



**Calvin Presbyterian Church**  
*where faith, compassion, and authenticity meet*

# Calvin's News & Notes

## The Standish Inkwell

October 2009

I'm not sure why it is, but recently it seems that more and more polling organizations are studying the topic of religious belief than ever before. Wherever I look, I see polls regarding the state of religious belief in the U.S., and the polls aren't particularly cheery for us Christians.

Recently, Bruce sent me an article by Cathy Lynn Grossman from USA TODAY, based on a recent poll, that said, "Americans who don't identify with any religion are now 15% of the USA, but trends in a new study shows they could one day surpass the nation's largest denominations — including Catholics, now 24% of the nation." Also, it said,

- Not all Nones are alike. Half (51%) still believe in God or a higher power.
- Nones also are the only major U. S. faith group that's majority male. Even when girls grow up with unbelieving parents, they're more likely to find a faith as adults than their brothers.
- Women are also less skeptical than men and less drawn to irreligious and anti-religious views. They are more likely to reject a secular upbringing.
- There is a lot of 'churning' going on but Nones gain much more from switching (people leaving religion) than from natural growth (children emulating unbelieving parents).

**Americans who don't identify with any religion are now 15% of the USA**

### Did You Know?

"Demons 101" by Brendon Wahlberg

In the gospel of Mark, we read about Jesus casting out demons from people. *"That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons"* (Mark 1:

32-33). There are many passages concerning demons in the four gospels, but what do we really know about demons? What are they? Where do they come from? What do they do, and why?

Demons seem to be common in the New Testament. Their existence is taken for granted and is unex-

plained. Demons, like angels, are not described or defined in any systematic way. All we can find are scraps of information scattered about scripture. All we can do is try to make a coherent picture out of those pieces. We cannot even look to older scriptures for more information; there are no demons in the Old Testament.

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### THE STANDISH INKWELL (CONTINUED...)

So what are we supposed to make of these statistics? In my sermon a few weeks ago, I mentioned another set of statistics done by the Barna group, an evangelical polling organization, for a book written by one of their researchers, David Kinnaman, titled *UnChurch*. The statistic polled 16-29 year-old non-Christians, and here's what they found:

- 91% say we are anti-homosexual
- 87% say we are judgmental
- 85% say we are hypocritical
- 78% say we are old-fashioned
- 75% say we are too involved in politics
- 72% say we are out of touch with reality
- 70% say we are insensitive to others

So what are we to make of these statistics?

I think that all of it says that we may be in a bit of trouble in the Christian world. Increasingly younger people are growing up believing that religion, and specifically Christian faith, are irrelevant to their lives. What happened to us? What happened to our culture? Despite what people think, this is not the kind of issue that putting the Ten Commandments in courtrooms or allowing school prayer will overcome. In fact, the more we argue about these issues, the more the above statistics solidify because our fighting about them makes non-Christians think that all we want to do is to indoctrinate others by force of law. And anytime religion becomes enforced by the state it decreases, at least in a real sense. People may become nominally Christian, but real faith suffers

Think back to the growth of the original church. What was it that allowed Christianity to grow? The original church, for its first three-hundred years, was outlawed and persecuted. For the most part it was illegal to be a Christian. During times when it was legal, it was only legal if individual Christians bowed once a year before a stature of the emperor, thus acknowledging him as a god equal to Christ. During those times of persecution, Christianity thrived. Why?

Christians gained a reputation for love and acceptance of those rejected by the Romans—the poor, the handicapped, slaves, and women. Their reputation was of being better than the culture. They stood for commitment in a culture that lacked commitment—where men and women often married seven, eight, nine, ten times. They stood for honesty in a culture that believed in deception and bribes in business. But above all, they stood for love of others, especially those rejected by the culture.

I think that the attitudes of non-Christians toward Christians has a lot to do with something they perceive very clearly about us Christians. I believe that Christianity as a whole has drifted away from the facets about us that made us attractive to begin with. The fact is that the present Christian culture in general (at least the visible Christian culture represented on television by Pat Robertson, James Dobson, and others) isn't always all that loving, at least toward the marginalized. We've come to stand much more for morality first, love second, rather than the opposite. This was very well articulated to me a number of years ago by a pastor who said, "Yeah, I sup-

**I believe that Christianity as a whole has drifted away from the facets about us that made us attractive to begin with**

pose love and all that is nice and important, but not as important as purity.” By purity he meant having the right beliefs and being morally pure. I don’t want to give the impression that I advocate for heretical beliefs and immorality. What I do advocate for are beliefs and morality that lead to love of others.

When I read scripture, especially the gospels, I hear love as clearly being the main point. It is hard for me to find passages where Jesus reprimands people for not having the right beliefs, but it is easy to find passages where Jesus reprimands people for not having love. And if you look at many of the heroes of the gospel stories, they are the rejected. It’s the centurion who has faith. It’s the paralyzed man who has faith. It’s the Syro-Phoenician woman who has faith. It’s the woman with the 12-year hemorrhage who has faith. It’s the tax collector who has faith and humility. It’s the Samaritan who has love.

The fortunate thing about most of us at Calvin Church is that we tend to be Christians who love. I’m under no false pretenses that we can be hugely influential over the Christian culture, but we can be influential over those we come in contact with. I believe that the answer to our times is for us to emphasize love as much as possible. It is for us to be people who lead with compassion for those hurt and rejected by others, who lead with a passion to help those on the margins, and who lead with a desire to find a way to overcome differences through patience and love.

Blessings to you,

*The Rev. Dr. N. Graham Standish*

### **Parenting Tips:**

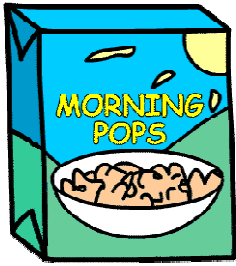
*This is a new feature that we will try to include each month to help parents raise healthy children.*

Are you tired of fighting with your children about everything such as cleaning their rooms, eating their vegetables, watching television, taking their baths, doing their homework? Your children are probably tired of it, too. And the conflict that arises out of these fights can increase over time. So what do you do about it.

The problem is that parents and easily slip into constant power struggles. Think of it this way: a parent's task is to raise a child to understand right and wrong, good and bad, and what is or isn't a priority; a child's task is to form an identity and to figure out where she or he fits in the world. These tasks conflict. How do you overcome them? By deciding what really matters and what only somewhat matters. Parents need to pick their battles carefully. Ideas on how to do that:

- Decide what really matters and what doesn't always matter. Don't turn everything into a battle. Decide what the five most important issues are (homework, manners, churchgoing, etc..., and focus on them). Be firm about what matters, gentle about what doesn't. Don't be firm about everything, or give in to everything.
- Allow yourself to lose battles that don't matter, but do it in a way that makes it somewhat gracious and bonding. If you have been battling over a clean room, and your child is fighting you, help them clean the room. Often a messy room feels overwhelming to a child. If you have been fighting over manners, take the children out to a restaurant of their choice to have a "manners dinner," to get them to focus on manners. Make sure they have good manners with others, good enough manners at home.
- Talk it out, don't fight. If you have been pushing a child to do a task, and she or he won't, don't fight. Talk about the issue. Try to find out what the problem is. And if the child won't talk, don't fight about that. Be patient. And make sure you hug and let your child know that she or he is always loved.

## Food Cupboard News



Thanks to Bob & Lynn Myers for organizing the food drive for the Cupboard at the Rock Lake Barbecue in September.

Food Dedication - **October 11** (the second Sunday of each month)

**Needs:** Baked Beans, Baking mixes (muffins & cookies), Cereal, Boxed potatoes (mashed & scalloped), Canned vegetables, Canned fruit, Applesauce, Spaghetti Sauce, Soup, Tuna, Macaroni & Cheese, Egg Noodles, Pasta, Peanut Butter & Jelly, Helper meals, Ensure.

Baby food and formula are not needed, as these are supplied by the WIC (Women Infants & Children) program. Diapers and wipes, however, are needed.

**\*Please supply only the items on this list. Most other items are hard to dispose of. Your monetary contributions are most welcome.**

Please make checks payable to **Calvin Church** and mark "**Food Cupboard**".

*Contributed by Arby Shenesky*

## Open Circle

The next meeting will be at Mary Schlott's home on **Oct 27th at 7:30PM**. If you have not been to Mary's before, meet in the Calvin church parking lot at 7:15 PM so we can ride together.

Upcoming events:

SERRV on **October 25, 2009**

Soup sale: **Nov 7, 14, 21.**

*Contributed by Kathy Efaw*

## Morning Circle

**G**et out your lesson book again to Chapter Five, Page 39. Rosemary will conduct our discussion and if you remember last month we had a good discussion on chapter four and an interesting program by Agnes Peebles. Mary should tell us more about the Least Coin and with Jane about again she may tell us about the Mission Field. Remember the date is **October 8th**, same time and same place.

## Singles Café at Calvin Church

**October 8<sup>th</sup> Healthy Relationships Workshop** - Join the Singles Café at Calvin Church, a singles networking group, on Thursday, October 8<sup>th</sup>, at 7:00 p.m. for a workshop entitled: "Are We Living in Healthy Relationships? Exploring How to Form More Stable Relationships." The workshop will be taught by Rev. Dr. N. Graham Standish. For more details please email [connie@calvinchurchzelie.org](mailto:connie@calvinchurchzelie.org) or call 724-452-7560, ext. 19.

October 2009

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## Mission Matters

On Sunday, **October 25**, the annual SERRV sale will be held in Fellowship Hall. This is an opportunity to purchase gifts made by skilled artisans from many different countries around the world, everything from food to jewelry. There will be "salespeople" available between services and following the second service. The artisans are paid on a fair trade scale and receive their money when the items arrive at the New Windsor, MD center. This is an opportunity to enable families to have money for food, housing and education, to lift themselves out of poverty.

The Mission Committee and the people of VOICe thank you for your gifts. You will never know who the people are whom you have helped, but you can be sure that you have made their lives easier. Donations for the Women's Shelter are always welcome, so feel free to call their office if you wish to contribute items - furniture, household appliances, gently-used clothing for women and children.

**December 5**, we will have an Alternative Christmas Fair, where you will have opportunity to give monetary gifts to groups such as Habitat for Humanity, Medical Benevolence, and the Food Pantry as gifts to family and friends.

*Contributed by Agnes Peebles*

## Calvin Kids' Choir

Calvin Kids' Choir will begin on Wed. **October 7th**. Children currently in Grades 1-6 are invited to join us in the downstairs Youth Room from 6:30-7:15. The kids will learn some new songs and will soon begin rehearsals for a Christmas musical. Any questions contact Karen Cramer at [rsramer@verizon.net](mailto:rsramer@verizon.net).

*Contributed by Karen Cramer*

## Calvin Youth Groups

**Calvin Youth Group (CYG), grades 9-12** Sunday evenings, 7:30-9:00 p.m.

**Calvin Youth Group 2 (CYG2), grades 7-8** Sunday evenings, 6:00-7:30 p.m.

**Calvin Youth Group 3 (CYG3), grades 5-6** Sunday evenings, 6:00-7:15 p.m.

**Ready for God (RFG), grades 3-4** Sunday evenings, 6:00-7:15 p.m.

**All Youth Groups**—always check the Sunday bulletins for any changes

For further information contact Bruce Smith, Youth Director, at the church at 724-452-7560 (ext 14) or [brucesmith@zoominternet.net](mailto:brucesmith@zoominternet.net)

**Ready For God (RFG), for grades 3 & 4**, will begin on Sunday, **October 4**. They will meet on Sunday evenings from 6:00 to 7:20 in Fellowship Hall.

## Bike Rack

Building and Grounds committee has recently installed a bike rack behind Faith house. For those who bike to church.... they now have a place to park and secure their bikes.

*Contributed by Karen Albert*

### “Demons 101” (continued)

Some English translations mention “demons” in a few places in the Hebrew Bible, but a more careful translation shows that those passages (such as Deuteronomy 32:16-17) are really talking about idols. Neither Testament gives any particular origin for demons. The Bible can't tell us where they originally came from or how they came to be. The pagan Greeks thought of demons (they called them daimons) as lesser deities. Perhaps Greek ideas about demons were imported into Jewish theology between the two Testaments, and then altered.

#### **Was a demon merely the same thing as an illness?**

It is tempting, in the modern scientific world, to explain the nature of a demon as equivalent to a mental or physical illness, and to say that the people of the first century simply did not understand such things, calling them “demons” out of ignorance. But that is not what the New Testament says. The passage at the beginning of this article is one example of how the Bible distinguishes between sickness and demon-possession (being a “demoniac”). Another is found in Matthew: “*So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they*

*brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them.*” (Matthew 4:24) Some of the people who came to see Jesus were sick and some had demons. These were two different things, although they could be confused because the presence of a demon could cause disease symptoms in a person (such as convulsions - Mark 9:20).

#### **What is the nature of a demon?**

A demon is a spirit (Matthew 8:16) and not a physical being. There are many of them, and more than one can inhabit a person (Luke 8:2, Mark 5:9). It is unclear why they inhabit people, but scripture says they are evil (e.g. Luke 7:21) and unclean, so their reasons are no doubt evil. It may be that they try to exist in places like the desert, but are unable to find rest there, so they inhabit people (Matthew 12:43-44). Some demons are more evil than others (Matthew 12:45). They are said to torment people (Acts 5:16) and indeed, their presence can bring madness (Mark 5:5), muteness (Matthew 9:32), or blindness (Matthew 12:22). A demon can talk through the voice of the possessed person

(Luke 4:33-36), and they are intelligent enough to recognize the authority of Jesus and to fear his power to cast them out and back into the abyss (Matthew 8:29-31, Luke 8:31). Demons are said to teach lies to men (1 Timothy 4:1) and to be able to tell the future (Acts 16:16). They can have a sort of name, for example, “Legion” (Mark 5:9). And, they did seem to know that their time of being able to possess people had a built-in ending (Matthew 8:29). It is possible that demons were made by Satan and worked for him (Revelation 16:13-14).

#### **If Demons are evil, why did God allow them to possess people in the first century?**

I said that there were no demons in the Old Testament. Actually, there is one *possible* exception in the story of King Saul. “*Now the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him. And Saul's servants said to him, 'See now, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. Let our lord now command the servants who attend you to look for someone who is skilful in playing the lyre; and when the evil spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will feel better.'*” (1 Samuel 16:14-16) In this pas-

sage, God sends an evil spirit (possibly a demon?) to torment Saul, possibly to manipulate him into sending for David.

The passage makes some commentators uncomfortable because it is God who sends the evil spirit. Yet, God has power over all things, including evil spirits. If God has power over evil spirits, then God has power over the demons of the New Testament period, and could conceivably prevent them from possessing people in the first place. It's another example of the question of: why does God allow evil to do its work?

It is possible that there was a divine purpose in allowing demon possession in the first century. The following passages suggest that purpose. Jesus said, “*But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you.*” (Matthew 12:28) “*The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!'* He said to them, ‘*I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning.*” (Luke 10:17-18)

The various signs and miracles that Jesus performed with God's power were meant to

prove that the Kingdom of God had arrived. Jesus demonstrated his power over many aspects of the world, including disease (curing sickness), the forces of nature (calming a storm), and even death (raising Lazarus). It may be that God allowed demons to possess people so that Jesus could demonstrate his power over the world of evil spirits as well, providing one more important sign of the coming of the Kingdom of God. After that purpose was accomplished, and the Apostolic age had passed, demons were no longer allowed the power they once had, and demon possession became a thing of the past. Certainly, aside from “Exorcist” movies, we see nothing in the modern world to indicate that demons have the power to inhabit people any more.

In the modern age, it is easy to question the entire existence of demons. But if we do, we have to ask ourselves whether we truly respect scripture and the gospel accounts of Jesus. The New Testament assumes that demons are real, and the gospels are clear about Jesus treating demons as real, and dealing with them in a real way. It is hard for me to imagine Jesus merely humoring the superstitions of the people of the time, and pretending to cast out imaginary beings from people while secretly healing their actual mental or physical illnesses. That would not be the behavior of the same Jesus who made such a point of telling us the truth all of the time.

In the end, we must at least keep our minds open and allow for the possibility that demons exist exactly as described in the New Testament. If that is true, then we should also be grateful that our century is so very different from the first century CE, and that we are free from the threat of unclean evil spirits on top of all the many mental illnesses and diseases from which we still do suffer.

### “Did You Know?”

All of the previous “Did You Know?” articles are now hosted on the Calvin website in the Discipleship section. Or go directly to:

<http://www.calvinchurchzelie.org/didyouknow.htm>

### Announcements and News

To put announcements in the Sunday Bulletin, please call the office no later than the Thursday of the week you want the announcement to appear.

All Newsletter material must be submitted by the 20th of each month to be included in the next month’s edition. Please send newsletter items to Nancy Mead at [nancy@mead.cc](mailto:nancy@mead.cc). Thanks in advance!

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