FROM THE PILGRIMAGE

Matthew Boote, Program Manager

of the plethora of highlights I have experienced. The Religious Life Council from Princeton University came and had engaging, challenging and fruitful conversations with different faith groups as they volunteered. High Schoolers from the Field School in Washington, D.C. took a week to give back to their community and

learn about problems first hand. The youth group from the First Presbyterian Church of Richmond pushed their boundaries and made a positive impact by trying our Bread for the Journey program when their previously planned activity fell through. Every group, however, provided their own highlights and have made the first two months of 2008 very successful. †