

General Presbyter's Report January 30, 2010

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!

I heard this at the Easter Vigil on Saturday night at First Morganton.

I heard this at the Waldensian Church at sunrise service and later at their early informal worship service.

I heard it at New Vision Church, our new church development in Conover.

Christ is risen indeed should be our song. I believe it with my whole heart. It is a message the entire world needs to hear. We are God's vessels to proclaim that news. We are to live as Easter people.

This Easter, I also heard, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." In baptism, we are buried with Christ in his death and from it we are raised to share in his resurrection.

At First Morganton's Easter Vigil Service, which comes from the ancient practice of baptizing catechumens on Easter morning, there were six baptisms. The vigil started outside with a fire from which we light the Christ candle. Then, with lit candles, we processed in darkness into the sanctuary to hear about God's gracious love from readings from the Old and New Testaments. We entered the third section of the vigil of baptism where two adults and four children were baptized.

One of those baptized was Happy Nagy, the five-year-old adopted daughter of Dr. Barbara Nagy, a mission co-worker/pediatric doctor in Malawi and part of this Presbytery. Many of you have prayed for them the last three years that Barbara would be able to adopt Happy. Happy's baptism was truly an answer to prayers and a time for tears of joy. All the baptisms were special as the pastors said, "God has claimed you. You are now a child of God." Easter is a time to remember our baptisms and be glad.

At New Vision, they baptized two youth/young adults and two children. I am encouraged by these baptisms. Baptisms are not just happening in these two churches, but in more throughout the Presbytery. I celebrate these baptisms as we seek to follow Christ's command, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them everything that I command."

As I reflected on these baptisms, I realize that we are bringing people into our churches that do not always know our family stories - the scriptures. They don't always have the background to understand God's huge love toward us and our own identity as children of God. That is where we have a big task to teach ourselves and others all that Christ has commanded.

As I have seen this Easter, I am encouraged as each of us and the churches reach out to those not in church, not in a Christian community or in a relationship with Jesus Christ. I cannot imagine how it would be to live without knowing the love of Christ, and the peace, joy and love that flows from God's love. Yet, more and more people are living like that in the USA today.

As I heard the Easter Story, I pondered what it must have been like for the women or Mary Magdalene to go to tell the disciples what they had seen. Luke's gospel says the disciples didn't believe them or thought it was a crazy tale. I think sometimes we get the same reaction from people or we are afraid that we will get the same kind of reaction. Yet, it is Jesus who told the women to spread the good news about the resurrection. We are given the same commandments.

As I ponder why we are not better at inviting people to our churches and into a loving Christian community, I remembered my childhood. My experience was similar to many of the people in our churches today. In the small community of Black Mountain, I can only remember one family that did not go to church. That family was Jewish. Therefore, I never developed the skill or understood the need to invite people to church. The assumption was that everyone was going to church and that the children would grow up and go to the same church or denomination in which they were raised. That assumption did not work. Many children and grandchildren of Christian parents are not in church today.

When I returned to the community as an adult many years later, I became part of a growing church where newcomers to the community had already been invited to the Black Mountain Church by three to four people before I even met them. That was one of the reasons it was growing. I realized that I had only invited one non-church goer to an Easter worship this year. Why had I not invited more? At Black Mountain, there was a group of people who invited people they met in the grocery store or bank or wherever, to come to church. They then trusted the church members to be welcoming and to witness to God's love. We can all do this. We can reach out, invite, welcome and witness that Christ has risen.

When I hear the words, "Christ is risen indeed" I think of a story I heard in a sermon. A preacher was telling about something that happened in Russia during the Stalin era. A young Communist was trying to convince an auditorium full of people about the virtues of Marxism and Leninism. The speaker thought he had succeeded. He said that God is dead. There is no need for religion. For what was to be the last question, an Orthodox priest stood up and said, "Christ is risen." The people in the auditorium stood up and responded, "Christ is risen indeed." After the service, an elderly woman, who spoke with a broken accent, said to the pastor, "What you didn't tell them was that everyone who stood up knew they would be sent to prison."

Thankfully, this is not our situation. We are not living in a Marxist state. But like Mary Magdalene and the people in that story, we, too, have the Good News to share. My dream is that we will be about reaching out and sharing the wonderful Good News of the resurrection and that baptisms will be a common Easter experience. My dream is that we will live as Easter people empowered by the knowledge that "Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!"

Wishing you Christ's peace this Easter season,

Bobbi



Here are some of the exciting things happening around the Presbytery of Western North Carolina!

West Avenue in Gastonia welcomed 65 folks from the community in their “Easter Community Celebrate” on Wednesday during Holy Week. They had both children and adult activities. This followed their Christmas Community Celebration and was part of their Acts Initiative to reach out to the community.

Asheville Citizen Times Newspaper featured the Reverend Pat Bacon and Calvary Church as one that has a history of reaching out to others in mission and ministry. Also, we should give thanks to the work team from Grace Covenant that helped Calvary with major repairs.

Montreat Presbyterian Church continues to grow. Although it worships in different locations each Sunday, it now has an office in the Conference Center.

32 churches and 170 people attended a day of learning and sharing on the Acts 16:5 Initiative as churches and teams look at how they can reach out.

Waldensian began a new early Sunday morning informal worship service in their fellowship hall, which is meeting the needs of members.

Morrison Church is reaching out by delivering flowering bulbs to their neighbors and asking the local school what help is needed.

Mitchell, Avery and Yancey Churches gathered for Holy Week services with preaching by Maggie Lauterer, Tee Gatewood, Kathy Campbell and Terry Alexander, with many churches participating in worship, leadership, music and providing food.

Sweetwater is finally tearing down their old fellowship hall that had no hot water or bathrooms and will replace it with a place where all its members can gather in a new, more flexible fellowship hall that is handicapped accessible.

Aimee Buchanan is celebrating her new ministry for youth in the Asheville area, Asheville Youth Mission, or “AYM.” More information can be found at ashevillyouthmission.org.

There are 66 youth and adults on the delegation to the Presbyterian Youth Triennium in July. This includes 2 girls from Immanuel (the Hispanic NCD in Hickory), 2 youth who are coming from Guatemala as Global Partners, and 10 adults (1 of whom is a translator). In addition to the 66 on the delegation, 6 more youth are going with Aimee and Bill Buchanan to be a part of the Drama Team that will help with worship. Aimee and Bill are the coordinators for worship at Triennium.

First Morganton spent a Sunday morning worship reflecting on God’s call to them as a church, “Growing and Going Deeper in Faith.”

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Mills River welcomed hospitality by hosting a community-wide effort to put together a 24,000 piece jigsaw puzzle and earn a spot in the Hall of Fame for being the first organization to finish the project in North Carolina, and the first church to complete the project anywhere in the world. This effort resulted in 3 new people attending, who will most likely join in the near future. The dedication of the puzzle will be held on Sunday, April 18th at their Fellowship Luncheon following the morning service.

We want to hear your good news! Share happenings with the Presbytery office so we can celebrate with you!

