

# Friend left his children the best legacy of all

## FOCUS ON THEOLOGY



REV. RONALD P. BYARS

**Editor's note:** This column is being run again in its corrected version. It originally appeared May 14 with technical errors. Our apologies to the Rev. Byars.

A year ago, as I write, my friend died of pancreatic cancer. He and I were the same age. We had become acquainted in western Michigan when we were both in the early years of our ministry. Our paths diverged, but we were kept in touch with each other over the years. Then, quite by surprise, we both found ourselves in the metro Detroit area again.

My friend was intelligent, conscientious and talented. In spite of those traits, I suspect that he often felt he disappointed himself. For some ministers, it's hard to take success seriously, while very easy to blame oneself for every failure. And there are lots of failures!

My friend was not old when he died, and I feel sure that he had established goals that he had not met. He had a hard time thinking of his ministry as successful.

I think he was successful. He has three adult children who go to church. Now, you may presume ministers' children always grow up to go to church. Not so! Just as many lay people are disappointed to discover that their own children don't keep the faith in which they were raised, so are many ministers.

Furthermore, I suspect that a good many ministers' kids develop a measure of resentment toward the church, which has consumed so much of their ministerial parent's time and energy.

Recently, I became a grandparent. That caused me to reflect on the years when my wife and I were raising our children. When a child is born, it seems as though an enormous length of time stretches out from infancy to adulthood. So often, as our children are growing up, I thought of how much fun it would be to take a weekend with them for one expedition or another. But I didn't have free weekend! No problem, I thought, "There will always

be another time."

In that way, weekend after weekend passed, year after year, until all at once, in a graduation ceremony, that endless stretch of time to an abrupt conclusion. I can't go back. The childhood is all over.

If I could go back, knowing what I know now, I hope I would do things differently. I hope I would be less self-absorbed, less driven, less inclined to postpone things and more present in the moment. I hope that I would take my childrearing more seriously, not leaving it to chance, or relying too much on society to help me out.

I think I would not presume that my children would learn by osmosis. I would be more deliberate in sharing with them my deepest commitments. And then, of course, they would still grow up to be their own persons. What children become can never be entirely in our control—thank God!

On my desk is a clipping, several years old now. It reports some surprising—and even embarrassing—statistics. It says that if your parents worshipped with you while you were growing up, chances are 80 percent that you will worship regularly as an adult. If only your mother worshipped regularly with you, chances are only 30 percent that you will worship regularly as an adult. If only your father worshipped regularly, chances are 70 percent that you will go to church regularly.

That's embarrassing, as candid as first it may seem. Why, several fathers have so much more influence over this part of a child's life than mothers do? Still the data doesn't say what ought to be—it simply records the facts.

Apparently, if children don't see their fathers committed to spiritual life, they find it easy not to take such things seriously. It's easy for boys, especially, to conclude that faith is a feminine affair. This only one area of life in which fathers play a more important role than simply being partners in procreation.

My hat is off to my friend, who was eminently successful in leaving his children the best legacy of all.

The Rev. Ronald Byars is pastor at the First Presbyterian Church in Birmingham.

## BELIEFS & Values

# First Baptist offers healing service

BY BARR PERT TEMPLETON  
SPECIAL WRITER

The First Baptist Church, in Birmingham, will offer a Service of Wholeness and Healing this Sunday, May 31 at 7 p.m.

The church welcomes those struggling with any form of human brokenness, whether it be disease, disability, addiction, dysfunctional behavior, relationship struggles, grief, depression or issues of self-worth.

"We offered this public service of healing for the first time in March and were so encouraged that we plan to do this every few months," Dr. Stephen D. Jones, pastor of First Baptist Church, stated.

"The healing service homes in on the ministry of the church and ministering to the whole human being which includes mental, physical, social and spiritual issues," added Kate Hope, a Deacon at

First Baptist.

Hope, of Bloomfield Hills, has been attending the church for three years and is pleased to see plans for another healing service being set. The service will involve the ancient rite of anointing, and a communal prayer spoken for each person requesting it. Holy Communion is also offered.

"Many people are struggling with disease and relationship issues, and we recognize more than ever that there is a spiritual component to health and wholeness," Jones said. "Yet there aren't many public places one can turn where prayer and worship are focused on this, and so the spiritual component is too often lonely and private."

"Basically what this will focus on is people's direct relationship with God and their desire to strengthen that relationship," Hope added.

The service will include reading from the scriptures, lots of singing and personal private prayers for those who wish to step forward and request them.

"Prayer doesn't replace our own efforts, nor those of helping professionals, but it does undergird and extend those efforts by calling upon the love of God," Jones said.

"We intend this to be a respectful, compassionate and confidential opportunity to offer spiritual resources to the struggles of people's lives," Hope said. "And it's not magical—it's spiritual. It's getting closer to God and finding whatever sense of peace they can in whatever crisis they are experiencing."

The March healing service welcomed some 60 people to First Baptist and many had never been to a service there before, according to Hope.

"We are a smaller church and there were many people

here that I had never seen before but that's fine," Hope said. "We don't ask them any questions or even their name. I've seen many people who have been very moved by this service."

People attending the service can quietly leave toward the conclusion at a time of their choosing. The service is nonsectarian and open to persons of all Christian denominations and backgrounds.

The service will last approximately one hour. No offering will be taken and the service is open to everyone. Dr. Jones will speak briefly and John and Myra Trask will provide music.

The historic church is located downtown between the Jacobson's Department Stores at the corner of Willits and Bates streets.

For more information call (248)644-0650 or visit the website at <http://users.aol.com/churchwww/first.htm>.

## COMMUNITY MESSENGER

Community Messenger features spiritual announcements from Oakland County religious institutions. Write: Community Messenger, c/o Beliefs & Values Editor, Observer & Eccentric! Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Farmington Hills, MI 48009. Our fax number is (248) 644-1314.

**FINAL CONCERT**  
Christ Church Cranbrook will present its season finale concert with music for choir, two organs and orchestra this Sunday, May 31. The 4 p.m. concert will feature Ernest M. Skinner pipe organ recently reconstructed by N.P. Mander Organ Builders of London, England. The concert concludes with the Mass, Opus 4 for Choir, Soloists, Organ and Orchestra by French Romantic composer, Camille Saint-Saens. Tickets for the season finale concert are \$16 for general admission and \$10 for

seniors and students. Tickets may be purchased in advance by telephoning the parish office at Christ Church Cranbrook at (248)644-5210. Tickets will also be on sale at the door. The church is located on Lane Pine Road one mile west of Woodward Avenue, in Bloomfield Hills.

**40TH ANNIVERSARY**  
Antioch Lutheran Church in Farmington Hills will celebrate its 40th anniversary on Sunday, May 31. The Reverend James Henneberger, founding pastor of the church, will preside over a special service at 10 a.m. A reception with a brunch buffet, birthday cake, slide show and historical displays will immediately follow the service. In March of 1958, 78 charter members were received and Antioch Lutheran Church in Farmington Hills was formed. The congregation has flourished and

now serves over 250 families in a large modern church located at the original site of Farmington and 13 Mile roads. Bishop-Elect Robert Rimbo said, "Our doors are always open, and we hope the community will join us in celebrating this momentous occasion." The church is located at 33360 W. 13 Mile Road. For more information call Antioch Lutheran Church at (248)626-7906.

**A FAIR**  
Farmington Hills Church of God will host a fun fair on Saturday, June 6, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Games, prizes, pony rides, a dunk tank, chips, hotdogs and pop will be offered. There will also be an inflatable jump activity. Most games will be 25 cents. The church is located at 25715 Powers Road between 10 and 11 Mile Roads. For more information call 477-9144.

**JEWISH HUMOR**  
An eight week adult study series on "Jewish Humor" will be offered at Borders Books and Music in Farmington Hills beginning Monday, June 8. The event is being hosted by Eilu Y. Eilu, the metro Detroit adult Jewish Learning partnership sponsored by Congregations Beth Abraham Hillel Moses, Beth Shalom and Bnai Moshe, Hill Day School, and Women's League for Conservative Judaism-Michigan Branch. The eight part Let's & Learning series will meet from 10 to 11 a.m. at Borders. Tuition for members is \$40 for the series or \$5 per session. Tuition for others is \$56 for the series or \$7 per session. No reservations are necessary and student may register for \$1 at the door. For more information call (248)737-1931 or e-mail Torah Teach@aol.com.

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