

BELIEFS Values

Relearning old lessons fuels spiritual growth



REV. RONALD P. BYARS

Down in Melvindale, participants are pressing the school board to teach something called "creationism." More than a decade ago, having moved to a city below the Mason-Dixon line, I discovered that the local school board was slugging it out over the same issue. I wondered whether I might have inadvertently slipped into a time warp! Certainly that issue had been settled and done with decades ago. One of the sad discoveries of life is that issues thought to be resolved turn out not to be!

Lessons thought to have been learned, required to be learned all over again. I am neither poet nor musician. Nevertheless, I have often wondered whether it was possible to be a Christian without having some music, some poetry in the soul. I can't speak for other religions, although I suspect that the same is true for most of the great religions of the world. I firmly believe that there is truth to be known. However, in order to know the truth, we have to bring to it something more than a literal-mindedness. Yes, of course, sometimes the truth is revealed in historical narrative — a recital of events that actually occurred. Sometimes, the truth reaches us in the form of a logical argument. But historical narrative and logical argument are only two of the tools God has given us with which to know the truth. God has also equipped us with imagination, and planted in us the ability to perceive the truth in parable and symbol.

It's easy for us to imagine that we are wiser and more sophisticated than any people who have lived before us. One reason for this prejudice is that we imagine that nothing is true if it can't be proved with an experiment, or documented by impartial witnesses. By that line of reasoning, a description of today's weather is factual: a certain amount of precipitation recorded, so many hours of daylight, the wind out of the west/northwest, temperatures ranging from a specific high to a specific low. However, a poem or song about snowflakes drifting in the wind, and the way they feel on the face, would be considered non-factual. The reality is that both the weather report and the song/poem tell the truth! They simply tell it in different ways. The song or poem tells the truth as it experienced by the person who takes delight in the weather, or fears it. Certainly that truth is no less important than the truth measured in degrees of temperature and inches of precipitation. There are moments when one way of perceiving the truth is the most appropriate, and moments when other ways of perceiving the truth fills in the blanks. God has given us a marvelous repertoire of tools to use. Those who confine themselves to the literal have disabled themselves.

The so-called "creationists" try to defend religions with inappropriate tools. The Book of Genesis says that God created the world in "seven days." To the literal-minded, this rules out evolution — the gradual development of life and its differentiation into many species over aeons and aeons. While there is a good deal in the Bible which is meant to be taken literally, there is also much that is not. The creation stories (there are two quite different ones in the first and second chapters of Genesis) are not intended as a literal history. They are rather an outpouring of praise to God for the goodness and lavishness of creation. Those who fashioned the stories and passed them on would have no quarrel with archaeologists or biologists who study the processes by which the world as we know it came into being. Their intent is rather to praise the One from whose hands all these marvels have come.

Years ago, this is the message many of us ministers sent to our poor school board, who had found themselves beset by well-intended defenders of religion — themselves disabled by literal-mindedness! Our school board managed to get the point.

Ronald P. Byars, Ph.D., is pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham.

Christ Church hosts interfaith service

"Thanksgiving is a time for families and friends to gather together in thanks for God's blessings. These celebrations are deep in biblical tradition. Both Israelites and early Christians offered their 'first fruits' to God in thanks for their abundance." — Bread for the World

Christ Church Cranbrook will host an Interfaith Thanksgiving Community Service at 7:30 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 23. This 23rd annual event is sponsored by the Northwest Suburban Interfaith Ministerium.

Readings, prayers and hymns will be offered to God for this special time of year. The service will begin with a Prayer for the Diversity of Races and Cultures, offered by the Rev. Edward L. Mullins, rector, Christ Church Cranbrook. Hymns and prayers of thanks will follow, intermingled with scripture readings.

The sermon will be given by Rabbi Daniel Syme of Temple Beth El in Bloomfield Township. A reception, hosted by Christ Church Cranbrook, First Church of Christ, Scientist, Birmingham, and First Church of Christ, Scientist, Bloomfield Township, will follow the service.

The church will be filled with clergy and people from all over the community.

Participating congregations of the North West Suburban Ministerium are: Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church in Bloomfield Hills, Christ Church Cranbrook in Bloomfield Hills, Christian Communication Council, Congregational Church of Birmingham in Bloomfield Hills, First Baptist Church of Birmingham, First Church of Christ, Scientist in Birmingham, First Church of Christ, Scientist in Bloomfield Hills, First Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Franklin Community Church in Franklin, Kirk in the Hills in Bloomfield Hills, Nativity Episcopal Church in Bloomfield Township, North-



Planning stages: Christ Church communications director Sally Timpnor (seated) of Rochester Hills, St. Regis Catholic Church deacon Brian Carroll (rear, left) and the Rev. Edward L. Mullins of Christ Church are among the organizers for this weekend's anniversary celebration at Christ Church Cranbrook.

brook Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Pilgrim Congregational Church in Bloomfield Hills, Pine Hill Congregational Church in West Bloomfield, St. Andrew Lutheran Church in Bloomfield Township, St. Hugo of the Hills Catholic Church in Bloomfield Hills, St. James Episcopal Church in Birmingham, St. Owen Catholic Church in Bloomfield Township, St. Paul United Methodist Church

in Rochester Hills, St. Regis Catholic Church in Birmingham, Temple Beth El in Bloomfield Township, The Ecumenical Institute in Southfield, William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak and the Emergency Assistance Ministry (TEAM) Center.

Christ Church Cranbrook is at Lone Pine and Cranbrook roads, one mile west of Woodward, Bloomfield Hills.

Kirk in the Hills to mark 50th anniversary

Kirk in the Hills, the largest Presbyterian church in the Detroit Presbytery, will celebrate its 50th anniversary with a series of special events and services the weekend of Nov. 21-23.

Currently led by its fourth pastor, the Rev. Dr. Norman M. Pritchard, the Bloomfield Township church was organized on Nov. 23, 1947. It has grown from 79 charter members to a congregation of nearly 2,800.

On Sunday, Nov. 23, three special worship services will be held at 8 and 10 a.m. and noon. "This is a departure from our regular Sunday schedule of worship at 9

and 11 a.m.," Dr. Pritchard said. "And for the first time, because of the high interest in our golden anniversary, we have issued tickets for sanctuary seating in an attempt to accommodate all who would like to worship on this special day."

He added, however, that overflow seating will be available for latecomers and visitors, and large-screen closed circuit TV screens will be installed in Heritage Hall of the Undercroft.

The guest preacher at all three Sunday worship services will be the Kirk's pastor emeritus, the Rev. Dr. James F. Anderson, who

served as the church's third pastor from April 30, 1972, until his retirement in June 1994.

Highlighting a year-long series of anniversary programs, a Kirk family reunion banquet will be held on Friday, Nov. 21, with the Rev. Dr. John M. Buchanan, moderator of the 208th General Assembly and Pastor of Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago, as the featured speaker. At 4 p.m. on Anniversary Sunday, a candlelight covenant service with communion will be held, with Dr. Pritchard preaching. This service and the reception following in the Kirk Rectory have been fully

subsidized.

Located on West Long Lake Road in Bloomfield Township, the Kirk complex has developed from a small church in a private home to an impressive Gothic-styled sanctuary. Patterned after Scotland's famed Melrose Abbey, it was dedicated on Nov. 23, 1958, exactly 11 years after the church was founded. For 18 months prior to that date, the congregation worshipped in what is now Bloomfield Hills Andover High School, following a near-disastrous fire that occurred on June 13, 1957.

The Kirk Abbey, a three-story

Please see KIRK, B10

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