

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI

A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

HARTFORD SEMINARY

DEEPENING THE FAITH: Increasing the members of the Congregational Church of Brookfield's capacity in speaking about their Christian faith in God by preparing to and reaching out to share the faith with the community.

A MINISTRY PROJECT REPORT
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
PETER MONROE WILEY

BROOKFIELD, CONNECTICUT
NOVEMBER, 1996

UMI Number: 9803444

**Copyright 1998 by
Wiley, Peter Monroe**

All rights reserved.

**UMI Microform 9803444
Copyright 1997, by UMI Company. All rights reserved.**

**This microform edition is protected against unauthorized
copying under Title 17, United States Code.**

UMI
300 North Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

CURRICULUM VITAE

Peter Monroe Wiley

Date of Birth: March 19, 1964

Congregational Church of Brookfield
160 Whisconier Road
Brookfield, Connecticut 06804
(203)775-1259

2 Junction Road
Brookfield, Connecticut 06804
(203)740-1605

Family Status: Married to Amiee Traut Wiley 8/6/88

Daughters: Sarah Beth, born 2/18/91; Katherine Tay, born 3/15/94

EDUCATION:

Hartford Seminary, Hartford, Connecticut
Doctor of Ministry, 1997

Yale Divinity School, New Haven Connecticut
Master of Divinity, 1990

Denison University, Granville, Ohio
Bachelor of Arts (major in Economics & minor in Religion), 1986

WORK EXPERIENCE:

Co-Pastor
The Congregational Church of Brookfield 1995 -
Brookfield, Connecticut

Associate Pastor
The Congregational Church of Brookfield 1990-1994
Brookfield, Connecticut

CURRENT CONNECTIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS:

Ordained 1990 with standing in the Fairfield East Association of the Connecticut
Conference of the United Church of Christ

Vice-Moderator 1995 -
Fairfield East Association

President of the Board of Directors 1991 -
WestConn Christian Ministry
Western Connecticut State University

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With grateful appreciation for their contribution to this project I acknowledge:

The Congregational Church of Brookfield and all its members, the visitation team and especially those who served on the *Sharing the Faith* committee: Wes Bates, Claire Horner, Dale Krause, Hilmer Parson, and Nancy Vodra;

Sargent Desmond, my colleague in ministry in Brookfield, for his encouragement, wisdom, support, and enthusiastic participation;

My many advisors at the seminary and on this project: Dr. Thomas Hoyt, Dr. Clifford Green, Hartford Seminary Dean William McKinney, and especially Dr. Carl Dudley who provided many new insights and saw me through to the end of the project;

Dr. Michael Wiley for his editorial assistance on the final draft.

Amiee Traut Wiley, my wife, for her never failing encouragement.

ABSTRACT

This project describes the Congregational Church of Brookfield in Connecticut and a pilot program seeking to raise participants capacity to share their faith as well as increasing the congregation's evangelical work in the community. The project included classes and a visitation program to people who visited the church for the first time as well as sending out information pamphlets to new residents in the town of Brookfield.

Most members of the Congregational Church of Brookfield were uncomfortable using the word evangelism. The author proposes that this is due in part to the co-opting of the term, along with many other explicitly religious terms, by more conservative denominations. The word evangelism and activities related to it have come to mean for many, an arrogant and rigid self righteous appeal to coerce others into the community of faith. Many mainline churches avoid using such terminology in fear of being associated with these other groups. A second way of looking at sharing the faith has developed in those congregations that are in a state of decline. They focus primarily on church growth and seek to provide more user friendly ways to encourage people to join the ranks. The author proposes a third way of viewing evangelism, as a gracious sharing of faith that is truer to the word's biblical roots.

The paper strives to better understand the use of explicitly religious language and its importance in the sharing of the faith. It looks at scripture, church tradition, and the culture to see how the three components interaction guides us in how mainline churches might best share their faith as they seek to both deepen the faith community itself and share the faith with the greater community.

In an effort to do this, a pilot project was undertaken by the Congregational Church of Brookfield where each of the participants attended a three week Christian Basics class that looked at some of the stories that are foundational elements of the sharing of the faith. They then attended an orientation session to consider how they would go about their visits to the visitors of the church. They were then sent out in pairs each Sunday, delivering a loaf of banana bread and a cookbook that shared some of the faith of the congregation. In their visits, they thanked the people for attending church with us and offered an opportunity to answer questions and share more about their faith.

The project provided an opportunity for the participants to increase their comfort level and capacity to share the faith. While the project only addressed one small aspect of sharing the faith, the majority of the participants saw it as a helpful step in deepening the faith.

To Amiee

v

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
CHAPTER	
I. Introduction	1
II. Theology: Golden Rule Christianity	20
III. Theology: Bible, Tradition, and Church	36
IV. Theology: Struggle With Evangelism	51
V. Sharing the Faith: The Project	60
VI. Reflections	68
APPENDIX	84
BIBLIOGRAPHY	113

CHAPTER I
Introduction
You shall bear witness.
John 15:27

When I entered the parish ministry I believed that it was going to be an opportunity to share the love of God that I experienced in my own life with other people of faith. It all seemed quite simple. People who wanted to be a part of the community of faith would come to church, and we would live out our faith in good caring ways. There did not seem to be much more that needed to be done. But then I began to wonder about those people who did not come to the church. What about those who attended once, but never returned? How would they find out about what we had to offer, the chance to share with others of faith? I knew first time visitors to our church should be called on, but found many other *meaningful* activities to occupy my time. Then finally, on a hot summer afternoon, I dredged up the courage to leave my air conditioned study and went out to see who I might find at home, not too sure the visits would make any difference.

"This is the friendliest church I've ever attended," Janet said to me. "When Bill and I first walked through the door, we were immediately greeted by Bob and Sue. They couldn't have been more gracious. We immediately felt at home. There were so many people and such excitement. We could sense the Spirit of God present. We knew the Congregational Church of Brookfield (CCB) was the place for us after worship when our children came out of Sunday school and said they wanted to come back the next week. There is such a warm sense of caring here."

After that encounter I decided these visits were not so bad after all, and ready for more of

the same, I quickly drove to the house of another family who had visited the church the same day as Janet's family, certain that everyone must have similar feelings about their first visit to the church.

"I have never felt so unwanted," Margaret told me at my next stop. "The sign in front of *your* church had the wrong hour for worship and we missed the service altogether the first week we tried to attend. But we decided we shouldn't be overly critical and that we should give the church another chance. When we arrived, there were no parking places left. After we left our car on the street and found our way through the door, nobody even greeted us. Every pew was filled. We had to push our way into that other room -- the one off to the side where the leftovers go. We finally were able to find a space on a couch without a hymnal or bulletin. No one offered to share theirs with us. Our children were placed in the wrong class for church school. And then when the service was over, not one person said hello. We felt invisible. I've never had such a cold reception in all my life!"

Two families visit the same church on the same day and have radically different experiences. How could that be? I came home that day not sure what to make of my visits, confused about the identity of CCB. Were we a friendly church, a place that would always welcome new comers, seeking to make them feel at home? Or were we a closed society, only wanting to care for our own? I did not know which we were, but my schooling and my heart told me we should be open to all new comers . . . and more.

On entering the parish ministry, I was not sure just why, but I knew we were supposed to be evangelists, a people actively seeking to share the good news. So that evening at a committee meeting I suggested that we ought to look at how the members of the church were involved in

evangelism. My suggestion was met by dead silence. I pressed on and was then told that "we don't do that in our church. Nobody wants to have what we believe forced upon them. What we do is share our faith by our actions. If someone wants to know what I believe, then that person should watch the way that I live. Words are hollow, action is what counts."

In the following months, I asked other groups in the church what evangelism meant in our congregation. Most agreed that evangelism was not a program for people like us, "It's for those other types of churches." The people in the church thought of evangelism as something for people who follow a rigid biblical literalism and travel door to door with religious tracts speaking about our eternal destiny, sharing the message that it is our way, or else. The members of CCB were fearful of appearing arrogant, narrow, exclusive, rigid and self righteous if they shared their faith with others. Many concluded that the best way (maybe the only way) for others to learn about their faith was through their faithful actions.

This avoidance of speaking about one's faith to those outside the church in explicitly religious language was also reflected in the way that the members of CCB shared their faith within the church. Scriptures were read and the Word proclaimed, and people spoke about how they knew God through other people's actions of love and inclusivity, but few people seemed comfortable talking about their faith in distinctly Christian terms that clearly demonstrated that their faith changed their lives and the way that they viewed the world. They did speak in terms of faith like love, caring, hospitality, and fellowship, but rarely in ways that were different from what might be heard at the Rotary Club and other civic organizations.

Like so many other mainline Christians, I also had this experience when growing up in a large, Midwestern, town-center Presbyterian church. I was taught that church was an important

aspect of being a good person: dress appropriately, show respect for your elders, do the best you can in all things, be involved in your community . . . and go to church. Church was a part of citizenship, one compartmentalized piece, and helped to support society; it did not question or inform the way that a person lived in the culture. Life in the church and the sermons preached there did not challenge the norms of the times, they aided them as a willing partner in seeking to create an ideal American society. They joined in the dance, but never took the lead. The society dictated how the church would live out its life, instead of the church seeking to guide how people of faith needed to live in a culture that was often at odds with the gospel. Karl Barth once said that a preacher should enter the pulpit with the Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other, implying that the church must be directed by the Bible, but fully aware of the world. I believe that in too many mainline churches, a newspaper is in one hand and the United States Constitution (as well as so many other cultural standards) in the other and the Bible is used to shore up the two.

My experience was similar to the one described by Martin Copenhaver:

Sermons were liberally sprinkled with quotes from every human endeavor. The preacher might use the words of a poet, the findings of a sociologist, the research of a scientist and the observations of a contemporary journalist to support the sermon's point. Jesus was used as a summary of all that had gone before, a kind of crowning sermon illustration. There seemed to be an underlying assumption that there is a continuity between the best human thought and the Christian gospel (an understanding that is summarized by the reassuring title of Nathanael Guptill's 1956 book, *Christianity Does Make Sense*, a typical affirmation of that era). A friend once gave this critique of liberal (mainline) preachers: "You hear what the psychologist says, what the historian says, what *The New York Times* editorial writer says, and then the sermon concludes with, and perhaps Jesus said it best."¹

The church taught me that my faith was meant to mesh with what was right about our culture

¹ Martin Copenhaver, *Colleague: A Journal of Theological Reflection by Pastors of the United Church of Christ*, "Christianity Doesn't Make Sense ... Praise be to God!", Vol. XVIII, No. 2, March 1996, p. 3.

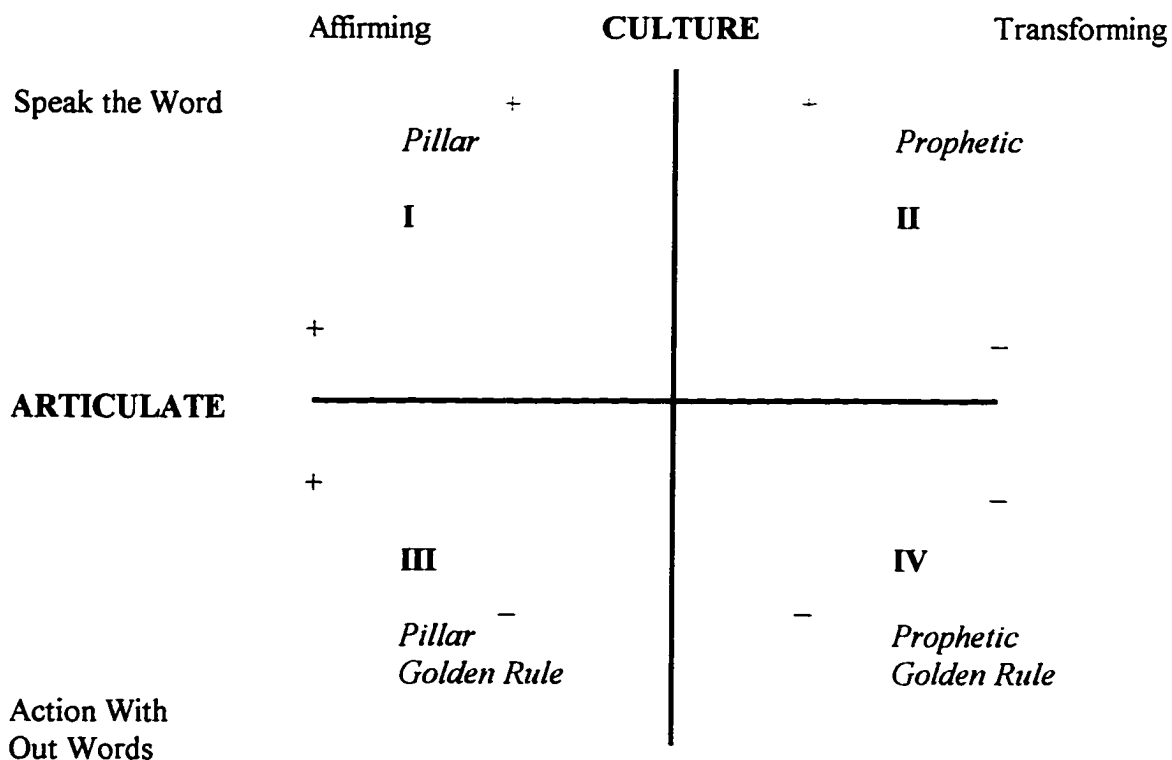
instead of being a litmus test through which to understand life and this world for better or worse. It did not show me a new way of viewing life and my relationship to God as a follower of Jesus. Instead, the church gave me additional support for what the world taught me. This idea of the church being a simple partner (with a minor role) with the culture has made it difficult for me, as it has for other mainline Christians, to divorce myself from what society has said about the church and let the church speak for itself. This phenomenon is not unique to the church in which I was raised and CCB. It can be found in many mainline churches.

The mainline's and CCB's relationship with the culture leads to two questions. First, we need to consider whether it is important for the men and women in our churches to be able to speak about their faith. Do they need to be able to talk with one another and those outside the church about the content of their faith? And if it is important, as I believe it is, then we need to examine how churches like CCB can improve their capability for sharing what is at the heart of their faith.

The second challenge, if it is agreed that mainline people need to speak about their faith, is to discern if such talk will naturally mesh with the language and ideals of the culture as has often been the habit of the mainline church for many decades, or if speaking in explicitly Christian terms means that what people of faith say will not mesh with our society. Should the church be one of many pillars that always seek to uphold the current culture, or should the church seek to gain its own unique direction from the gospel (which often does not mesh with the norms of our culture) and then guide people of faith to a responsible way to live in the midst of a world that is often hostile to the Christian faith?

As seen in the chart below, a church has four basic options about how it will address these

two issues. First, it must choose whether or not it will seek to articulate the faith. Will a church place its emphasis on sharing the people's experiences of God in their lives and in the scriptural story; will they seek to primarily live out their faith by their good actions, or a combination of the two? Second, the church must decide whether it will seek to be at one with the culture or, instead, speak with its own voice, willing to critique the cultural norms. Or will it seek to let the culture critique the faith as well as the faith being able to critique the culture depending upon the situation being addressed? The following chart is an over simplified scheme of a complex relationship, but placed in this format helps to differentiate some of the issues that will be addressed. Later in the paper the complexity of the relationships will be dealt with, especially in the discussion of H. Richard Niebuhr's work, Christ and Culture.



Most churches will find themselves falling in one of the quadrants most of the time. What is more difficult for most churches is to allow themselves to be drawn into all of the quadrants and let the implications of each influence the others. CCB, along with many other mainline churches, typically finds itself in quadrant III. In the following chapter I will consider how and why CCB, as well as other churches, might want to push its edges and make itself be influenced by the other quadrants.

In the mainline church, many of us have been uncertain about whether or not we need to speak about our faith. This discomfort has led to the apprehension many have in sharing our faith, especially with outsiders, as was the case in my going out to visit new comers. I believe part of the cause of this is that the mainline is not sure what the content of our faith is about. We

struggle with how we fit in with the culture, most knowing that we are somehow different, but fearful of appearing at odds with our society. Thus, we are left unsure of how or what we should share. The church needs to clarify for itself what it is about. Without doing this, we have little significance in the lives of the participants in our congregations.

The challenge that I now find, as will be further discussed later, is that scripturally the faith is not about finding a way to assist the powers that be in bettering our society. I find the Bible to be a challenge to the way the world is and believe that if we follow our faith, in many instances we will be forced to speak and live in ways that go against the norms of our culture.

In the following, two levels of challenge will be addressed. First, there is a need to find ways to enable mainline church goers to articulate their faith, with themselves and outsiders. Second, the mainline church needs to consider its relationship with the culture. But before we go into more detail on how and what should be spoken, we need to get to know the Congregational Church of Brookfield, the church that took on this project.

THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF BROOKFIELD & THE TOWN OF BROOKFIELD

Driving into town on State Route 133 from Bridgewater, the Congregational Church of Brookfield's steeple can be seen looming up into the sky. The church sits prominently in the center of the historic village, literally built upon the rock ridge that travels through the middle of town, where it has played an important role in the life of the area since even before there was a Brookfield. In fact the town was formed around the church. In the early 1750's, people residing in the area now known as Brookfield petitioned the state to allow them to meet in their homes for worship during the winter months (November - April), due to the hardship of travel to the churches in the three neighboring towns of Danbury, Newtown and New Milford. In 1757, the year-round ecclesiastical society of Newbury was formed, taking portions of each of the three towns, and what was to become known as the Congregational Church of Brookfield was built in the center of this territory. When the town was incorporated in 1788, the residents voted to name the town after the church's first pastor (who was still serving at the time), Thomas Brooks. For the better part of the next 150 years, the area was a rural village with a few mills and between 2000 and 5000 residents. Then in the late 1950's a rapid period of growth began and the town quickly became primarily a bedroom community.

The Church's Demographic Picture:

Today, Brookfield has one humanmade and two natural barriers making up three of its four borders. Its western and eastern borders are both large lakes (one of which, Candlewood Lake, is the largest lake in Connecticut), with no way to enter Brookfield from the West and

only one bridge entering from the East. Although not right on the town line, Interstate 84 closely follows its Southern border. Finally, to the North is New Milford. There are only one main and three smaller roads that cross from Brookfield into New Milford.

Although some come from nearby towns, the majority of CCB's active membership comes from within Brookfield. To a large extent this appears to be a result of the physical barriers that separate Brookfield from other towns. The town has a population of about 14,000 and its period of rapid growth appears to have come to an end. Even though just forty years ago Brookfield was primarily a rural town and it retains some of that image, today most consider it a bedroom community. The residents are almost all white (97%), married (67%), generally well educated (90.5% of adults have completed high school and 41.2% college) and economically well off (the mean family income is \$76,213).

The members of CCB generally classify the people of Brookfield and the church as upper-middle class, commuters, and successful. For the most part this image is correct, but leaves out a fair number who do not fit this mold. Regardless of those who do not fit the stereotype, the general perception stands that we are a people of good fortune.

Some people feel a sense of isolation within the community. CCB is in Brookfield Center, but there is no town center where residents might encounter one another. Almost all of the shopping is found in strip malls and large discount stores that cater to the greater Danbury area and the town has almost no sidewalks. Without local stores or walkways where residents might gain a sense of community, many are left with no other options to seek belonging except in organizations including the town's churches.

CCB had a membership role of 584 people in 1993, yet its average attendance was nearly

250, and far more of Brookfield's residents consider it their church than are found on the church rolls. "No I haven't stepped foot inside the building in over 20 years, but my grandfather was married in this church, of course it's my church," say many of the town's residents when they want to have a family member baptized, married or buried by the church.

CCB also has had a long history of having the town's leaders as members, even though this is less the case today than a few decades ago. In interviews, members of the church stated that they believe the church is an essential part of the town's culture and vice versa. They also stressed the importance of CCB's relationship with the town. It's therefore not surprising that the membership views CCB as a *pillar church*, one that "stands at the center of cultural life for the people who call it home," as described by Carl Dudley and Sally Johnson in Energizing the Congregation.²

Much of CCB's membership places great value in its Congregationalist roots and the process of democracy within the church. One example of the church's ties to congregationalism can be found in the extensive survey produced by Hartford Seminary that the congregation completed in the Fall of 1994. In one section, it was asked in what denomination one was raised. On the lengthy list, United Church of Christ was listed, Congregational was not. Numerous people wrote in Congregational.³ This tie to our Congregational roots is also demonstrated in CCB's extensive committee structure (about 150 committee positions) and lengthy process of

² Carl S. Dudley & Sally A. Johnson, Energizing the Congregation, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 99.

³ Although some of these can be attributed to poor name recognition of the United Church of Christ, some of the respondents specifically wrote that when they were born it was not the UCC, but Congregational Church and they still see themselves as Congregationalists, not members of the UCC.

change in the church.

The Church's Way of Life:

CCB places an emphasis on each person's right and responsibility to form their own opinion without coercion from the whole body. This can be seen in the discomfort the congregation has when it is suggested that the church make a unified stand on an issue. In 1994, a few members of the Outreach Council (missions) made an announcement that they would have a table set up during coffee hour for those who wished to write letters in opposition to the construction of a casino in Bridgeport, Connecticut. The effects of this simple voluntary stand were felt over the next few years in complaints that it imposed one group's view upon the whole congregation. Because of this fear of coercion, the church generally avoids controversial issues.

As is true in many mainline churches, CCB has a full range of the lifestyles within its membership described by Tex Sample in his book U.S. Lifestyles and Mainline Churches. Yet as seen above, the church is often stereotyped in the same way as the town is, as primarily made up of people in the historical mainstream of society, or what Sample classifies as the "cultural middle." These are the people who vote in most elections, are well educated, career oriented, believe in civic responsibility, and work from within the established system. This group is made up of people who have *made it* and those who are trying to. Sample describes two other groups in society, the cultural left and the cultural right. His designations, although not complete, help us to get a better understanding of the people found within the church. Although they are a minority, CCB also has more than a handful of the less educated, hardworking, community-rooted people that Sample describes as the "cultural right." This group is more likely to believe in

absolutes, have set values, and be biblically based literalists.

In addition, CCB has a large share of people on a journey seeking personal fulfillment with a strong sense of inner direction, the "cultural left." Sample writes that for these people on the left, "The obligations of community, business, family, country, and faith failed to capture (their) commitment."⁴ This group is the most diverse of the three and is also the least likely to be involved in organized religious activities. They may drift through a church, but usually do not stay long. They can be seen in those who often come through the church hoping for personal growth. There is often a one to two year deep involvement and then they are gone. They are the most difficult group for the mainline church to reach, yet are an important group to understand, as baby boomers often fit in this category and CCB (as well as the town of Brookfield) has an exaggerated number of people from this generation.

Along with some of those on the "cultural right," it is the "cultural middle" that provides continuity to CCB. Even though this group in the "cultural middle" only makes up a portion of the congregation, much of the life of the church is directed towards them, since that is the way the congregation perceives itself.

Introduction to The Theology of The Congregational Church of Brookfield:

The members of the church find it easiest to express their faith in actions. A common phrase that can be heard in the congregation is, "I believe that God is present in the actions of those around me." "I see God's presence in the care of my family and friends -- and at times even

⁴ Tex Sample, U.S. Lifestyles and Mainline Churches, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), p. 25.

from the unexpected good will of a stranger." God is not seen, served, expressed, or discovered by confessional statements or proselytizing, so much as God can be found in caring actions. The old cliché, "actions speak louder than words," continues to be believed at CCB. Efforts in the past to form a committee on community relations (evangelism) have been thwarted immediately. On the other hand, the church has an outreach council made up of two separate committees, a mission committee and a church in society committee, with a total of fifteen members. The council is currently primarily involved in the allocation of mission money and the education of the congregation on mission efforts, but the structure of the by-laws provides a means for hands-on action in the community with a church in society committee.

Another phrase that is often heard at CCB is that "God can be found from within the inner self," suggesting the community's faith includes a privatization of some aspects of experiences with God. But that does not mean that faith is a fully private matter. In interviews and in group meetings where members have described what is important about CCB to them, the majority have said that it's the community and the nurture that is given. God's love can be seen in the community's care for one another. Yet, as one member said, "There is little evidence of deep sacrificial caring within the community or beyond the church into the world." Many members speak about the heart and soul of the church being the way we treat one another, but as in most churches, the actions do not always match the words.

How is God's presence spoken about by members of CCB? When asked in interviews, most respondents said that we speak of God's presence best by being good role models of God's teaching to love one another. Our faith is spoken of in our actions and the way that we treat one another. When asked to be more explicit about their faith, many were concerned about "sounding

too religious." There is a sense that most of what we believe has some sort of logic to it that most Americans would agree with regardless of whether or not they are Christian, as if the life of a Christian follows a natural sense of order that could be arrived at by any clear thinking individual. Thus, many do not see a need to speak in terms of the faith, if our culture's language will do just as well.

Few people speak of God intervening in their lives or calling them to see the world in a way different than the culture calls them to do so. God is seen as active primarily in other people's loving, caring involvement or action. It is also common for laity and clergy alike to differentiate CCB's faith from "the fundamentalists and evangelicals". If the mainline faith is similar to the culture's norms and the fundamentalist's and evangelical's faith is stereotyped as different than societal standards, then this differentiation should not be a surprise as it fits with CCB's identifying with the town and not wanting to appear too different.

The use of religious language is also avoided in casual conversation, although it is used from the pulpit. At first this may make the community look as though it lacks faith or the ability to speak about it. But speaking in more "secular" terms, faith is expressed. Members commonly refer to the importance of community and the fellowship of support in the church, as well as talk about what it means to be a Christian and how that is reflected in lifestyle choices. Although it is not a use of traditional religious language, it can be an expression of faith for people who either lack or are uncomfortable speaking about Jesus Christ.

Although uncomfortable doing it, there are some who wonder if we should be more explicit in the way that we speak about God. Even though they are reluctant to do so, many members of CCB think that we should be more willing to talk about and share our faith, as well as

improve our comfort level in using more "religious" language.

The Issue To Be Addressed:

My experience and reading tell me that the preceding is similar to the reactions many people in mainline *pillar* type churches as a whole have in regards to evangelism and speaking about one's faith. Yet there are other reasons that I believe that CCB has not needed to or been encouraged to be more focused in the way that it speaks of its faith in the last few decades. I suspect that one important reason is that the number of church members and church attendance have remained strong over the years without any explicit effort to bring in new members for many years, other than the assimilation of those who have expressed an interest in CCB either by regular attendance or asking to join.⁵

One reason the church has not created an ongoing church growth committee is that it does not appear to need it. Even though members move away and drift from the church, with Brookfield's growth over the last four decades and the number of transferees entering the town each year, plenty of newcomers enter the church each year to not only maintain the church's size, but even add growth. Without any paid advertising in local papers or the phone book, or signs posted in the town, CCB sits in a prominent location that attracts newcomers who have the perseverance to find there way into the life of the church.

Secondly, the meeting house only comfortably seats about 150 people without opening up

⁵ An effort was made in the early eighties to be a more welcoming church. This included among other things starting a bridging program and using designated greeters at worship. There have also been efforts made to make CCB more hospitable to those who attend, including enlarging the parking lot and creating a second hour of church school so that families with children could attend either of CCB's two worship services each Sunday morning.

the doors to the church parlor (Brooks Hall). With an average worship attendance of well over 200 people each week, CCB has needed two services to accommodate everyone. And even with two services, the larger of the two can be overcrowded many times of the year, making it difficult to find a seat on some Sundays.

Without having to attract new members, the church has not been forced to reflect as much as it might on what it means to be a person of faith. It is not difficult to discuss what one believes with people who believe the same things. Republicans seem to be able to speak to Republicans and Democrats with Democrats, sharing their political views without the need to explain the virtue of their ideas. But when a liberal sits down with a conservative, far more explanation is needed to help the other understand why one would take a stand with which the other is not familiar.

The Challenge:

The challenge comes in explaining our faith to outsiders. As a minister I can explain my faith quite easily to other church members. The greater challenge comes in explaining what my faith is about to my five year old daughter. Uncolored by indoctrination from the church, she curiously pushes me to explain aspects of my faith that are not always well thought out. Simple answers explaining how Jesus rose from the dead do not satisfy and when asked why we say the resurrection took place three days after Jesus was crucified on Good Friday and celebrate Easter on Sunday, even her simple math at four knows that from Friday to Sunday isn't three days unless you are a travel agent selling a three day/two night package. Her questions have helped me, or forced me, to consider and explain many things that I had previously taken for granted.

The same is true in efforts of church growth. When sharing with outsiders, members are forced to explain their faith in ways they do not have to when speaking to other members. Because CCB has not had to work on attracting new members, it has not been a necessity to thoroughly critique our faith so that it can be explained to prospective members. Therefore, it should not be a surprise that some members of the church believe that we need to be challenged to be a more reflective community and struggle with what it means to be a person of faith.

The issue to be addressed is not whether or not we should be acting in ways that are true to our faith. I think there is little question that this is a must. What needs to be discussed is how these actions relate to the speaking and sharing of our faith story. Many churches can act out their faith, but stumble when attempting to articulate what that faith is about or the reason behind the actions. When we only focus on the *actions*, we may come to believe that we simply need to do a certain number of good deeds, but that some other areas of our lives are outside the realm of our faith. This is often the case for people that believe their jobs do not allow them to act out their faith.

There is a need for the integration of our faith into the whole of our lives. To assist in this integration, our God consciousness needs to be raised to a level where our faith is not seen as something that is only lived out in the church and possibly with our families and friends. The regular sharing of the faith helps connect our daily lives with our beliefs. This creates a sunrise to sundown faith, as we are reminded what is at the foundation of our very being. We can learn from people of other faiths, like the Muslims who pray five times a day, regardless of where they might be. Then we can join with the Psalmist in saying, "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."(Psalm 118:24)

Is sharing the faith something we need to do? In recent years there have been plenty of reports documenting the decline of the mainline church, both in its relevance and in numbers. Many mainline churches are in a state of decline. But there are others, like CCB, that are maintaining their size and enthusiasm without an organized evangelism program or attempts to help their membership speak about and share their faith more clearly. Is there any reason for these churches to change? Or should these churches simply be seen as different from churches that are involved in such activities? In asking this question, we need to look at what it means to be a "golden rule" Christian.

CHAPTER II
THEOLOGY: GOLDEN RULE CHRISTIANITY
Behavioral & Believing Christians
In everything do to others as you would have them do to you.
Matthew 7:12a

When asked what is at the heart of their faith, many members of the Congregational Church of Brookfield say the *golden rule*. Their stated reason for being a part of the church is to be a good member of the community whose actions are caring and just. It is not unusual for mainline Christians to see participation in a pillar type church, as described by Carl Dudley and Sally Johnson, as a part of good citizenship.¹ Their church participation becomes one of numerous ways that they care for others. In this section I will look at how many members of CCB (as well as other mainline church members) understand their faith and the way that it interacts with the world, as golden rule Christians. I will consider how this faith meshes with the gospel and tradition and then consider whether other alternative ways of viewing the faith might appropriately be introduced. To begin, we need to define what it means to be a golden rule Christian and its implications on the faith.

Golden Rule Christians are typically people who believe that actions are more important than words. The way a person lives out his or her life is more important than what is behind the actions, and certainly than speaking about how and why one should live in a particular way. They seek tolerance in differing views, respecting the rights of the individual and state a desire for their institutions to be inclusive. There are limits to acceptable behavior, but within those parameters there is a desire to include as many people as possible, the big tent concept. Most of these

¹ Carl S. Dudley & Sally A. Johnson, Energizing the Congregation, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993).

Christians are also likely to blur the lines between the church and the world. The way in which the church lives out its faith must mesh with what they believe to be the realities of society. They are apt to shy away from idealistic concepts that go beyond the accepted possibilities of their culture. Golden Rule Christians are likely to try to improve the world, not believing that there is much hope in trying to radically change it.

According to Nancy T. Ammerman, Golden Rule Christians find meaning "not in cognitive or ideological structures, not in answers to life's great questions, but in practices that cohere into something the person can call a 'good life'"² These Golden Rule Christians are this worldly, inclusive and do not read the Bible literally. According to Ammerman, many sociologists and theologians view these people as less developed Christians, those whose beliefs have not fully formed. She argues that this is a mistake to compare Golden Rule Christians with the Orthodox as if they can be found on a growth continuum. Instead she presents Golden Rule Christians as simply different and needing to be understood on their own terms.

Ammerman defines Golden Rule Christians as those who do not adhere to specific tenets of faith, rather they follow a code of living that includes caring and seeking to leave the world a better place than they found it, stating,

Most important to "Golden Rule" Christians is care for relationships, doing good deeds, and looking for opportunities to provide care and comfort for people in need. Their goal is neither changing another's beliefs nor changing the whole political system. They would like the world to be a bit better for their having inhabited it, but they harbor no dreams of grand revolutions. The emphasis on relationships among Golden Rule Christians begins with care for friends, family, neighborhood, and congregation. In the neighborhood, they value friendliness and helpfulness. Many of these folk know what it is to be mobile and therefore adjusting to life in a new location. "Doing unto others" means welcoming

² Nancy T. Ammerman, "Golden Rule Christianity: Lived Religion in the American Mainstream", Candler School of Theology, Emory University, p. 7.

newcomers and offering routine neighborly assistance. Beyond such routine care, they are also convinced that a good person invests in relationships.³

Ammerman argues that this practical form of Christianity ought to be seen as a valid expression of faith, instead of being seen as a second class form of more orthodox followings. She acknowledges that Golden Rule Christians generally have a lower level of commitment to their churches and that they are not clear on what they believe. But she does not see this as a reason for alarm.

While I agree with Ammerman that there is much to be learned from this pervasive group, and that it is important to acknowledge they exist from a descriptive view, as a religious leader I see some theological problems in the way that golden rule Christians seek to live out their faith. There are three aspects of a golden rule faith that are right and with which I agree should be maintained. 1. It is a part of Golden Rule Christians' faith that tells them that Christians do not have an exclusive corner on the market of how one might find God. 2. Golden rule Christianity stresses that the way in which Christians live out their faith is of great importance and scripturally faithful. 3. Golden rule rejects a literal reading of scripture. These three elements of the Golden rule faith differentiate it adherents from other people of faith and should be retained by the mainline.

On the other hand, I believe there are at least four practical and biblical concerns that need to be raised in golden rule Christian's lack of focus on what it is in the make up of their faith that is different from the culture in which they live and their lack of motivation to share their faith. 1. A congregation or denomination needs clarity in the definition of what the faith is about in order

³ Ammerman, p. 8.

to maintain its groups theological identity, its direction, and its energy to act. 2. Biblically speaking, I believe there is a mandate to speak about and share our faith. 3. With ambiguity of what the faith is about, there is a greater risk of subversion. When what the people believe is not focused, the church becomes an easy target for ideas that are alien to the faith. 4. A sharing of the faith makes it possible to teach and for others to join in the community of faith. These are foundational elements for a healthy faith community. They are not criteria for the individual. Each person has his or her own special gifts and abilities for expressing faith. Some people of faith will not be able or suited to do some of the above. Just as some people may serve in choir, while others still participate in this praise by being present in worship while the anthems are sung. What is important, is that within each faith community, there are people who are able to do each of the above and that the faith community values their contribution to the whole.

Questions to be Explored:

A story here will help to illustrate this point. In the mid-1980's I worked at Allen House, a county-run shelter for abused, neglected and delinquent children and youth in Cincinnati. The shelter had gone through a difficult period where it had to address internal abuse and overcrowding. Allen House was a catch basin for children who had no other place to be sent and the shelter often ended up with some of the most difficult children in county welfare system. Much of the staff's time was spent breaking up fights, restraining children, and often sending them off to juvenile detention. Understaffed, it was a trying place to work and as a result had a high rate of burn out and turnover for its care givers. Many care givers quit after a year or two of service or less. But most of those who remained and were able to provide healthy care for the

children could be placed in one of two categories. There were those who had themselves grown up in foster care and shelters and felt a connection with the children and understood their needs on a personal level. I discovered that the others that remained saw their work as a part of their faith.

This second group was not unlike Golden Rule Christians in that they thought that their actions were a way to express their faith. But they were different. They regularly attended churches, prayer groups, and Bible studies (many of them on a daily basis), where they were taken away from the troubles they faced at work and found renewal in the sharing of their faith with other Christians. Away from work, in their faith settings, they spoke in explicitly religious language that they were not allowed to use at work and gained sustenance in the world view they shared with other people of faith. This world view was based on their faith language that told them God's view of the world was radically different than what their culture claimed about the world and the *hopeless* children with whom they worked. This gave them the strength, so they told explained me, to face a culture and especially the place that they worked that had a radically different world view than that of their faith. They were empowered by their faith sharing away from Allen house, to be able to care for and maintain a sense of hope for the children that the culture told them were hopeless

Therefore, I have practical questions that need to be addressed. Without time spent with other Christians sharing and struggling with what their faith is about, do Golden Rule Christians lose their rootedness? Do they have less of an opportunity as those who do share their faith, to be strengthened in their ability to try to live out their faith? Without taking the time to discuss their faith and struggle with what their faith is about, does the foundation of their faith simply become

the need to be good people because good citizenship is important? Without sharing, is the content of their faith in danger of becoming murky, blurred with cultural standards, and having little left to sustain why they should live their lives in this caring way?

Barriers Between Faith and the World:

Without a language and world view that is derived from the Christian faith, it is likely that the church will not be able to retain anything that makes it different and therefore meaningful. The culture's world view is likely to become that of the church's, with the church just being one place in the midst of many to live out the way that society as a whole would encourage people to live.

This golden rule faith is commonly found in "pillar" type churches (as well as other type churches), and to a great extent is how for many decades CCB has lived as one of the standard bearers of the town's culture. Over a hundred years ago, this was also a part of CCB's identity. But in the last fifty years, the town's identity has changed. Some time ago, one of the primary factors in the life of Brookfield was CCB; the town influenced the church and the church influenced the town and society as a whole. This is no longer the case today and the church's identity needs to be reevaluated. The accommodation mainline churches have made to our culture have led to the loss of much of the meaning of the faith. When the faith is to a large extent a support (or pillar) of the culture, there is difficulty in separating what the church is about from the world at large. The theological model of extreme golden rule Christianity is the abandonment of the Christian faith, replacing it with the norms or morality of society. This model fails to take the faith seriously and suggests the need to consider a new model that recognizes the value of

elements of the golden rule, yet also grapples with the faith itself.

None of the preceding suggests that the church should ignore the culture. The golden rule as offered in Matthew 7:12 is a valuable lesson in Christian living. But its value is lost, if it is reduced to a rule that stands by itself without the rest of the gospel helping to shape it and give it meaning. There is an old story about an astronomer and a seminarian on an airplane. On getting acquainted, the astronomer bragged that he learned all that he needed to know about Christianity in kindergarten -- "The Golden Rule". The seminarian retorted that she had also learned all that she needed to know about astronomy -- "Twinkle, twinkle, little star"! Clearly anything can be reduced to the ridiculous. My fear is that when Christians rely on the Golden Rule as their primary guide in the faith without reflecting on and sharing the rest of the content of the Gospel, the Golden Rule is reduced to something that has little meaning and the faith becomes ambiguous.

Without the rest of the teachings of the faith, the Golden Rule also easily becomes what it already is for many people within society at large, "Do unto others before they do to you" or "Do to others what they do to you." This is a subversion of Gospel, with the faith losing its identity and becoming a guide to living in a competitive capitalistic society. A way of living as a caring person fully aware of the potential dangers in our culture.

Living In Tension:

A new model needs to be considered that would let the church live in tension. CCB and other mainline churches must let the forces of scripture, faith tradition, CCB's tradition, and the culture interact with one another, pulling and pushing to question the meaning behind each one's

claims. This is a restoration of the polarities that should naturally exist between each of these elements that have historically influenced the faith. Thus far, I have discussed what is, what the people of CCB have inherited from their predecessors and the way in which many mainline people live out their faith. I am now able to look at what might be, or ways in which we might live out the faith more fully.

The Golden Rule is a simple and helpful piece of the gospel, but it is only valuable when it is backed up by the rest of scripture and tradition. A reporter is said to have asked Karl Barth to sum up his faith, to which he replied, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." This children's ditty may be a simplistic thought for many, but for Barth, it was backed up by his many years of study and profound faith. It was able to have meaning to Barth because of his extensive knowledge of the language of faith and what that meant and what the Bible told him.

The Golden Rule itself has Christian value and meaning only when it is informed by the faith and its unique language and world view. Most other major religions and philosophies have rules that are similar to Matthew 7:12. What makes the Golden Rule unique is its meaning as interpreted by the Christian faith as it interacts with the world. One of the dangers of living solely by the Golden Rule apart from a sharing of the faith is that the rule becomes a means of simply trying to live well in the way that our society might have us live instead of critically seeking to follow Jesus.

In their book, Resident Aliens, Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon rightly point out that one of the mistakes of the mainline church has been assuming that its primary social task is to

support the American concept of democracy.⁴ The mainline has attempted to build upon itself as a part of the culture instead of as something unique, namely a church that views the world through the gospel. The primary social argument within the mainline has digressed to whether it should be seeking a politically liberal or conservative agenda, as if these were the only two options, when the church's real agenda should not be accommodating to societal norms. The church's business is about sharing God's reality.

A more helpful theological model is John Yoder's concept of a confessing church which rejects both the conservatives' individualism which lacks an offer for how to live in the world as a socially responsible people and the liberals' activism which lacks theological underpinning. The confessing church is a radically different way of viewing the world that assumes that the church should be about following Christ in all things.⁵ Certainly the confessing church is likely to come up with some of the same ideas as the liberals and the conservatives in the culture. But the way that they come to those decisions is based on different presumptions and often lived out in completely different ways.

Liberals and conservatives alike are apt to judge their actions by whether or not they are realistic. Can or should our goals be accomplished as judged by the reality of our culture? The confessing church is not troubled by (though it needs to be aware of) what the society believes is practical or possible. The confessing church is interested in what is "real". Is reality what the

⁴ Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, Resident Aliens, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), p. 32.

⁵ John Howard Yoder, "A People in the World: Theological Interpretation", The Concept of the Believer's Church, ed. James Leo Garrett Jr., (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1969), pp. 252-83.

world claims to be true? Or is reality the way that God says that things are as revealed in Jesus? The confessing church recognizes that evil exists and permeates the world. It confesses its participation in the ills of our culture and then says that what is real, true and right is God's vision of the world. What may seem unrealistic or impractical to the culture has little to do with the way the confessing church lives out its life. This is not an other worldly view. It is fully aware of and concerned with the world. The confessing church takes on the challenge of seeking to view the world in a radically new way, as seen through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. And if the world is seen through these eyes, what our faith proposes is practical, reasonable and realistic.

Hauerwas and Willimon also note that one of the errors of the mainline churches has been relying on seeking change in the world solely through societal structures. They want society and the government to uphold and create the changes they believe are necessary, using lobbyists and encouraging their parishioners to write letters to their legislators. An environment has been created where churches believe that the only way for change to occur is through the government instead of taking the responsibility to live in a way that meshes with the church's unique world view. The church has become dependent on the culture for direction and assistance when it should be about living out what it finds in the gospel.

The Faith and Culture:

None of the preceding suggests a dogmatic approach to the faith. Instead, it calls people of faith to seek to understand how the church relates to the world. Put another way, we need to look at how God is revealed to us and how we are guided in understanding what we claim to be reality. H. Richard Niebuhr's book Christ and Culture helps clarify the ways in which we might

understand how God relates to the world and therefore how the church ought to relate to and be influenced by the world. In the book, Niebuhr suggests five different models of how the church might consider Christ interacting with our culture.

1. **CHRIST AGAINST CULTURE:** This view suggests that an individual must choose between Christ and culture, an either or challenge. Christ is the one that saves the individual from the world. Christ shows us the way that is utterly different than the world's way.
2. **CHRIST OF CULTURE:** This is the opposite of Christ against culture. There is no distinction between Christ and the culture, suggesting that Christ represents the best of the world. Jesus is just a very good person, a model. The faith can be obtained through worldly reason.
3. **CHRIST ABOVE CULTURE:** In this model, Christ is never fully immersed in the culture. Christ helps the culture find a better way, guiding it from above.
4. **CHRIST AND CULTURE IN PARADOX:** There is a tension between Christ and the culture. There is a need for a constant dialogue between the two. The world is never fully saved until the end. We live between the culture and Christ.
5. **CHRIST THE TRANSFORMER OF CULTURE:** In this fifth model, Christ is the transforming agent of change, constantly rebirthing the kingdom. Despite the existence of sin in the world, God can and will make a difference.

In what way should people of faith view God's relation to the culture? Golden rule Christians would be likely to accept the Christ of Culture model. The opposite extreme of this view, if all five were placed on a continuum, would be Christ Against Culture. Neither of these views seems satisfactory. The first, Christ of Culture, subverts the faith, imposing cultural norms in place of

the faith. The second, Christ Against Culture, ignores the interaction that the Bible suggests that God has with the world. Nor, would I suggest, any of the other three on their own be appropriate models on their own. Instead, people of faith and the church, must be able to encounter each situation and judge, through their faith and interaction in the world, which model is the most helpful in every situation and discussion. I do not believe there is one easy answer that fits all situations. Instead, the church must encourage its participants to be thinking people willing to struggle to discern how God interacts with the world, and the world with God.

Faith Tradition and Language:

The mainline church has been working under the assumption that the faith that it follows is rational in the eyes of the world. It is not. And according to Hauerwas and Willimon, "In acting as if the church's ethics were something that make sense to every thinking, sensitive, caring American despite his or her faith or lack of it, the church is underestimating the *peculiarity* of Christian ethics."⁶ The way that Christians view the world is not something one can come up with by oneself. It is based in the faith tradition and language that has been shared over the generations of people who have shared how God has entered the world and their lives. To be a part of the church and to follow the God we know in Jesus is to be a part of that tradition and it is essential to become immersed in that culture and language. It is in this language that we learn about God and a new world view.

This does not mean that the church should be unaware of the culture or not be involved in the world. To know and be able to act in the world the church must be able to speak with in the

⁶ Hauerwas and Willimon, p. 71.

world in its language. An essential aspect of the Christian faith is the ability to be in dialogue with the culture. If churches fail to acknowledge the importance of the language of the culture, a conversation is not possible. Neither the church nor the culture will understand one another. On the other hand, if the church's language becomes the same as society's, the discussion becomes the culture speaking with itself -- again with no real dialogue occurring. The church must also be able to be influenced by the culture as well as by itself.

Churches like CCB and many in the mainline, have given away much of their language and story to those they often stereotype as fundamentalists and evangelicals. In fear of being associated with these other groups, they have abandoned such talk. But this language and the stories are theirs. They need to be reclaimed and interpreted by the people in mainline churches in ways that they can give them meaning and identity to people who have traditionally felt at home in mainline churches.

Ammerman is correct in her assertion that the mainline churches are not somehow "lower on the scale" of religiosity than these other churches. They are different. But that does not mean that Golden Rule Christians do not have something to learn from the evangelicals and vice versa. For the Golden rule Christians, the lesson is the need to reclaim the language and the stories and the capacity to share the faith.

A Fear of Articulating the Faith:

Golden rule Christians typically avoid speaking about faith experiences with others, even if they are life shaping. According to Stephen Carter in The Culture of Disbelief, the mainstream culture of America has created an image that religion is a private matter that need not, and should

not be shared with others; faith is seen as personal. As a result there has been a "flight from religious dialogue." Those who wish to be a part of the culture tend to have a fear of discussing their faith.⁷ Sadly, this leaves many Golden Rule Christians (who often are a part of the mainstream culture) with no one to share their faith experiences as they seek to grow in their faith. Martin Copenhaver tells a story that helps to illustrate the inability to share their faith that many mainline Christians feel:

A prominent business leader once made a lunch date with the pastor to discuss what the man described as "something very important." Over the course of the lunch, after they had bobbed on the surface of pleasantries for some time, the man finally got around to the reason he had asked his pastor to lunch. Several years earlier, he confided, he had had an intense religious experience. He told his pastor that, as strange as it might sound, he was convinced that he had actually heard the voice of God. He still did not know what to make of the experience, but he knew that he would never be the same again. In response, the pastor said, "Well, that's wonderful. Would you be willing to share that experience with the members of our congregation?" The man replied, "Are you kidding? I haven't even told my *wife!*"⁸

Golden Rule Christians place a heavy emphasis on relationships and the power that can be found in them for healing and growth. Sadly, when unable to discuss faith experiences in explicitly religious terms (or any terms at all), even with those they are the closest to, growth can not occur as it might if they could enter into a conversation about their faith.

Golden Rule Christians' faith experience and world view are real. Unfortunately these people's faith development is retarded when they do not speak about their faith. Kirk Hadaway and David Roozen are right that many people, even in the mainline, "expect churches to be *religious* institutions, not social-service organizations or social clubs." But instead, they point

⁷ Stephen L. Carter, The Culture of Disbelief, (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

⁸ Martin B. Copenhaver, To Begin at the Beginning, (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1994), p. 255.

out, "Mainstream churches have appropriated the 'don't ask, don't tell' approach to God that guides public discourse."⁹ This has left mainstream churches speaking primarily in psychological and business terms, drawn directly from the mainstream culture, leaving people in the church without a clear way to discuss their faith experiences that are dramatically different than the culture.

They are classified in many ways, *the religious left, Golden Rule Christians, mainline Christians, & mainstream Christians*. Along with Ammerman, I agree that these people of faith are too pervasive a group to ignore, that they have much to contribute to the religious dialogue, and that they have a legitimate faith. Yet, we do them a disservice to suggest that the idea of speaking about and sharing one's faith is not important. It is essential to struggle with what our faith is about with one another, if we wish to nurture our faith and the faith of those around us. To do so is a part of being in relationship with one another and God.

Finally, we fail to recognize the diversity that is found in every congregation if we claim that all the members can be classified in one group. What is important to remember, in mainline churches, is that golden rule believers are just one among many pervasive groups. In seeking to help a congregation grow in its faith, Paul reminds us that though we are one body, there are many gifts (I Corinthians 12). We need to be aware that among the people, each may be able to grow in differing ways. It is appropriate that there are some who find that they are best able to live as the congregation's hands in the world, seeking to live in ways that further justice in society but may not be able to speak about the faith. Yet this does not mean that the church as a whole

⁹ C. Kirk Hadaway & David A. Roozen, Rerouting the Protestant Mainstream, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), p. 76.

should not be struggling to be able to speak about the faith more clearly or share that faith with the world.

A more appropriate model for mainline pillar churches needs to be considered. A model is needed that nurtures the tensions that naturally exist between the culture, scripture, and tradition. When these elements are encouraged to interact with one another, the faith is best able to take hold of peoples lives. But this can only happen when the stories and language of our faith are taken seriously as the congregation seeks to share with one another and the world.

CHAPTER III
THEOLOGY: BIBLE, TRADITION, & CHURCH
Go therefore teaching all the nations ... even unto the end of the earth.
Matthew 28:19-20

In order to better understand what role sharing the faith should have in the mainline church and what language should be used, we need to look at a number of influences that shape and direct us in our lives. In their book, Method In Ministry, James and Evelyn Whitehead propose a method of theological reflection that discourages the simplistic decision making process of only seeking out one body of information that has in the past led to absolute answers that do not stand the test of time. In any pastoral concern, the Whiteheads see a need to seek to understand three areas, "tradition", "cultural information", and "personal experience". These three factors then need to be allowed to interact with one another in a dialogue that lets each question the others. By doing this, the Whiteheads believe the temptation to create certitudes that only take one area seriously will be eliminated. Using Whiteheads' model in this chapter, tradition will be seen as scripture and church history. Cultural information will be the influences and generally accepted norms of society. And personal experience will be viewed as the current life of CCB and its ministers.

For many decades, the mainline church has allowed cultural information to dictate much of the discussion, at times as if tradition and personal experience did not exist. A grave mistake would be made, if in reaction we were to give dominance to tradition or personal experience. Instead, a dialogue needs to take place where all three factors are taken seriously. But in this chapter, as we consider how people of faith might share their faith, we will especially focus on the two areas that have been neglected by the mainline in recent decades..

For all the ambivalence in taking sharing the faith more seriously that a church like CCB understandably feels, there is a clear mandate to do so in the Bible, Church history, and the history of the Congregational Church. Martin Luther suggested that evangelism is about one beggar telling another beggar where to find food. According to Martin Copenhaver, "It is our obligation to share the knowledge of where to find sustenance. If we derive strength from God, it is our obligation to share that with those who seek strength. If we receive peace from the continuing presence of Christ, it is our obligation to share that with those who yearn for peace."¹ It is clear from interviews done with members of the Congregational Church of Brookfield, that they do find peace, strength, and growth in their faith and relationship with God through their participation in the life of the church. The people do have faith experiences to share, and that in itself should be a mandate to share them. Yet there is also support for sharing found within the church's and biblical traditions.

The Bible in Dialogue with the Culture:

The central piece of tradition for Congregationalists is the Bible. This is especially evident in CCB. The first thing seen when entering the church is the central pulpit and Bible. The whole church's focus is on the pulpit with the pews curving in to the center so that most seats face the pulpit. With clear glass windows, no cross, nor statues or icons, there are no other explicit symbols in the sanctuary. The Bible is the focal point of worship. To better understand how we might speak about God and our faith, it will be helpful to see what common stories are found in scripture. Although many mainline Christians see scripture as a call to action and a directive of

¹ Copenhaver, p. 260.

how we should live our lives, my experience in the study of the Bible shows a common thread of the people sharing the ways that their lives have been changed by God. The Hebrew scriptures and the stories of the people of Israel are to a large extent a recalling of the repeated action of God that has brought the people to faith. God encounters people in the midst of history, radically altering the way that the people see reality. Then after a period of time, the people fall away from God and begin to interpret the world in the way of the culture, only to have God intervene, once again bringing the people back to faith. This is a repeating cycle in the stories of the people of Israel.

The Bible begins in the beginning, at least physically and chronologically. In the first four chapters of Genesis, we hear the testimony of the author of the book that God was an active participant in the world and people's lives since the start of the world. We are told that God created all that is, and that God was actively involved in Adam and Eve's lives.

The covenant with the people of Israel is then formed with Abraham beginning in Genesis 12. Here again the people of Israel look back and state that God has actively participated in their people's lives over the years, even though they recognize the people have broken the covenant with God. The covenant is once again renewed when God called the people of Israel out of captivity in Egypt (Exodus 3 and following). This covenant is renewed repeatedly as the people traveled and fell away from God over and over (Exodus 16f). The story of the exodus and God's intervention in the chosen people's lives then becomes the central story of the people of Israel. The same telling of stories of God's reaching out to the people of Israel is found in the stories of Joshua, Samson, Samuel, David, Elijah, Elisha, Daniel, and Jonah. God continually enters into people's lives and brings them to a stronger faith.

As important as the stories themselves may be, it is also helpful to note that the people continuously told the stories throughout the centuries. Most of the stories were oral traditions that were passed on from generation to generation before they were written down. The people felt a need to share the stories as they helped define who they were and gave them their identity. The stories showed the people that they were somehow different than the world that surrounded them. Their world was ruled by the powers that be and the realities of the society. But through God's intervention they saw themselves as God's people who were to be ruled not as the world might wish them to be, but by their covenant with God, who called them to live according to God's reality. In sharing the stories of how God intervened in people's lives, those who passed on the stories also confessed their own faith in how God was a part of their lives.

The sharing of their common story of faith, gave the people of Israel the ability to critique the culture in which they resided as they let the two live in tension. Their culture was constantly critiquing the content of their faith, as it sought to subvert the Israelites. But their faith stories gave them the ability to hold onto another world view that did not always accept the norms of their society. The Bible needs to be used in judging the world, but the culture must also be allowed to critique the faith. This can be seen in the way that material in the Bible that is critical of the Jews has been used to oppress Jews. The world needs to be critical of such attempts by people of the Christian faith. The same can be seen in the way that our culture has helped the church rethink much of the patriarchal framework of the Bible. Both the stories of faith and the culture must be allowed to interact and judge one another.

The sharing of stories about God entering into people's lives is also found in the New Testament. The Bible can be and has been read and used as a guidebook for how to live a moral

life. But when it is read as a book of principles that stand on their own apart from a God who is active in the world, the moral code must be judged against whether it makes sense to the culture. This reading is bound to fail as what is found in scripture is not some sort of natural common sense; it is God's peculiar reality. Any guidance for life that is found in the Bible has meaning only when it is affirmed that this is God's word and what is described is what God is like. The Bible is better read as a testimony of how people of faith encountered God, or how God has chosen to enter people's lives, and how they have struggled to live faithfully to the God that has been revealed to them.

The Bible does contain moral instruction and calls to action. Yet we also find Jesus calling his followers to spread the word and good news that they have found in their faith. When Jesus called the first disciples, he told them that they would be fishers of people. (LK 5:1-11) In John we hear Jesus saying we should "harvest the people" (John 4:35-38), and "You shall bear witness" (John 15:27), and later that we should "feed my sheep". (John 21:15-17) In the end of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus commissioned the disciples (and us), to *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them . . . and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.* (MT 28:19-20) Although Jesus did speak about the how the faithful should live in the world, according to the Bible, he dedicated far more of his teaching to the people's relationship to God and how that should be shared with others. Jesus by no means ignores how the faithful should treat one another, but he bases these relationships on the relationship that they have with God. Without that connection, rest has little meaning. The writings of the early church also stress the need to share one's faith (Acts 1:21, 10:42, 22:15, Ephesians 3:8-10).

The Church's Need to be in Dialogue with the Culture:

The preceding leads us to the question of whether the church should be culture affirming or denying. Much of the life of the mainline church has revolved around its investment in the culture. The mainline identity is centered in its role in the community, as a support of what is believed to be good and right by society at large. Is this as it should be? Certainly there are times when the church ought to affirm the standards of the culture. The church also needs to be able to work with the communities in which they reside. This is important if they wish to be agents of change. Yet the church loses much of its unique identity, and its connection to God, when its primary guiding force is the morality and whims of the society. The church must base the way in which it lives on the faith, not on the culture. This means that it will at times be culture affirming and at others culture denying, each being decided upon by how well the society meshes with the faith, not the faith with society. This is not an easy task for the mainline, as it identifies itself so clearly with the culture. But with a shift in how the people of faith view reality makes it possible. To do this, we need to take the world view and language of the faith more seriously.

While the Bible gives us a mandate to share the faith, it also tells us that the faith that is shared is not like the culture and must be differentiated from it using its own distinct language while still being fluent in the language of the culture. Walter Brueggemann demonstrates the importance of knowing the language of both the culture and the faith in his essay, "The Legitimacy of a Sectarian Hermeneutic: 2 King 18-19".

{ 13 } In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, King Sennacherib of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. { 14 } King Hezekiah of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, "I have done wrong; withdraw from me; whatever you impose on me I will bear." The king of Assyria demanded of King Hezekiah of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. { 15 } Hezekiah gave him

all the silver that was found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the king's house. {16} At that time Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of the LORD, and from the doorposts that King Hezekiah of Judah had overlaid and gave it to the king of Assyria. {17} The king of Assyria sent the Tartan, the Rab-saris, and the Rabshakeh with a great army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. They went up and came to Jerusalem. When they arrived, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is on the highway to the Fuller's Field. {18} When they called for the king, there came out to them Eliakim son of Hilkiyah, who was in charge of the palace, and Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph, the recorder. {19} The Rabshakeh said to them, "Say to Hezekiah: Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: On what do you base this confidence of yours? {20} Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war? On whom do you now rely, that you have rebelled against me?

{26} Then Eliakim son of Hilkiyah, and Shebna, and Joah said to the Rabshakeh, "Please speak to your servants in the Aramaic language, for we understand it; do not speak to us in the language of Judah within the hearing of the people who are on the wall." {27} But the Rabshakeh said to them, "Has my master sent me to speak these words to your master and to you, and not to the people sitting on the wall, who are doomed with you to eat their own dung and to drink their own urine?" {28} Then the Rabshakeh stood and called out in a loud voice in the language of Judah, "Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria! {29} Thus says the king: 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you out of my hand. {30} Do not let Hezekiah make you rely on the LORD.

Brueggemann writes about the conflict found in 2 Kings between Judah and powerful Assyria. In 2 Kings we find mighty Assyria's representative standing at the wall of the city shouting out the terms of surrender for meek little Judah. In the terms of the empire, Judah had no alternative but to surrender. It was a total mismatch. It was important for the leaders of Judah to be able to speak at the wall in Aramaic, the language of the empire, and to know the ways of the culture in which they lived. Without this, they would not have been able to understand the problems or the threats of the wider culture, nor could they have negotiated with the world. But Brueggemann also states that they needed to be able to speak behind the wall in Hebrew, the language of their own people and know their own world view that was dramatically different than that of the empire. This gave them the sustenance they needed and the power to hold fast to a different

world view while speaking to that of the culture.² Without their own unique world view, they would have seen their situation as hopeless. In the terms of their culture there was no way that they could repel the incredible power of Assyria. But without the language and world view of the culture, they would not have been able to communicate with the world at large or understand its threats. They had to be fluent in both languages and world views.

People of faith need to be bilingual. The language behind the wall³, in which Golden Rule Christians rarely engage, is essential if the Christian community is to question the assumptions made by society. It is this language that gives direction and meaning to the actions of people of faith. Brueggemann writes that it is the liberal temptation, or that of Golden Rule Christians, to be "so embarrassed at the sectarian narrative (the faith story), to believe that the conversation at the wall is the only conversation, and that all needs for conversation can be met there."⁴ Without the distinguishing identity of who people of faith are, as different from the culture, they become one with the culture and there is little difference from many civic organizations that are committed to helping people be good citizens.

This does not mean that Golden Rule Christians have nothing to contribute to the discussion. Their emphasis on the conversation at the wall is needed. According to

² Walter Brueggemann, "The Legitimacy of a Sectarian Hermeneutic: 2 Kings 18-19", Education for Citizenship and Discipleship, ed. Mary C. Boys, (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), p. 3-5.

³ This discussion behind the wall often includes aspects of the Gospel that are at odds with the culture including a different way of defining reality. For example, the need to seek change and justice through passivism, humility, and sacrifice instead of through might. Most importantly, this discussion behind the wall is centered in the idea that the faithful's lives are directed by God as found in Jesus Christ.

⁴ Boys, p. 25.

Brueggemann, "it is the conservative temptation, so enamored of the sectarian narrative in its uncriticized form, to imagine it is the only conversation (the one behind the wall) and to conclude that anybody who wants conversation at all must join this conversation."⁵ To do this leaves the conversation unable to reach those outside the inner circle of people of faith, as well as often render the discussion irrelevant to what happens in society. Those on the wall do not understand the conversation behind the wall. It makes many of the actions of people of faith irrelevant to the world if they do not know the culture.

Both conversations are essential for the health of the church and the faith development of Christians. This is what the second group at Allen House was able to do so well. They knew the culture and the trials its citizens faced and were willing partners in that dialogue, allowing it to criticize the language of their faith and its assumptions. But they also knew of the importance of retreating behind the wall, letting that conversation give them direction, a new world view and criticize the conversation of the culture and its assumptions.

The risk for Golden Rule Christians as described by Brueggemann is, "In the liberal church, so captured by laudable goals and imperial methods, the story that has lost power is the one behind the walls. And so, we end up with more knowledge about what to do, but without the will, courage, energy, or self-knowledge to act. What is required, then, is a sectarian tale that gives us freedom against our perceived vested interest."⁶

Without this *sectarian tale* the mainline church may also lack the ability to distinguish the ways the Christian is called to live from the *laudable goals* of the culture that are often not the

⁵ Boys, p. 25.

⁶ Boys, p. 29.

same. Hauerwas and Willimon tell the story of a new pastor who entered a sleepy church and wanted to mobilize the parishioners for community ministry. He encouraged the Christian education committee to implement his proposal to open a day-care center for children. The pastor explained to them that "it would be good stewardship to put the building to good advantage. The church had the rooms, and a playground, which was idle most of the week. It might be a good way to recruit new members. The church could be social activist and evangelist at the same time."⁷ He was then interrupted by Gladys who asked how a day care-center was a part of the church's ministry. Again, the pastor explained all the advantages and another member of the committee shared how difficult it was for families to put food on the table unless both husband and wife were working. Gladys then chimed in again saying,

"That's not true. You know its not true. It is not hard for anyone in this church, for anyone in this neighborhood to put food on the table. Now there *are* people in this town for whom food on the table is quite a challenge, but I haven't heard any talk about them. They wouldn't be using this day-care center. They wouldn't have a way to get their children here. This day-care center wouldn't be for them. If we are talking about ministry to their needs, then I'm in favor of the idea. No, what we're talking about is ministry to those for whom it has become harder every day to have two cars, a VCR, a place at the lake, or a motor home. That's why we're all working so hard and leaving our children. I hate to see the church buy into and encourage that value system. I hate to see the church telling these young couples that somehow their marriage will be better or their family life more fulfilling if they can only get another piece of junk. Why doesn't the church be the last place courageous enough to say, 'That's a lie. Things don't make a marriage or a family.' This day care center will encourage some of the worst aspects of our already warped values."⁸

When the church accepts society's norms for what it means to be nice, caring citizens it loses its ability to be a truth teller, guiding its people in the truth as found in the gospel. To avoid this

⁷ Hauerwas and Willimon, p. 118.

⁸ Hauerwas and Willimon, p. 119.

slide into the church being an agency doing civic work for the society it must maintain and be in the business of sharing its radically unique language and world view.

The Church Universal:

There is also a mandate to share this unique language and world view of the faith in the traditions of the Church Universal. From its earliest days the Christian Church has felt compelled to share the faith. The Church's history has included nearly two thousand years of explicitly spreading the stories of how God has been an integral life changing part of the people's experience. Without this willingness to speak about one's faith, Christianity could never have come to be the faith of more people than any other religion.

This tradition of spreading the word through a telling of how God enters people's lives continued to be an important part of the Reformation and the Protestant Church. In a sermon, Martin Luther said, "We have often said heretofore that the Gospel, properly speaking, is not something written in books, but an oral proclamation, which shall be heard in all the world and shall be cried out freely before all creatures, so that all would have to hear it if they had ears; that is to say, it shall be preached so publicly that to preach it more publicly would be impossible."⁹ The father of the Reformation gives us a clear calling that an essential part of the faith is a sharing of the Good News with all the world.

While the preceding discussion of tradition has stressed the importance of speaking of one's faith and how God has acted in world (which is the focus of this project), we need to acknowledge that scripture and Christian tradition also stress the importance of living in a way

⁹ Ascension Day Sermon, Lenker Edition, Volume XII, #3.

that reflects one's faith by the way that others are treated. It is helpful to remember, that in tradition, we find a wide variety of ways to live out the experience of God's acting in people's lives. But one essential part of tradition has been an oral and written sharing of the faith, and its this sharing of the faith that gives meaning and direction to the actions of the faithful.

The United Church of Christ & The Congregational Church of Brookfield:

It is also important to consider the traditions of the United Church of Christ (the denomination of the church in this study), the Congregational Church, and the Congregational Church of Brookfield. In its brief 39 year history, the United Church of Christ has promoted the idea of speaking about and sharing how God has acted in our lives (evangelism), yet it has more fully demonstrated the importance of being caring hands in the world. This can especially be seen in the resolutions that are considered at conference and general synod meetings. Examples of the typical resolution at the Connecticut Conference meetings include concern for children,¹⁰ those with AIDS,¹¹ teen parents,¹² Native Americans,¹³ and women.¹⁴ The overwhelming majority of

¹⁰ 1993 Connecticut Conference Annual Meeting - Resolution: In Support of the Right's of God's Children.

¹¹ 1993 Connecticut Conference Annual Meeting - Resolution: In Support of AIDS Education and Ministries.

¹² 1991 Connecticut Conference Annual Meeting - Resolution: In Response to the Needs of Teenaged Parents and Their Children.

¹³ 1991 Connecticut Conference Annual Meeting - Resolution: Native Americans and the Columbus Semi-Millennial Anniversary.

¹⁴ 1992 Connecticut Conference Annual Meeting - Resolution: Ecumenical Decade 1988-1998 Churches in Solidarity With Women.

these resolutions treat moral and ethical issues that confront our society and the church. They focus mainly on how we ought to live as Christians, sharing our faith through our caring and just actions. In addition, most of them argue for how society, especially the government should confront these difficult issues, instead of the church worrying about how we as a church should seek to live out our faith in response to the trials of our culture. In doing this, we try to align ourselves with the world when our primary concern should be letting our faith speak to us through a sharing of God's word and letting that direct our actions as we take personal responsibility for what is happening in our culture.

The Congregational Church also has a history concerned with actions, yet the Missionary Society of Connecticut (as well as the church at large) placed a strong emphasis on spreading the word of God's action in our lives (evangelism). Much of the Missionary Society's work was centered on saving the "heathen". The end of this groups original charter in 1798 stated that the purpose of the board was Christianize the heathen of North America, as well as supporting and promoting Christian knowledge in the new settlements of the United States.¹⁵ The majority of the money raised by the Missionary Society, was used in evangelism.

Although CCB currently focuses more on living lives that reflect faith, an important part of its history includes sending some of the first missionaries to the Sandwich Islands to evangelize the people. It also sent missionaries to China for the same purpose. CCB has in its past been comfortable talking about what it means to be a person of faith.

Many of the members of CCB struggle with finding God's connection to the world, at

¹⁵ Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Connecticut, (New Haven: J. H. Benham, Printer) 1861, p. 166.

least within the church.¹⁶ Some have described CCB in terms that would make it hard to distinguish from a civic club that gives people opportunities to serve. Involvement in the church is often interchangeable with other town groups and organizations. For some, a low level of commitment suggests that they may not see it as an integral part of who they are, helping to discern God's activity in their lives. This does not mean that these members of CCB do not speak of God's activity. In less explicit ways, most of the members of the church do speak of God's presence. Some simply appear to be unsure of how to express this connection.

Of course this phenomena is not unique to CCB and is a common thread running through much of the mainline church. Nor is it a new experience; the same was true in the church in which I was raised some twenty years ago. Like many people in mainline churches, I too am more at ease in speaking of God's presence in the actions of people instead of in more explicitly religious terms. Yet this is not an adequate way to grow in our faith and understanding of God's presence. Much of God's activity in the world can not be explained through human actions, or people acting as God's hands in the world. Much of God's presence can be nothing but mystery and needs to be explained in a more symbolic manner. The Christian faith teaches that God is enmeshed in the world, and yet is radically other. God is not our cultural norms or societies current morality. In order to better appreciate this *other*, we must be able to speak more clearly about God in ways that differentiate God from our culture.

In my own upbringing, and to a great extent in the United Church of Christ, this less tangible part of God's presence has been neglected. Outside of corporate worship, little energy has been devoted to grappling with how to speak more fully about God's presence in the world.

¹⁶ This was discovered in interviews with many of the members of CCB.

In doing so, we have also defined God in the terms of the world, instead of seeking to understand the world in the terms of God. This is a radical shift in how one views a reality that is only made possible by becoming immersed in the faith, its traditions and language. And, as we have seen, scripturally, the way people become immersed in the faith is in sharing the stories of the faith -- those unique moments when God has most clearly been revealed to people of faith through God's intervention in the world. The Christian faith does not proclaim a God that is distant and observes the world from afar. At the heart of the Bible, is a God that is active in the world and the lives of the faithful. These experiences of God's activity in the world are at the center of the faith teaching us of God's complete commitment to us.

CHAPTER IV
Theology: Struggle With Evangelism
We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.
Acts 4:20

How and with whom we are to share the faith is a question that dates back to the beginning of the Christian church and Peter and Paul's feud over whether the faith was meant exclusively for the Jews or if it was to be shared with all people and whether it was meant to be in a limited geographical area or spread through all lands. The debate rages on in modern Christendom. Some believe that the Christian has a duty to convert all to the faith, ignoring cultural differences and the possible legitimacy of other faiths. Others believe such actions are an atrocity and we must promote religious diversity and tolerance. How, what, and if the faith should be shared at all continues to be a dilemma, especially for mainline Christians.

One thing however is clear, the only way that one can become a Christian is if the faith has been shared with that person. Faith in the Christian God is not something that simply happens. A person may have what they believe is an experience with God that creates a faith in a being beyond this world, but it would not be an experience that is shaped by the Gospel unless the Christian story had been shared with that person. Martin Copenhaver tells the story of a church discussion group he led where a man said, "I never say anything about my faith. If you want to know what I believe, watch what I do.' At that point, a good friend of his interjected, 'you may have to watch very closely . . .'"¹ Laughter followed, with the recognition that few of us live out our faith as well as we would like. Unfortunately our actions are seldom clear on their own, if at all. They also have no way of fully conveying the content of our faith. To be sure, one's actions

¹ Martin Copenhaver, To Begin at the Beginning, (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1994), p. 266.

may cause another to ask what is behind them, but the faith that causes a Christian to live his or her life in a particular way is only made clear when the faith is shared. The story of the Gospel is something that is passed from one person to another, from one community to another. If we believe there is value to the Gospel, then we are called to share it with others. But we have more than an obligation or calling to share our faith. If we find peace in our faith, then we will probably feel a need to share it with others who desire to have that same sense of connectedness and meaning in their lives. Although apprehensive to share the faith, the desire is there. Interviews with members of CCB revealed that many sense a need for more opportunities to talk about their faith and to grow in the content of the faith. They desire more avenues to share their faith and for others to do so with them. How it is shared is another matter. The mainline church has forgotten how to talk explicitly about the faith outside corporate worship and limited Christian education classes.

This is in part a result of much traditionally Christian language being discarded by the mainline church, I believe out of a fear of how other Christians use the terminology. Not wanting to be associated with those who are often classified as fundamentalists (and stereotyped as close minded), mainliners have shied away from terms like, born again, salvation, sin, and especially evangelism. This abandonment of Christian language is a sign of something deeper than the use of a few words. Its an example of how the mainline has been living on the defensive, attempting to show that they fit in with the rest of the culture and are a part of it, instead of proclaiming what the faith is about and allowing it to take hold in people's lives.

In recent years, the mainline church has viewed evangelism, or the sharing of the faith, in one of two ways. Most have come to define evangelism as what the religious right does.

Evangelism is the converting of souls according to this definition. It is seen as intolerant of divergent views, unwilling to accept the potential validity of other faiths, and biblically literalistic. This is also the way that much of western culture has come to define evangelism. Fearful of this form of evangelism, but unable to abandon the idea of seeking new members for our churches in light of dramatic membership declines, the mainline has had to find another way to look at bringing in more warm bodies -- thus the birth of the church growth movement. In my reading and experience, in recent years the majority of evangelistic work has fallen into one of these two categories. The first, in the eyes of the mainline is thankfully unacceptable, the second is simply a mistake.

Church growth material can be helpful when seeking to understand better ways to make new comers feel at home within a congregation, but it typically has the wrong general focus. So much church growth work is based on the desperation of the mainline to maintain its numbers, simply, so it appears, because it sees value in numbers themselves. Our reason for sharing the faith must not be based on our wish to not be lonely in our decaying church buildings. The sharing must be based on our desire to share that which we find so meaningful in our lives that we believe others might want to know the story and share in our fellowship as Christians. Scripture and the Christian tradition also call us to share the faith, but the real reason to share and speak about the faith should be based in that burning need to share the offer of new life that has brought more meaning to our existence. We share not because ought to, but because we have a personal need to do so.

The two existing definitions of evangelism appear to be inadequate, so what is the mainline to do? I would suggest the need for a third definition of evangelism, or a recovery of

what I believe the word has always meant. This is not a compromise between the evangelism of the religious right and the church growth material of the mainline, but a return to the gracious sharing of the faith found in scripture. There is a need to reclaim the word evangelism as well as many other explicitly religious terms that have been abandoned by the mainline. The words themselves are essential in helping to define who we are, what we are about, and our relationship to God and one another.

Before considering the third definition, it is helpful to note the importance of words and the way they help to shape who we are, as well as the fact that we have the ability to shape our words. The words of our faith help to define that very faith, but we help to define those words. In his book The Nature of Doctrine, George Lindbeck demonstrates how words do define our reality. Not only do the words help shape what we see, we may not, according to Lindbeck, be able to see some things without the help of linguistics. As an example he speaks about some reported tribes that have no words to distinguish between green and blue and therefore have difficulty in seeing the difference between the colors. Lindbeck says that raises "the question of whether language influences domains of human reality that are generally thought of, not as simply prelinguistic, but as preexperiential."² Lindbeck claims that it is not inner experiences that shape our religious life, so much as our linguistics. He writes that "religious change or innovation must be understood not as proceeding from new experiences, but as resulting from the interaction of a cultural linguistic system with changing situations."³ Accordingly, the way we view our faith and

² George Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), p. 37.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

understand our reality is shaped by our language. Not only is this further support for the need to be able to talk about our faith, it also suggests the importance of the reclaiming of our traditional religious language as it is an essential part of any such sharing.

I therefore suggest that the third definition of evangelism must include the development of the ability to use and the actual use of explicitly religious language. In the use of the language we also help to shape and redefine the terms' meanings.

THE THIRD DEFINITION:

At its core, evangelism must be about sharing the faith of the faithful, with others and also among themselves. If we find life in the gospel, we are motivated to let others in on the good news found in the story. Thus, to be involved in evangelism, we must be able to tell the story of the faith. We must gain comfort in the story so that it can be shared. We are then called to invite others in. Evangelism can therefore be defined as an invitation, to others and ourselves to share in the gospel story.

One fear that many have about evangelism, is that it must mean that the one who is invited must respond to a set of well laid out beliefs or rules, as if the story is about a series of beliefs and regulations. But the invitation is really to respond to the story of God entering into people's lives, an invitation to respond to the good news found in Jesus the Christ. We are mistaken if we believe that the Christian faith can be written out in a series of well defined fundamental beliefs or that we can create concrete answers for any situation that will always prevail as if the text of the Bible were flat and dead with all answers well laid out for all time. Jesus spoke in a way that allowed God to be alive in the world. The same is true with all the encounters the people of faith

had with God entering their lives. These were experiences with the living God that shed light on the people's reality and helped to guide future generations, but were not meant to be laid to rest as a dogma that must judge all new situations without hope of God's presence alive again in them. Evangelism is not a call for people to buy a set of beliefs. Instead it is an invitation for them to respond to the living Christ in their lives.⁴

Evangelism is also an invitation to come and see, not coercion into the faith. Too often in the history of Christianity, evangelism has been a self righteous forcing of our set of beliefs upon others. This is the type of so-called evangelism that is feared by many in the mainline. True evangelism is a gracious invitation to see what the faith is about, an opportunity to encounter our gracious God who freely offers us love. This is also the type of offer our evangelism must be about, a gracious invitation, freely given, to which a person is free to accept or reject.⁵

Evangelism should be an offer to look inside and see what we believe to be a life giving story of God entering into people's lives, especially as found in Jesus of Nazareth, which may or may not resonate with the one receiving the story. This is not a judgement against or a discounting of the possible legitimacy of other faiths.

The process of inviting another into the faith through a sharing of the story is not only a gracious invitation to the one receiving the offer, it is also essential to the one doing the sharing. When I graduated from college, I decided that I wanted to give a few years of my life in volunteer service and arranged to go overseas in a mainline church mission. I had grand visions of giving *worldly* assistance to *needy* people in another culture. When I attended a training session in New

⁴ Copenhaver, p. 260-61.

⁵ Ibid., p. 262.

York State to prepare for a three year mission stint, I learned that as a liberal arts major with little life experience I had few skills to offer, other than speaking English which was a desirable gift for people in a country that wanted to enable their brightest an opportunity to increase Thailand's ability to trade with the western world. In New York, I learned that my time overseas was to be spent teaching English to upper middle class children. I was not quite sure how this would help out the poor, but was still willing to go. Then I learned that I would only be teaching about six hours a week, the rest of my time was to be spent as I pleased. Seeing my concern, a life time missionary attending the session took me aside and told me privately that all this freedom meant plenty of time for evangelism. Considering myself an enlightened, open minded individual who did not believe that Christians had exclusive rights on access to God, this paternalistic idea of conversion greatly troubled me. (Little did I realize at that time that the idea that my belief that being a westerner meant I had some skill to offer these *simple* people was just as close minded as the missionary's idea of evangelism!)

I met with the man heading up the training retreat and told him I did not think I could participate as a missionary unless I thought there was something concrete that I could share beyond a mere six hours a week of teaching English. Furthermore, I did not want any part of any activity that forced my set of beliefs on another. He assured me that it was not the church's desire to have people involved in explicit evangelistic activities. In fact he told me, "one of the primary purposes of sending short time missionaries like me overseas, wasn't for what they could contribute in those few years, but as an educational growing experience for them. What happens to you overseas is what we are most concerned with." The value of the growth that can occur in the one offering their time and doing the sharing was an idea that I understood only years after

deciding not to go to Thailand.

An essential part of evangelism is the effect it has on the church's people themselves. In sharing the faith, they themselves have to confront their own questions and doubts. They must grow in their comfort level in speaking about what it means to be in relationship to God. In doing this, the church itself is renewed in its sense of the presence of God as the people share stories of God's activity in the world. Simply improving signage, putting advertisements in the papers, sending out letters to new comers, and fine tuning greeting skills, as are suggested in most mainline church growth material, have little effect on church growth or the membership of the church. True evangelism, an intentional sharing of the story inside and outside the church is where real growth occur, both in numbers and in the faith.⁶

Material on this third definition of evangelism is unfortunately limited. The challenge in the mainline is to get a congregation to see the value in taking such an approach. Most churches that are shrinking are so concerned with their numbers that it is difficult for them to get beyond their hope to fill the pews. Churches that have maintained their size or grown in recent years are typically scared off by anything that resembles their stereotype of evangelism. Everything seems to be working for them, so they believe, so why mess with success. But if this third definition is at the core of what it means to be a people of faith, and if being involved in such evangelistic work has the potential to help people grow in their faith, we must consider how a mainline church, especially those like CCB that have not suffered a decline in membership, might become involved in evangelism.

⁶ C. Kirk Hadaway & David A. Roozen, Rerouting the Protestant Mainstream, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), p. 67.

We also need to consider who should be involved in an evangelistic effort. I noted in the introduction, that like most churches, CCB has a diverse membership including people of the cultural left, middle and right as described by Tex Sample. Not all are golden rule believers, nor can all be classified as liberal or conservative. There are differing gifts and levels of comfort in taking on specific tasks. It is important to acknowledge that some people are better suited than others to take on some roles within the church. In approaching evangelism (even with this third definition) in a congregation there will be some people who are better able to be involved. The whole of the congregation needs to be encouraged to take their faith seriously and grapple with the language of Christianity. But it would be a grave mistake to attempt to force the whole of the congregation to all become involved in sharing the faith. Just as sharing the faith is something that typically occurs one on one, nurturing the faithful into a sharing process must happen in a similar manner. We need to work with those who see themselves as able to share the faith first, and as they grow in their capacity to do so, more will come along for the journey.

CHAPTER V
Sharing the Faith: The Project
And he commanded us to preach to the people.
Acts 10:42

Mailings were sent out, posters displayed, announcements made, even personal calls were placed, all inviting the congregation to attend a new series of adult education programming. The classes were believed to be bound to add to participants spiritual growth. They could not fail . . . so it was thought. Just seven people showed up other than the organizers of the program. An announcement was made asking for help painting the church's barn and about forty people arrived that morning, completing the task in a few short hours. A retreat was designed that would provide participants an opportunity to reflect on their faith, it was cancelled twice because of a lack of sign ups. Calls were made throughout the congregation for help serving at the church's fair and hundreds of people agreed to assist in the effort. Like so many other mainline churches, CCB is made up of "doers", people who are most willing to participate in a program if they believe they are able to contribute something. Few people join in programming that's sole purpose is for their personal growth and enrichment.

Knowing the obstacles they faced in getting people to participate, a seven member task force made up of five lay members and the two ministers was challenged create a project that would both increase the members of CCB's capacity in speaking about their faith and reach out to share that faith with community. After much debate the team decided that the project should include an opportunity for the participants to serve, as this was an important element in obtaining people's involvement. The following is a description of the program the *Sharing Our Faith* team designed and implemented.

The team determined that the heart of the project should include an opportunity for the participants to struggle with their own faith. They decided that in a church of "doers", a good way to encourage them to consider what their own faith means to them was to have them participate in a visitation program that targeted first time visitors to the church and new town residents. The logic behind this decision was that by asking them to go visit people in their homes, the visitors would sense a need to be prepared for their encounters. This would mean that they might participate more actively in the sessions of preparation and education prior to the visits. Knowing they might be asked questions about their faith would be an incentive to reflect on their faith before the encounters. The visits themselves would provide an opportunity to practice sharing their faith. There would also be some sense of safety in the visits. Although they would be primarily with strangers, the people visited would be individuals who had expressed some interest in the church.

The visitation program fit well with Ammerman's description of golden rule Christian's belief that it is important to welcome new comers. This is especially true in a highly mobile community like Brookfield where many of the residents only stay in town for a few years. A good portion of CCB's members are transplants who know what it means to be displaced and believe the church should make strangers feel at home.

CCB also had evidence of the success that participants had in programs where they would have to share their faith in the process of contributing to the church in their newly formed confirmation program. In 1991 we created a "Discipleship" confirmation program that was

inspired by and deeply indebted to William Willimon's, Making Disciples.¹ In this program, each confirmand is paired with a member of the church, the confirmand's mentor. Over a nine month period, the two then work through a series of modules in which they are challenged to reflect on numerous aspects of the church and life as a Christian and what they mean to their faith. At the heart of the program is the challenge to share one's faith. In the past five years of running the program we have had an overwhelmingly positive response from confirmands and their families. But the most surprising reward of the program has been the reaction of the mentors. With few exceptions, each mentor has found that their participation has helped deepen their faith through the challenge of discussing it with a young person in the church.

The success of the confirmation program led the church to change the process in which new adult members are welcomed into the congregation. Each prospective new member now meets twice with the deacons where they are paired up with a deacon and go through modules that ask questions about the faith. The new members have responded well to this process and the deacons who have participated have suggested that the program has also been helpful to them as well.

The *Sharing Our Faith* team was concerned about the visitors not being identified with many of the other religious groups involved in visitations. This is one of the reasons they wanted to limit their visits to those who had already expressed some interest in the church. This also led the group to decide that visitors would need some material to bring with them that would help to define the faith of CCB. They decided to create a bread cook book that would have five bread

¹ William H. Willimon, Making Disciples, (Inver Grove Heights, MN: Logos Productions, 1990).

recipes and a page next to each of the recipes that gives information about the faith of the people of CCB. (see appendix #1)

The group was also encouraged to consider how they might reach out beyond those who were first time visitors to the church and they decided to send out a mailing to new town residents. A pamphlet was created that briefly defined the church, invited the new comers to participate, and described the various ministries taking place through CCB. Enclosed in the pamphlet was a mailer that could be sent back to the church that expressed that the recipient would like to learn more about CCB. (see appendix #2) Regardless of what type of information was requested, if a mailer was returned, they decided that person would receive a visit the following Sunday. The creation of the cookbook and the pamphlet provided an opportunity for the team to struggle with their own faith as they attempted to describe CCB. On each visit a cook book and a loaf of banana bread was delivered.

The team then decided that those participating in the program should be considered a prototype group. By packaging the program as a test case, they were able to limit the number of visitors to twelve people. This meant that there was not a general plea for volunteers, but instead, each participant was individually invited to be a part of the program. By receiving a personal invitation, the team believed that those involved would sense that they were chosen because they had something special to contribute, and they did. The twelve participants were chosen to be a good representation of the diversity of the church. This approach also meant that the congregation as a whole was not going to be immediately forced to participate in the foreign ground of evangelism.

After designing the cookbook and the pamphlet the team was hard at work over the

summer of 1995 working out all the mechanics of the program making sure that there were no unsolved details. Schedules were set up. Visit evaluation sheets were designed. Property transfer listings were scoured at the town hall. Mailings were sent out. Recording books were put together. Bread bakers and monthly coordinators for the program were recruited. A series of classes and a training session were designed. And after eight months of intensive work the project was ready to begin.

Each of the visitors was asked to participate in a three week *Christian Basics* class. The class was primarily designed to share some of the basic components of the Christian faith. The team believed that it would be important to share some of the general tenets of the faith before we could consider discussion or sharing of the faith. The class was also designed to add to the comfort level the participants would have in sharing the faith. The classes relied heavily on Martin Copenhaver's book, To Begin at the Beginning. Components of Dorothy & Gabriel Fackre's book, Christian Basics, Gabriel Fackre's book, Conversation In Faith, Robert Fauth's book, So You are a Church Member, C. S. Lewis's, Mere Christianity, and John Stott's, Basic Christianity were also used in the course.

The first week of the course focused on "God the Creator", the second week on "Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus the Christ", and the third on "The Holy Spirit and Life as a Christian". The course was not meant to cover the whole of the faith, but to only be a beginning of an on going discussion and process of learning and growth. (for the course outline, see appendix #3) The course also revolved around the "Five Foundational Planks in the Reformers Platform" that include, the authority of the Bible, Jesus Christ is the head of the Church, justification by faith, the priesthood of all believers, and the right of private judgement. (for the content of the planks, see

appendix #4) The class did not attempt to give definitive answers as if the Christian faith were able to be pegged in a creed or confession. With a broad stroke the class was designed to give some general ideas on how we might approach our faith and the biblical content that guides the faith. An emphasis was placed on "the story" of our faith and how it is a remembering by the people of the way that God has chosen to be active in the people of faith's lives.

The content of the classes were based in the stories of faith. The group talked about how these were "living" stories that people of faith carried with them generation after generation. An attempt was made to help the class understand how people of faith had used these stories to understand the world they lived in, that the people allowed the stories to interact with the culture and the culture with the stories. By doing this they were able to be strengthened by their faith to live in what they saw as God's reality, while at the same time letting the world critique their faith. The classes sought to show the importance of knowing the content of the faith and sharing the stories so that the people might find the sustenance they need for their lives.

The class was designed to be a beginning for the participants. There is a natural resistance for those of us raised in the mainline church and mainstream society to allow our faith to stand on its own helping to guide the way we view the world. This is especially difficult when the faith many mainline people know has subverted itself to the culture. The primary purpose of the class was to encourage the participants to consider another alternative, namely, allowing the stories of faith to take hold in their lives. Then there is an opportunity for them to interact with the norms of our culture and our experience following the Whiteheads' model.

Before each session, the participants were given a work sheet that was designed to help them consider the subject matter for the day. (see appendix #5) All twelve people in the

prototype group participated in the course, along with twenty one other people in the congregation. Eight of the visitors attended all three classes, three attended two, and one attended just one, for an average attendance of 86%.

In the end of September a "Visitor Preparation" evening was held. (see appendix #6) The first half of this session relied on Corinne Ware's exercise, *The Spirituality Wheel Indicator*.² The exercise shows how an individual approaches spirituality. It makes no judgement on where a person ends up on the wheel, but simply demonstrates that people look at their faith in different ways. This is dramatically different than many other exercises that imply that faith or spirituality is on a ladder or staircase that we are intended to climb, one being at a higher level than another. Ware's wheel was used to assist those who were going to be making visits understand that if they encounter someone who approaches the faith in a way that was not the same as their's, it is not a judgement against either party, but instead, that each person's approach may be valid. We simply come at our faith from different vantage points. The group then spent the rest of the session discussing the logistics of the visits. At the end of the session each participant was given a copy of the article, "Tips to turn a home visitation disaster into a winning experience", written by Gwen Kelly Burnett.³ Ten out of the twelve visitors attended the visitor preparation session.

The prototype visits ran from October 1 through December 17, with each visitor being assigned to two Sundays. The visits took place each Sunday after church, priority for visits being

² Corinne Ware, Discover Your Spirituality Type, (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 1995).

³ *The Disciple*, November 1994, see Gwen Kelly Burnett, "Tips to turn a home visitation disaster into a winning experience."

given to those who had attended worship that day and any cards we had received in the mail over the week. The visitors would then look at previous weeks to see if there were any people who had not been able to be visited. Finally, whenever there were not enough visits (three) for that Sunday, the bread would be taken to a special concerns member of the church. The visitors were sent out in pairs, a man and a woman team whenever possible.

Over the twelve week period, thirty six visits were made. Out of the thirty three first time attenders that were able to be identified, nineteen of the visits were to first time attenders at CCB. Two of the visits were made to new town residents who returned the mailer that was sent to them describing CCB. The other fifteen visits were made to special concerns members of CCB.

CHAPTER VI REFLECTIONS

Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.

Acts 1:21

By most measurable standards, life is going well at CCB. The membership remains robust. The budget is always a struggle, but sound. Worship attendance is strong. New and creative programming continues to develop. There are no scandals splitting the congregation. And the congregation is generally pleased with life in the church. Why mess around with something that seems to be doing so well? Couldn't any change disturb the delicate balance that holds together the church? Of course changes could cause problems, but with change comes the potential for new and greater life as we seek to live out our faith.

In their book, Built to Last, James Collins and Jerry Porras stress the importance for organizations of all types to both preserve their core and stimulate change. Those that can do this, the two claim, are the truly visionaries that will last, thrive and have an influence on the world. Certainly the Church recognizes the need to preserve the core, but has to often forgotten the need to drive ahead into the future seeking to change and adapt in the ways that respond to the changes in the local church as well as the society. This is not a call to abandon the core of the church's message. Rather, it is a need to let that core interact with each new time and place instead of assuming that nothing changes in the world over time. This is an especially important message for churches like CCB, that in recent years have not suffered from the decline that has effected so much of the mainline. The temptation for such churches is to assume all is well, when there is a need to both reflect on why they have maintained their strength and strive to grow in their faithfulness to the gospel. Collins and Porras are right in their claim that "the drive for

progress is never satisfied with the status quo, *even when the status quo is working well.*"¹ To be faithful to the gospel, the church with all its imperfections, must seek to grow in its ability to nurture people's relationships with God.

In all of our activity in the church, we need to regularly evaluate why the things happen in the way that they do. In Rerouting the Protestant Mainstream, Hadaway and Roozen stress that whether a church is growing, shrinking, or maintaining its size and enthusiasm, "faithful discernment demands that we find out why we are growing or why we are declining. Otherwise we can be lulled into complacency by growth, or without reflection absolve ourselves of responsibility for decline."² Churches must take into account the local context and other factors in understanding changes within the church. When considering needs for evangelism, this is especially true for churches like CCB that have maintained their size over the years. Churches that have been shrinking will normally be forced to consider the many factors involved in their decline. Those that do not sense trouble are less likely to be reflective. But just as those who have lost members may have been influenced by a shrinking population and changes in the religious affiliation of those who move into the community, churches that have retained their size may conversely be influenced by such demographic changes. This contextual information must be understood for the congregation to better understand what they are doing that has effected changes for the church, both in its size and its character. They are then freed to consider how they might need to stimulate change to add health to the congregation. In studying their context,

¹ James C. Collins & Jerry I. Porras, Built to Last, (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), p. 84.

² C. Kirk Hadaway & David Roozen, Rerouting the Protestant Mainstream, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), p.12.

the members of the *sharing our faith* team at CCB determined that the church had been blessed with favorable demographics over the past four decades that had helped CCB maintain its size and influence. On the other hand, they noted that in that same period, three new mainline churches were started in Brookfield, drawing some potential members away from CCB. CCB had lived for many years with favorable demographics, but had also found itself with more churches seeking to reach the same pool of people.

The team also knew that whatever changes or programming they recommended for the church, the effects of what they did would need to be evaluated following the implementation of each of the components of their effort.. The project of *sharing our faith* had two primary purposes that they wished to be able to evaluate. The first, and most important was to increase project participants' capacity to articulate and share their Christian faith. The second, was to share the faith of CCB with the community of Brookfield.

According to the Handbook for Congregational Studies, goals within a church are usually difficult to measure because they normally can not be quantified. As is true in this project, they typically are less concerned with cost efficiency than they are with less tangible outcomes like the faith development of the parishioners.³ As such, the team decided to use personal interviews and evaluation forms to determine how well the project met their goals. Both of these forms of evaluation would need to allow room for the respondents to share their general perceptions about the program. The team also determined that each stage of the project needed to be evaluated, beginning with the Christian Basics class, then the preparation session, and finally the visits

³ Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley & William McKinney, Handbook for Congregational Studies, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), p. 132.

themselves.

Ten of the twelve participants in the program completed evaluation forms on the class and about half were interviewed. (see appendix #7) There was general agreement that the church needs more opportunities to discuss material like that covered in the class. Ironically, though not surprisingly, when classes like this one have been offered in the past, few people attended. This supports the need of participants at CCB to be involved in projects where they are able to contribute something to the outcome. A strong majority also believed the class helped them "think more about the faith", as well as making them feel more comfortable with the idea of talking about aspects of the faith. The class was also thought to be a success in that it presented the faith as an ongoing story, a story in which the participants could then place themselves as they considered telling the story of their faith. The primary criticism of the class was that it was too short, just three one hour sessions. This was especially a problem since little time was left for general discussion. Clearly this was a mistake for a class that was meant to assist people in their ability to speak about the faith.

The Christian Basics class was found to help the participants gain a better background in some of the elements of the faith. The class also made most of them feel better able to share their faith with each other and those outside the church.

The project team concluded that the class should be offered again, twice a year. Knowing that more people attend classes at CCB when they believe it is important for them to do so for more reasons than their own enrichment, the team decided that new visitors would be recruited just before the class was offered and encouraged to attend before they started visiting. To enlarge the number of people who might benefit from the offering, they also suggested that the class be

held just before each new member class joined the church and have attendance in the class made a part of the membership process.

Eight of the twelve participants evaluated the evening of preparation. All eight agreed that this was an important part of getting ready to visit. They found it an important time to talk about some of their concerns about visiting and to know that they were sharing the experience with others in the church. A few expressed that they had found Ware's "Spirituality Wheel" a meaningful exercise. This alleviated some of their concerns about the differences they knew they had in their faith with others in the church as well as knowing that they were likely to encounter people with a wide variety of views in their visits. They liked the idea of being able to affirm their own faith, while they could also appreciate the faith of others that might be different. The project team decided that this evening should be offered again each time a new set of visitors was prepared to start visiting.

To evaluate the visits themselves, the team decided that they would need to get information from the visitors themselves and from those who were visited. Evaluation forms were filled out after each of the visits sharing reflections on each individual visit (see appendix #8) and at the end of December when all the initial visits had been made, eight of the ten visitors filled out evaluation forms on the visiting program. (see appendix #9) About half of the visitors were interviewed and about twelve of those who were visited were interviewed.

It would be nearly impossible to get clear data on the effect of the visits compared to how those visited would feel if they had not been seen. But all those who were visited and interviewed responded highly favorably to the experience. One representative response was, "I felt like I had a place at the church, that I was welcome." Another said, "The information in the pamphlet and

the cookbook helped me better understand what the Congregational Church of Brookfield is about." Almost all seemed to feel they had more of a connection to the church after the visit , and many have since joined CCB.

The visitors evaluation forms and interviews all suggested that the program was meaningful for them, as well as, they believed, for those they saw. Most were surprised at how little opportunity there was for sharing their faith, yet believed they were much more at ease with the idea of doing so as a result of going out to do the visits. Those who were involved in the creation of the pamphlet and the cookbook felt that they had a special opportunity to reflect on their faith as they struggled with the wording of each of the pieces.

One surprise for the visitors was that on some Sundays they were unable to find a new comer at home to visit. Happily, this turned out to be a blessing for many of them. They relished the opportunity to visit some of our own special needs people. Many said they had done little or none of this type of visiting before becoming involved with the project. These visits often provided more of an opportunity to speak about their faith than the visits to new comers. The program had not been designed to meet the needs of CCB's own special concerns people, but ended up helping to fill a gap that was not being met as well as the church might have wished. It also helped the participants work on their capacity to share the faith.

The team was disappointed that only two cards were returned from the nearly two hundred pamphlets that were sent out. But they still believed that this was an important ministry. The team suspected that some of those who received the pamphlet decided to attend CCB's worship because they received it in the mail. Even if this were not true, they still believed it was helping to share the faith of the congregation with those outside the church, as a number of

people in the *sharing our faith* team received comments around town from new comers and those who had moved within Brookfield about how meaningful they found the pamphlet.

Finally, the team along with the executive council decided that the program should continue as an ongoing part of the life of the church. With each new group of visitors, more people have the opportunity to work on their capacity to share the faith as well as being faithful to our need to be evangelists. By recruiting small teams to be involved in the project, the program has to some degree been able to meet both the needs addressed by the team, while not forcing those in the church who find their gifts elsewhere to feel they are neglecting their responsibility.

What does it all mean?

When the initial *Sharing the Faith* team met, they were scared by the idea of even discussing evangelism. It was not a word that they were comfortable with and questioned whether it even had a place in the church. But they took a risk and were willing to consider what it would mean for a church like CCB to take on its own form of evangelism program and to struggle with the language of faith. By the end of the project, the majority of the team and visitors alike saw the use of such language and sharing to be an important part of the life of the church. As one team member said, "Despite ourselves, we ended up enjoying the work and saw it as a natural outgrowth of our faith."

There was also a sense of affirmation of our faith. Team members said that they saw how their faith and their sharing, even if it was not always or even often explicit, seemed to really touch the people they encountered and often did it when they most needed it. The people involved also felt affirmed by sharing in the work together. They were linked as a people with a

common story of their faith to share. The involvement was able to add to their sense of identity as a people of faith.

THE ROLE OF CHURCH IN SOCIETY

In this project an important theme has been considered, "What is the mainline church's role in our culture today?" For many decades mainline churches like the Congregational Church of Brookfield have lived under the assumption that they were at the center of what was happening in society. Whether or not this was a faithful way to live out their faith, that era is clearly over and mainline churches need to be able to redefine who they are today and what they need to be in the future, if they are to help people grow in their relationship to God and one another as people of faith. This project has addressed three areas that need to be evaluated in how the *sharing our faith* work helps inform what churches like CCB should be about. First, the relationship between doing and saying, works and sharing the word, needs to be considered. Second, I will consider who should be doing the different tasks of the church. And third, I will address the issue of whether the faith separates us or aligns us with the culture. All of these will be looked at in relation to the project undertaken by CCB.

To evaluate the preceding three areas, I will focus primarily on the process the participants in the project went through. The real growth or change took place in the preparation for the project, not in the visits themselves (although the value of the visits is not diminished). It was in the period of time before the actual visits that the participants considered what their faith is about and decided how they would share it. This process of faith development in the preparation for the

visits is not unlike the way every member canvas projects in stewardship campaigns usually expect that most of the success will take place in the lives and giving of those going out to make the visits.

Doing V.S. Saying

Is it acceptable or even possible to base the faith of a church primarily on the living of the word to the exclusion of a sharing of the word? Although most were uncomfortable with the idea of speaking about their faith, the reflections of those involved in the project supported the need to take sharing the faith more seriously. They found that the process of trying to understand what their faith was about and sharing it with one another helped solidify their faith. Most of the participants still believed the actions of their faith were essential, however thought the actions had greater meaning when they were able to talk about the content of their faith.

This was especially seen in the Christian Basics class where the participants wanted more time than was allotted for discussion so that they could share with one another what their faith was about. It is in the talking about the faith where an understanding of the need for the actions that golden rule Christians want to participate in gains clarity and meaning. The two, doing and saying, should not be seen as exclusive options. Instead, they should be seen as dependent upon one another. The mainline church needs to be able to both speak about the faith and live it by faithful actions.

Who Should be Sharing the Faith?

Tex Sample, along with others, gives a clear picture of the diversity of people that are found in each congregation. The mainline church needs to affirm Paul's idea that there are many parts to the body and that each may have a different function, but that all are essential to the health of the whole. Within any church, there will be some who are the hands of the church, reaching out doing acts of good will. There are others that are the mouth of the church, who will be able to share the word with others. Some will be both. It would be wrong to expect that everyone in a church would take part in a soup kitchen project. It would also be a mistake to think that everyone in a church should participate in evangelism.

A few of the visitors dropped out of the program after their first round of visits. While they supported the continuation of the *sharing our faith* project, they felt as if this was not the area in which they were suited to contribute. This supports the notion that not all members of a congregation should be expected to join in a verbal sharing of the faith, each person comes with his or her own gifts. The gifts need not be the same. Some people simply have gifts that suit them for other forms of ministry.

Not all people in a congregation need to participate in every endeavor of the church. At the same time, for the health of the congregation, both the "doing" and the "saying" need to be taken on by some portion of the people. This was one of the successes of the *sharing the faith* project. It targeted just a part of the congregation for involvement. There was no effort to coerce the whole of the church into participation. This seems to be a healthy way to approach most aspects of the life of the church; seek out those parts of the body that are suited for participation in each area of the church, but make sure that all areas are addressed.

Church of the Culture or Church Against Culture?

A third area addressed in this paper that needs to be evaluated is whether the church should see itself as separated from or aligned with the culture. In the preparation for visitation, the participants initially voiced a connection to the town and a fear of seeming different than it. They expressed societal needs that were similar to that of the culture. But as the discussion turned to an explicit dialogue about what the faith means to each of us, there was a shift into seeing the church as somehow different than the culture.

The preceding is support for the need to be aware of both cultural norms and the stories of faith. We need to be able to go behind the wall and share with others of faith as we seek to better understand what the faith is about on its own terms. We also need to go to the wall and let the culture speak to us and critique the faith. Allowing for this dialogue between the faith and the culture means there will be times that the church finds itself aligned with the culture and others when the faith needs to stand against the culture, but the ways the church acts is based on the dialogue between the cultural norms, the traditions of faith and our personal experience. This was the process that the *sharing our faith* participants went through in their preparation for the visits. The success of the project came in the people's growth in the above areas during the period of getting ready.

THE ROLE OF THE PASTOR

For me, the *sharing our faith* project has been an affirmation of the need to be able to speak about our faith. The idea of doing so is uncomfortable for many in mainline churches like

CCB. But when done with care, this sharing provides an additional way for people to grow in their faith, to struggle with how it meshes with their culture, and seeks to be faithful to the call to share the gospel with the world.

As a pastor of CCB, my role in the project was to act as a stimulus and resource. The project began when I called together a team of five people and shared (in depth) with them the reasons I believed the members of CCB might need to consider how we could better share our faith with one another and the greater community. The immediate reaction, as previously mentioned, was a fear of speaking about faith issues with others, especially those outside the church. An ongoing discussion ensued over the next six months, where the group slowly gained a greater level of comfort in speaking about the faith.

While I had visions of how the group might want to address the issue, once I laid out the concern, I encouraged the committee members to develop what they believed was the right response for CCB. I went on the journey with them and attempted to act as an enabler of their ideas, with a conscious attempt to avoid imposing my own ideas. They considered a wide range of ways to better share the faith, from a speaker outside the church playing the worship services for all who passed, to putting people on street corners speaking about the faith. Endless ideas were considered before agreeing on the project that was undertaken.

Some of the most meaningful opportunities for the *sharing our faith* team centered on the development of the printed material that was shared with new comers. In creating the cookbook and the pamphlet the group spent many hours pondering each word that was included as they discerned what their faith was about. They found themselves torn between wanting the material to be acceptable to whoever might receive it (aligning themselves with the culture) and seeking to

share what was unique about the faith and how it brought meaning to the church's members' lives (placing the church against the culture).

As a pastor, the project confirmed something that I had believed but not accepted before, that for a project to be meaningful for its participants and to aid in their growth of faith, they need to develop the project themselves. Not only does this give them ownership of the work, they also have the opportunity to struggle with their own faith. The same is true in the sharing of the word. If the only place that the faith is explicitly spoken of is from the pulpit by the clergy, the laity miss the chance to grapple with their faith. There need to be opportunities created for people of faith to discuss their faith.

The relinquishing of control was not always easy. Not using a strong hand to guide the direction of the development of the project, meant that there was no guarantee that the project would be something that I believed would meet the stated needs of the effort. This is especially difficult when the work being done is apt to primarily reflect on the minister involved (at least that is often the concern of clergy). The project proved that both of these assumptions are not always true. The committee was able to create a project that was more appropriate for CCB than one that I could have developed on my own. By including a number of people, there was a greater level of creativity as well as helpful words of caution when we would stray into ideas that were wrong for CCB.

I also learned that letting go of the control of the planning had a number of other positive ramifications. By involving a group of people from the start, the project was not seen as the minister's whim, and instead reflected on all those involved. This also spread out the sense of ownership for the work, thus increasing the hope for the longevity of the project. Many first time

efforts in the church rely on those involved in their development for their success. If only one person is involved in its creation, that one person may be left making sure that the project continues after its first phase. In the case of the *sharing our faith* project, after the first round of visitors finished, the team, without my persuasion, kept the project going into its second and then third round while I was away on sabbatical.

Letting go of control is not easy, but it is essential if we wish to affirm that all the members of the church are ministers. The clergy have much to learn from the members and need to help enable the laity to dream and develop the direction of the church, keeping it relevant to their lives, as well as being directed by the traditions of the faith.

WHERE DOES THE MAINLINE CHURCH GO FROM WHERE IT IS?

Many people hold little hope for the future of the mainline church. They claim that its demise is a forgone conclusion. But hope should remain. Projects like the one undertaken by the team at CCB are nothing but incremental steps (that may not last long) in an attempt to stimulate change where it is needed. But the mainline church remains based on the faith we find in God as revealed in the Gospel. This is exciting news and wherever it takes hold its bound to come alive. There is much health in the mainline church, our problem is when we become entrenched in the way things have always been instead of looking ahead to the future seeking to share the Gospel in new and lively ways that have meaning for each particular age. Many, like Hadaway and Roozen in Rerouting the Protestant Mainstream, are working creatively to call the mainline back to the core of what the faith and the mainline have been about for many years and at the same time are

seeking the change needed to bring about greater health in the church.

Even those within the leadership of the United Church of Christ, whose identity is so wrapped up in our society's liberal edge that it often can not separate itself from the culture, are calling us back to the Word found in the Bible, to the story we share, and to evangelism. When asked why so many in the UCC are frightened by and misunderstand evangelism, Rev. Robert L. Burt, the General Secretary UCBHM, Division of Evangelism and Local Church Development, unapologetically responded,

Biblical illiteracy! No other reason. People who have trouble with the most basic cluster of words ("to evangelize", "to proclaim", and "to witness") in the New Testament Church don't know our scriptures. They have no basis for critiquing the negative expressions of the media's religious culture that they find objectionable. Too bad! They reject it without ever understanding what they are rejecting. A biblically informed person knows that evangelism as the heart of God's mission is foundational to the Christian faith, . . . and that to dismiss it is to reject the gospel without which churches are reduced to activity centers or maintenance clubs of shrinking in-groups of homogenized people. Reject evangelism and you *assure* the church's demise! It is only a matter of time. So lets get with it. Study the scriptures. Get ourselves straight about the "E" word! New life begins there! (Maybe that is what frightens some people).⁴

There is hope for the mainline, but to find new life we must stimulate the change that brings us back to the core of who we are and what our faith is about. We must not fear the language of our faith that has provided meaning in our rich tradition over the centuries. The language must be reclaimed and redefined as it once was. Then we are the church alive, filled with a faith that brings meaning into our people's lives.

Many mainline churches fear being associated with churches stereotyped as theologically conservative, and have thus abandoned much of what has been important to them for centuries.

⁴ Rev. Dr. A. Gayle Engel, "Gayle Engel Interviews Bob Burt" in *Growing Plans*, (Cleveland: published by UCHBHM -- UCC, Spring 1996). pp. 6-7.

Words and involvement in activities like evangelism can and should be reclaimed. A sharing of the faith is possible while still maintaining the integrity of being a tolerant people. Our views need not be forced upon others. But when the stories of our faith are taken seriously and allowed to take hold of who we are, we are driven to share the good news that has been shared with us. We are called to and can share, not by force, but with a gracious offer to join in the story.

APPENDIX #1

VISITATION BREAD COOKBOOK

(The format of this cookbook has been adapted for this paper. The cover has been left out and drawings have been omitted.)

[page #1]

Thank you for expressing an interest in our church. We hope the following stories and recipes will give you a taste of our congregation and a sampling of what our church is all about. Please accept this gift and let it help bring you closer to God's magnificent blessing in Jesus the Christ, Bread of Heaven, Bread of Life.

[page #2]

Our first bread is the All Season Pineapple Bread. Since Colonial days pineapples have served as a symbol of welcome and hospitality. In that spirit, we extend to you a warm welcome to our church community in the heart of Brookfield. Our congregation feels it is our privilege to welcome all, since the very life of this community began around our pilgrim church, and in fact, the town of Brookfield takes its name from the Reverend Thomas Brooks, the first pastor of our church.

Like the bread variations included in this recipe, our congregation reflects this diversity of seasoning. We are a *United Church of Christ* whose fellowship includes members who have come from a wide variety of denominations. At the base, we are a church of the reformation - proclaiming the Good News of Christ, the evangel. Thus, we are truly Reformed, Evangelical, Congregational, and Christian. So whatever your religious background, you will find kindred spirits and an adventurous ministry in this church of all seasons.

[page #3]

ALL SEASON PINEAPPLE BREAD

(and recipe)

[page #4]

The Quintessential New England Bread is reflective of our quintessential and historic meeting house. When the congregation was gathered in 1757, the first meeting house was built on the site of our present church and was a barn type building with no floor, no seats (except temporary benches), and no heat. It served an area midway between three towns and stood as a symbol of faith and hope at the main cross road in the heart of historic Brookfield.

The name "Congregationalist" was given to us by those who noted both the quality of commitment and spiritual freedom demonstrated by our early congregations. Our forebears' concern for simplicity of worship, the "owning" of the covenant by which they vowed their loyalty to God & one another, their deep reverence for the Bible, and their confident trust in the guidance of the Holy Spirit are all part of our spiritual heritage today.

Both the building and the people of faith who meet for worship each Sunday bear the continuing testimony to the promise of life which is the Good News of the Church.

[page #5]

QUINTESSENTIAL NEW ENGLAND OATMEAL APPLESAUCE BREAD

(and recipe)

[page #6]

While we are extremely proud of our rich historic roots and pilgrim background, we are also a church on the move. We have thus included our recipe for Johnny Cake - a bread for "the journey".

From birth till death, The Congregational Church of Brookfield strives to respond to the congregation's and the individuals' ever changing needs in the journey of life. Baptism, nursery care, church school, youth groups, confirmation, adult education, church family fellowships, summer camps & conferences, retreats, and ecumenical activities, outreach to those with special needs, and opportunities to share and grow in faith are just some of the constantly changing and evolving ministries that mark our church life journey together.

It is God's good plan of life that we should have this bread for the journey - for all the human hungers for meaning, future, purpose, accomplishments, and life.

[page #7]

JOHNNY CAKE

(and recipe)

[page #8]

Even with all our church's programs and services, or so to speak, "bread for the journey", God has said, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the Lord" (Deut. 8:3 & Mt. 4:4).

We have many opportunities for you to turn to God's Word. Of course the congregation gathers each Sunday for worship of God through scripture based teachings which connect faith and life and explore biblical themes and meanings. In addition to worshipping each Sunday with hymns, scripture readings, prayers and sermons, the congregation celebrates communion the first Sunday of each month. While Sunday worship allows families to sit together, praise God and give thanks, a variety of learning styles involving the whole church evolve from a common theme each week in ways that address concerns, questions, and abilities of each age group. Through Bible studies, adult and children's church school, musical ministries, youth activities, fellowship groups, and special support groups - all under the guidance of our ministers, we strive to pass on the joy filled, life changing, never failing good news of the Gospel.

[page #9]

NEVER-FAIL OATMEAL BREAD

(and recipe)

[page #10]

You may wonder why we have chosen to share this bread recipe book and Banana Bread with you. Jesus told the disciples as he tore the loaf of bread to share with them, "Here I am." "This is my body, broken for you. Remember me as you break bread together" (Lk 22:19) - and we do. Jesus is at the heart of the sharing of this congregation. "For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." John 6:3.

We hope when you eat this bread, or use these recipes you will remember the old and the new story of Jesus and his love. And we at the Congregational Church of Brookfield also hope you will remember us and let us share our faith and that Christian love with you. We hope you feel the warmth of our welcome and we invite you to share in the life of our church community.

[page #11]

BANANA BREAD

(and recipe)

[back cover]

**The Congregational Church of Brookfield
United Church of Christ
Crossing of Routes 25 and 133
Brookfield, Connecticut 06804**

(203)775-1259

**CO-PASTORS
Rev. M. Sargent Desmond
Rev. Peter M. Wiley**

OUR WORSHIP TIMES

Sunday Worship

(Nursery Care Provided)

8:45 & 10:45 Family Worship and

Church School

9:45 Education Hour

(Adult Education & Children's Activities)

Summer Hours

8:00 Outdoor Communion Service

10:00 Family Worship and

Church School

OUR CO- PASTORS

The Rev. M. Sargent Desmond

The Rev. Peter M. Wiley

The Congregational Church of Brookfield

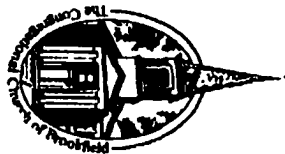
Crossing of Routes 25 & 133

Brookfield, CT 06804

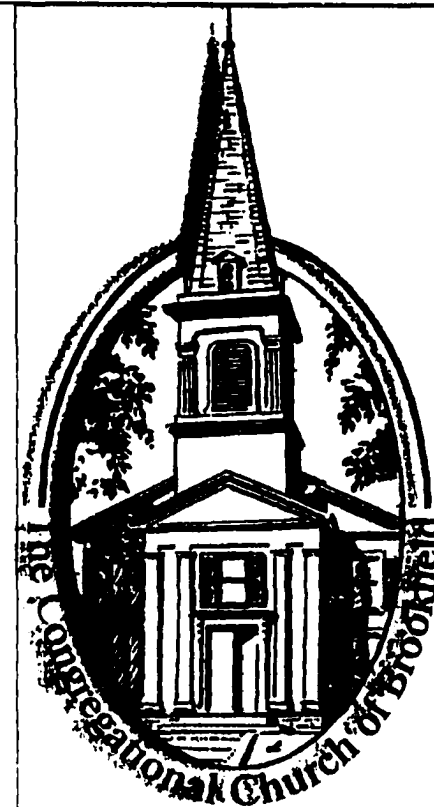
Please call us for more
information

775-1259

.....



Crossing of Routes 25 and 133
Brookfield, CT 06804
(203) 775-1259



United Church of Christ
Gathered in 1757

Rooted in the Past,
Alive in the Present
and Focused
on the Future

.....

A ministry for all ages

WHO WE ARE

The Congregational Church of Brookfield is a local congregation of the United Church of Christ - a mainline Protestant denomination in the United States.

WE BELIEVE

Jesus Christ is Lord of all.
This belief is the central focus of our faith as a fellowship of growing Christians.

ONE IN CHRIST

We are a diverse people of God celebrating the unity we cherish in Jesus the Christ.

A MINISTRY FOR YOU

We invite you to journey with us in the quest for meaning, hope, and purpose.

ADULT MINISTRIES

- Sunday Family Worship
- Adult Choir
- Handbell Choir
- Adult Education
- "Bible Alive"
- "Contemporary Christian Responses"
- Weekday AM/PM Study Opportunities
- Fellowship Groups
- BASH
- Serendippers
- Daytimers

YOUTH PROGRAMS

- Sunday Family Worship
- Sunday Church School
- Joyful Noise Choir
- Youth Handbell Choir
- Sunday Night Fellowship for Junior and Senior Highs
- Confirmation Program
- Adventure Field Trips and Work Camps

CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS

- Nursery Child Care
- Children's Moments in Worship
- Alleluia Choir
- Year Round Sunday Church School
- Ecumenical Vacation Church School

FELLOWSHIP & SERVICE

- Iglesia Hispana Unida de Cristo
- WestConn Campus Ministry
- Hanahoe Children's Clinic
- Dorothy Day Soup Kitchen
- World Missions
- SERRV
- Yankee Fair & Barn Sale
- REACH Phone Line
- Memorial Garden

MEETING SPACE FOR

- Chinese Alliance Church
- Alcoholics Anonymous
- Survivors of Incest Anonymous
- Red Cross Blood Mobile
- Boy Scouts/ Girl Scouts
- Newbury Fellowship of Retired Men
- Other Community Groups

SEASONAL EVENTS

- Summer Camp Fires
- Ecumenical Thanksgiving Eve Worship
- Candlelight Christmas Eve Services
- Noontime Lenten Table Fellowship
- Maundy Thursday Service
- Good Friday Walk
- Easter Sunrise Service
- Church Family Events



Yes...

I'd like to know more.



Please have a member of the church call to get acquainted

Please call to arrange a tour of the church.

Please add me to the newsletter mailing list.

I am...

Name

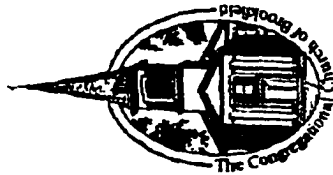
Address

City Zip

Phone

The Congregational Church of Brookfield
Crossing of Routes 25 and 133
Brookfield, CT 06804

Visitors Encouraged



APPENDIX #3

Christian Basics

Three Week Course Outline

[The outline for this course is highly in debt to Martin Copenhaver and his book, To Begin at the Beginning.]

Week #1: GOD THE CREATOR -

- I. True - False test. (to be taken as people arrive)
(see appendix #5)
- II. Opening prayer.
- III. Reading from Buechner, Listening to Your Life, p. 268.

All-wise. All powerful. All-loving. All-knowing. We bore to death both God and ourselves with our chatter. God cannot be expressed but only experienced.

In the last analysis, you cannot pontificate but only point. A Christian is one who points at Christ and says, "I cannot prove a thing, but there's something about his eyes and his voice. There's something about the way that he carries his head, his hands, the way he carries his cross - the way he carries me."¹

1. While Buechner is right that we are not able to prove anything about our faith - we do need to talk about it. For thousands of years, people have needed to talk about their faith. It is the way they shared it with their children and friends. It is also the way that they nurtured their own faith, and were strengthened knowing that others had the same faith.
2. So if we need to talk about our faith, where do we begin? Or put another way, *Where does the faith begin?* **Get answers from the group.**

* People have made many claims about where faith originates.

- In the Bible
- In the Church & through its teachings
- In God's covenant with Abraham
- In Jesus

* But faith really begins with you and with me. It begins with each person and their experience.

¹ Frederick Buechner, Listening to Your Life, (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), p.268.

- It is when all the things that we mentioned interact with an individual's experience and helps him or her make sense out of life - that faith really begins to develop.
 - For the Christian faith, all these other elements are essential - but for faith to develop, it starts with each person as it has throughout history.
3. Faith does begin with each person. But it does not happen in a vacuum, where one day, we simply say *AHAH! Now I get it. I believe in Jesus Christ!* Part of becoming a Christian is being exposed to Christian beliefs and finding that they point to God - they help us to know who God is and how God relates to us. That's why at baptism, we as a congregation make a promise for all Christian churches that the child being baptized will be exposed to the faith. We promise that we will help the child learn what makes up the Christian faith. The child is taught about aspects of the faith from birth, so that the child is able to relate those teaching to his or her experiences in the world.
- * The purpose of this class is to do just that. We will consider some of the foundational elements of the Christian faith. It will be just a beginning - or a re-beginning for most of us as we have learned about the faith before. But no matter how versed we are in the faith, we do need to return to the beginning over and over again. It also is not about how our faith developed, so much as a look at elements of the faith, the stories that help us to understand our experiences as people of faith. It also won't be a complete overview, but more of a taste, or a beginning of talking about what makes up our faith.
4. In the class we will look into three general areas.
- * First we will look at the stories of who we believe God to be in a general sense.
 - * Second we will focus on the stories of how God is revealed to us in Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus the Christ.
 - * The third week we will look at the stories of the Holy Spirit and life as a Christian.
5. We've already begun to consider who God is and how we experience God. Even if we agree that faith begins with each person, we still need to look to see where the story of God begins in the Christian experience.
6. *Pass out the five planks of Protestantism and explain what they are.*
This week we will only concentrate of the first of the five - *The Authority of the Bible.*
Read the section on Authority of Bible and discuss. (see appendix #4)
7. What is in the Bible? *Get ideas from the group.*
- * There are books of history, prophecy, song lyrics, laws, poetry, sermons, legends, and letter - and many of the books combine two or more of these genres.

- * The Bible is really made up of the story of God's interaction with God's people. Its a telling of how the people's faith developed through their experiences with God. The Bible is their sharing of these stories, accounts, and what is important to them in their relation to God.
- * The Bible was written between 800 B.C.E. and 150 C.E. A span of about a thousand years. Consider the changes in the last 1000 years.
- * Most of the Bible started as oral tradition, but that does not mean that it necessarily changed radically over the centuries.
- * The Bible found its current form in 1546 at the Council of Trent.
- * Discuss the difference between *natural theology* and *revealed theology*.
 - Natural: God can be found equally in all things.
 - Revealed: God can be found in all things, but is not equally perceived in all. God is revealed more clearly in some ways than other especially the Bible.
 - / The Bible helps us to see God more clearly in our own lives.

8. Is the Bible literally true?

- * Some may claim to do so, but no one reads the Bible literally.
 - / Was John the Baptist speaking literally when he said that Jesus is the Lamb of God.
 - / Karl Barth said, *I take the Bible too seriously to take it literally.*
 - / Martin Luther said, *The Bible is like the manger in which the baby Jesus lay: while it cradles the word of God, it also contains a lot of straw.*
- * But something does not need to be historically true to reveal truth.
- * It is also not easy to determine what is truth and what is straw.
- * So as Christians, we take the whole of the Bible, and all it contains as the way that we most clearly know God and define our faith.
 - Christians affirm the need to read the Bible so that they may know it.

9. If the primary source of the Christian story is found in the Bible, the where does that story begin?

- * Reading the Bible, we might naturally assume that the beginning comes at the beginning of the Bible, with Genesis 1:1 and the story of creation. But if the faith begins with each person, then the story of our faith really begins with the people who wrote the creation story.

- There were no eyewitnesses to this event.
- * In fact, the creation stories weren't even the first pieces of scripture and were written after the people of Israel had experienced God in their midst. The Hebrews first thoughts of faith didn't start with creation, but came from their experience with God in the middle of history. So our story really begins in the midst of life.
- * The story starts with the Exodus and God's calling the people of Israel out of slavery. The Exodus is the focal point of Israel's faith.
- * Read Exodus 3:7-8, God responded to the cries of the people saying,
 - I have observed the misery of my people ... I have heard their cry ... I know their sufferings ... and I have come to deliver them.*
- * As a group, consider why the Exodus experience was so important to the people of Israel.
 - Through the eye of faith, regardless of what really happened in the Exodus, God's saving hand was in the midst of it.
 - God intervened in the midst of life.
 - It became a definitive sign of God's special relationship with them.
 - / Especially important that they did not see themselves as deserving such a distinction - grace

10. The Law.

- * What did such a relationship mean to them? It wasn't without requirements. Just as a parent loves a child unconditionally - but still has expectations for the child, out of a love for the child.
 - "A complete lack of expectations is a sign not of love but something more like indifference." (Copenhaver, pp.8-9)
- * What do we think of when we talk about the law for the people of Israel?
 - The Ten Commandments.
 - Many people - even those outside the Jewish and Christian faith have made claims that the way to improve the world is if we all lived by the Ten Commandments. But when they say this, they speak as if their is some natural character to the commandments that anyone should be able to see their value. But they are not universal principles that we can come up with on our own. They had power for the people of Israel because they believed they came from God for them. They were bound by them in their relationship - covenant.

What are some of the other places in the Bible we find God in covenant with the people?

What are some of the names used to refer to God?

- * The people of Israel looked back to previous covenants.
 - Abraham >>>> Israel
 - Noah >>>> All humanity

10. Finally we can return to the creation story.

- * Why are there two accounts? Especially when they have conflicting information in them?
- * What we learn from the creation stories is that they are included not because of their historical accuracy. But because of what they say about God and our relationship to God. They both remind us that God created us and the world. It was not a random act.
- * Again, we are reminded that our faith is about a personal God that acts in the world.

11. Follow up on true false quiz.

12. Closing Prayer

Week #2 JESUS OF NAZARETH & JESUS THE CHRIST

- I. Pre-activity (see appendix #5)
- II. Prayer
- III. Reading from C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, pp. 55-56.

Jesus ... told people that their sins were forgiven. . . . This makes sense only if He really was the God whose laws were broken and whose love is wounded in every sin.

. . . I am trying to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You can shut Him up for a fool, or you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.²

1. What did C.S. Lewis mean when he said that Jesus can not simply be thought of as a great moral teacher? (*response*)

- What does it mean that we call Jesus both man and God?

IV. THE INCARNATION OF GOD.

1. Where and in what do we find the word of God?

- For Christians, the word is Jesus. And we find Jesus through the Bible.
- For Muslims, the word is the Koran. And the Koran came through Muhammad.
- / So for Christian's the Bible isn't the Word, Jesus is - but its through the Bible that we find Jesus.

2. The Christian faith says that Jesus was God in human form - fully God & fully human.

- According to the Gospel of Luke, soon after Jesus began his public ministry he returned to his hometown of Nazareth and preached there. Chose his reading from the prophet Isaiah and read:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to ... release the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Isaiah 61:1-2)

² C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1952), pp. 55-56.

There was nothing unusual in Jesus doing this, it was the common practice for a preacher. But then he went on to say, *Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.* (Luke 4:22). Simply stated, "I am the one for whom you have been waiting.

They were amazed and receptive to what they heard. But then reality sunk in, *this is Joseph's son, a mere carpenter.* They wanted to believe, but it seemed to unbelievable. They sensed that God was present in Jesus. But that couldn't be in the Jesus they knew. This contradiction is still one that puzzles Christians today.

The idea of a person also being God was as troubling for the earliest Christians as it is for us. But most of the first Christians didn't try to make sense out of it, they simply stood before it as a mystery. Paul even acknowledged that by worldly wisdom, such a belief was nothing short of foolishness.

And strangely enough, "If we cannot hold in our minds the twin affirmations that Jesus is God and human, then paradoxically - we are on the right track." (Copenhaver, p. 24). We often try to make sense out of this paradox, but in doing so we lose the essence of the Christian belief in God.

- Some do this by only affirming that Jesus was man.
- Others do this by only affirming that Jesus was God.

But in the Christian faith, we need to hold on to both and the tension they create. When we try to create an image of Jesus, we need to look for a common person - one that we would never be able to distinguish as different from you and me. That's what it means for him to be fully human. It's only the eye of faith that can see beyond the common person of Jesus and see the Christ.

3. One of the great affirmation of the Jesus of the incarnation is that God is not a distant God, but shares fully in the human experience. It says that God knows about the darkest trials we face. God has faced them. It says that our God is a God that shares our trials with us.

John Westerhoff tells the story of a child who was late leaving nursery school. The child explains to his mother that a classmate had broken a piece of pottery she had made. *So you had to stay and help her clean it up?* the mother asks. *Oh no,* the boy replies, *I had to stay and help her cry.* That's in part why God came to us in Jesus, that we might know that God is not above the world meddling in our affairs. But that God is with us in the midst of our lives and shares in our pain as well as our joys. Jesus is Immanuel, which means God with us.

4. The same God existed in Old Testament times as exists today and has for all times. And yet how God is revealed to us is new in Jesus. When Moses asked for God's name, God said, "I am who I am," In Hebrew the phrase is spelled YHWH, without any vowels - it cannot be pronounced. For Moses, God was too distant and mysterious to have a name. The God we know is also too great to have one name. We use many names in an attempt to use our inadequate language to describe something beyond description.

But Jesus did use names for God. Not distant terms but personal ones, like "Abba," which means daddy or papa. Jesus reminds us that our God is a personal God with us.

* Surveys show that almost all Americans believe in God in some sense. What does it mean to say that we believe in Jesus who is God incarnate? To say that Jesus of Nazareth - the man - is God?
(response)

V. JESUS AND THE RESURRECTION.

1. Christians often refer to themselves as an Easter People. We talked about what it means that God came and lived with us in human form. And we talked about how I believe that for the people of Israel, the focal point of their faith is the Exodus. So what does it mean that the Christian focal point is Easter? To begin we need to look at the cross.
2. What is the meaning of the cross for the Christian faith?
- Its often suggested, that in our day to regain the shock of the cross we ought to use the symbol of the electric chair, noose
3. To better understand the importance of the cross, it helps to look at God's earlier failed attempts to bring us into a faithful relationship. God formed a covenant with the people and renewed it repeatedly, only to have the people break it and fall away from God. But God doesn't accept no for an answer and comes back to the people over and over again. And finally, God sees that something more than a renewed covenant is needed - and instead sees the need for a new covenant of altogether.

It wasn't, I believe, that there was a need for a change in the way that God viewed humanity. God's signs of forgiveness and love are found over and over again in the Hebrew scriptures. The people of Israel spoke repeatedly of God's words of assurance of forgiveness. One of many examples is found in the 103 Psalm:

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love ... He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.

(Psalm 103:8,10-12)

Jesus also spoke of God's forgiveness. One of the best examples is found in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (LK 15:11-32). The story tells how the son takes his share of his father's inheritance of wastes it on loose or extravagant living. And once his money is gone, he decides to come and plead for forgiveness from his father. But his father doesn't even allow him to ask, and instead extravagantly welcomes him home throwing a party for his return. It's been suggested that this story shouldn't be called *The Prodigal Son*, but instead *the Prodigal God*, because prodigal means extravagant and lavish. And it is the father, or God, who is the one that is truly extravagant.

There are plenty of words that reassure us that God forgives us, but words just aren't enough. People needed to be able to feel that forgiveness in some concrete way.

5. THE CROSS

So what does the cross mean to us. (response)

Many claims have been made, including the idea that Jesus died on the cross as a sacrifice - dying for our sins. While such ideas may be helpful in some ways, they can also be misleading. They can make us think that God needed to be changed. They can make us think that without Jesus dying on the cross God couldn't have accepted us. But it wasn't God that needed to be changed - it was us. Jesus didn't die on the cross so that we could be forgiven - but for us to be able to accept God's forgiveness. He died on the cross so that we could not only hear, but also feel how far God's love for us goes and we could be reconciled with God. That's what Good Friday is all about.

- * This new covenant didn't change the way that God relates to us - but the way that we relate to God. When Jesus gathered with the disciples just before he would die, holding the cup of wine he said, *This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.* (MT 26:28) This new way of relating no longer depended on the keeping of the law, but was based on faith alone. **ONE OF THE REFORMERS PLANKS.**

6. And what does faith mean? Living in trust. Placing our lives in God's hands. But Paul reminds us, that this faith is not simply another human achievement - something we can accomplish. It is a gift from God.

7. So what does it mean to live in faith that God forgives and loves us despite our shortcomings? Does it mean that we are free to live however we wish because we know that God will forgive whatever we do?

- Some have claimed that we ought to sin more so that we can enjoy the pleasure of God's forgiveness.

- The poet W.H. Auden once wrote, *I like committing crimes. God likes forgiving them. Really, the world is admirably arranged.*

But like the people of Israel knew, unconditional love doesn't mean there are no expectations. Strangely enough, we probably don't even know or feel we are truly forgiven unless expectations are included.

Bill Muehl, a homiletics professor I had illustrates the point with a story about a man who had strayed from his marital vows of fidelity who has been reunited with his wife. He knows that he's not forgiven just because the proper words have been spoken, his wife saying that he is forgiven nor through her reminders of forgiveness as she treats him well and with love. *The erring husband knows that he has been forgiven the day his wife tells him to get off his behind and dry the dishes.*³

The promise of forgiveness is unconditional, and even if we turn it down, it remains. But we are called to receive the gift with gratitude.

8. So far we have talked about Good Friday. How does Easter fit into the picture?
(response)

Without Easter, the cross should lead us to despair - as it did Jesus disciples. God offered himself fully to us, present in Jesus of Nazareth - but we killed him on the cross. End of story? No! God has the last word. You can throw the worst you have at me. Despise me. Spit on me. Abandon me and kill me on the cross. But I remain, as does my offer of forgiveness.

What happened that first Easter we don't know. Little is said about it in the Gospels. But we know it was so unexpected indescribable and wonderful. That it had such power that it turned around Jesus followers who had been cowering in their homes in fear. So that they came out of hiding and proclaimed the he is alive! They couldn't hold their joy within and had to share it. Its Easter that confirms everything else.

³ William Muehl, Why Preach, Why Listen, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), pp. 69-70.

Everything else that we have talked about is secondary to Easter. Easter is really the beginning of the story for Christians. It is the confirmation of who God is. All of his teachings have little meaning without it. In fact there are many who have taught things similar to Jesus teaching. What makes it different for us is that the Jesus of Easter said it. This is what we are about!

VI. BAPTISM AND COMMUNION

If time allows discuss baptism and communion.

VII. Follow up on quiz.

VIII. Closing Prayer.

Week #3 **THE HOLY SPIRIT AND LIFE AS A CHRISTIAN**

I. Pre-activity (see appendix #5)

II. Prayer

III. Reading From Martin Copenhaver, To Begin at the Beginning, p. 63.

The Holy Spirit is active from the first to last in the biblical drama, at work in the first chapter of Genesis, appearing again in the last chapter of Revelation, and evident often in between. In the biblical story, the Holy Spirit always seems to be where the action is and in a very real sense it is the Spirit that is doing the acting, stirring things up - always creating, empowering, and sustaining.

Yet, even though the Holy Spirit is one of the main characters in the biblical drama, this same Spirit is often treated like an actress who plays a bit part. For many Christians, this central character can drift into obscurity and sometimes be forgotten almost entirely. If our liturgies reflected our understanding, we might be baptized in the name of "The Father, the Son, and Someone Else" or "The Creator, the Redeemer, and the Other One."

To be sure, the Bible introduces us to the Spirit early and often, but that might be the problem: each time the Spirit appears, it can be in such new and startling ways that we might be tempted to ask, "Excuse me, but have we met before?" As the biblical story unfolds, the Holy Spirit's character seems to develop. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that our understanding of the Spirit's character develops to the extent that we must add new understandings to the old if we are to get an accurate picture.⁴

* So who is the Spirit? (response)

- The Word Spirit as its used in the Bible includes several meanings that are all included in the Greek Word Pneuma: breath, wind , and spirit.

* The second creation story says that God *breathed the breath of life into man.*

{Genesis 2:7}

- Without the Spirit there is no life.

* The first creation story says that *a wind from God swept over the face of the earth.*

{Genesis 1:1-2}

⁴ Copenhaver, p. 63.

- So if the Spirit is a wind, what does that mean for us? If Jesus is our access to God - is the way that we best know God in a concrete form - the way that we come the closest to being able to pin down who God is the Spirit is NOT! Try getting a hold of the wind, grabbing on to it. Try describing the wind and what it is to a child. Can it be any wonder that most of Church School focuses on stories of Jesus.
- * The Spirit is elusive, but it's also what empowers us and gives us life. One of my favorite illustrations for how we encounter the Spirit is by looking at a sail boat and the way that it encounters the wind.
 - If you've ever sailed, you know that the natural thing for a sailboat to do if you let out the sheets is for the wind to pass right by the boat, not filling the sails. It's almost as if the boat didn't recognize the presence of the wind at all. The same is true for us with the Spirit - it's often hard for us to recognize or describe.
 - If it is the Spirit that is doing the acting, stirring things up - always creating, empowering, and sustaining ... a sailboat also helps us understand how the Spirit works in our lives - as if we individually or the church as a whole is the boat.
 - / A sailboat works on air drafts - with the wind either pushing the boat downwind or pulling it upwind. *explain*
(downwind pushed. upwind: wind flows on both sides of the sail - longer distance on the outside creates a low pressure, actually pulling the high pressure on the inside upwind.)
 - / The Spirit is like that. We are adrift at sea, being both pulled and pushed by the Spirit.

* So where is the Spirit today? (response)

* Reading from I Corinthians:

Reading From I Corinthians 12 *selected*

{1} Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. {2} You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. {3} Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. {4} Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; {5} and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; {6} and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. {7} To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

{11} All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. {12} For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. {13} For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. {14} Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.

{18} But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. {19} If all were a single member, where would the body be? {20} As it is, there are many members, yet one body. {21} The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." {22} On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,

{26} If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. {27} Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

- * What does this passage tell us about the Spirit, active and alive in us today? (response)
 - People often distinguish between the gifts of the Spirit and the fruits of the Spirit. But for our purposes, what's important to remember is that it's the Spirit that is present with us and makes life possible ... It's the Spirit that is with us on the journey of faith.

IV. So, finally, what does it mean to live as a person of faith today. I want to take the remainder of the time we have left for discussion. A chance for each of us to share what the Christian life and life in the church is about.

- * Read quote from Buechner, Listening to Your Life, p. 57.

Some think of a Christian as one who necessarily believes certain things. That Jesus was the son of God, say. Or that Mary was a virgin. Or that the Pope is infallible. Or that all other religions are wrong.

Some think of a Christian as one who necessarily does certain things. Such as going to church. Getting baptized. Giving up liquor and tobacco. Reading the Bible. Doing a good deed a day. Some think of a Christian as just a Nice Guy.

Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). He didn't say that any particular ethic, doctrine, or religion was the way, the truth, and the life. He said that he was. He didn't say that it was by believing or doing anything in particular that you could "come to the Father." He said it was only by him - by living, participating in, being caught up by, the way of life that he embodied, that was his way.

Thus it is possible to be on Christ's way and with his mark upon you without ever having heard of Christ, and for that reason to be on your way to God though maybe you don't believe in God. A Christian is one who is on the way, though not necessarily very far along it, and who at least has some dim and half-baked idea of whom to thank. A Christian isn't necessarily any nicer than anybody else. Just better informed.⁵

⁵ Buechner, p. 57.

- * Discuss what it means to be a Christian today.
- V. Evaluation.
- VI. Closing Prayer

APPENDIX #4

Christian Basics

FIVE FOUNDATIONAL PLANKS IN THE REFORMERS PLATFORM (Protestant Affirmations)

AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

The Bible is central in our faith as authority - before church tradition, before private pronouncements, before current *revelations* - all of which must meet the biblical test to be received as authoritative.

This does not mean that the Bible is literally historically accurate in matters of technology, culinary artistry, etc. But that the Bible is the basis and authority for our belief in God and our search for meaning in our lives.

When the Bible is honored, carried at the head of the processional, placed in a central position in our church, made the basis for our worship - then we are pointing up the authority of the Bible in our choices and life decisions. We are a church of the Evangelion.

Why study the Bible? - So that we may know the full sweep of the Bible story of God's struggle with and for humanity. Not the verse here and another verse there - but the whole Bible sweep of salvation is the authority for our faith and our living.

JESUS CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH

Jesus as the one, sole, living *Head of the Church* above that of the current members of any other earthly head of the church - Pope, Bishop, Ruling Elder, President, Synod Chief, etc. The body of Christ has one head, and that is the Living Christ.

As the empty cross marks our thinking and our symbols, so the Christ, risen and living is the head of the church.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

Grace is ours in Christ at God's good pleasure. Nothing we do can earn more, nor less. Believe in the gift. (Critics say *Easy Grace or Cheap Grace*.) No, we are not able to "win God over" by praise and deeds of justice.

Then why be good? Thank God! If you are a believer in Justification by Faith, then you are overcome with the wonder of your good fortune, and therefore thankful, "What can I ever do to thank you?" "Nothing I could ever do would thank you enough!" we gush ... and right we are. But we are urged to try. God says, "Try me!"

Give thanks then - and show forth your gratitude in deeds of kindness and mercy.

PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

Selfishly: Each one approaches God directly without the need for priestly intermediaries.

More importantly: All believers ought to serve in a priestly function for their neighbors: petitions and intercessions, hearing confessions, assuring forgiveness, conveying grace.

Here again, then we find the incentive for goodness and right living with others. We seek to be the means of grace to them.

RIGHT OF PRIVATE JUDGEMENT

This appears as not only a right, but a responsibility. If it doesn't look right, moral, true, just - then no amount of authority of group or tradition should sway us from righteous living. "Following Orders" does not excuse us. Majority vote of the "congregation" does not change truth.

While the *corrective* of the group is the genius of congregationalism, each of us must understand our own actions and be responsible for them.

The "private" does not mean that we are to keep silent. Quite the reverse. We are to share our viewpoint and sway the whole of humankind. Speak out against injustice and take action to end it. Join with others of like mind and make of society a "heaven on earth".

APPENDIX #5
CHRISTIAN BASICS I –WEEK I

In the time available, please indicate your choice in each of the following questions (Circle all that apply):

1. There must be a God because:
 - a. Since the beginning of history the most variegated majority of people have intermittently believed there was:
 - b. It is hard to consider the vast and complex structure of the universe in general and of the human mind in particular without considering the possibility that they issued from some ultimate source, itself vast, complex, and somehow mindful;
 - c. Built into the very being of even the most primitive man there seems to be a profound psychophysical need or hunger for something like truth, goodness, love, and - under one alias or another - for God himself.
 - d. Every time and culture has produced mystics who have experienced a Reality beyond reality and have come back using different words and images, but obviously and without collusion describing with awed adoration the same Indescribability.

(Buechner, Listening to Your Life, p. 268)

2. The following statements concern our Bible.
 - T. F. The Bible contains many different kinds of writing, including: history, prophecy, laws, poetry, song lyrics, sermons, legends, fables, and letters - and many of the books combine two or more of these forms.
 - T. F. The Bible as a whole tells the story of God's interaction with God's people... and the response of God's people to these experiences with God.
 - T. F. The whole Bible was written by different authors over a span of about 1000 years.
 - T. F. Most of the Bible began as oral tradition that has been captured in written form by Biblical writers.
 - T. F. Literally no one reads the Bible literally.
 - T. F. Unless a writing is historically accurate, it cannot reveal truth about life or God.
 - T. F. Because our Bible has at least two accounts of The Creation, one of them must be false - and devoid of truth.
3. In the time remaining, jot down all the "names" for God that you are familiar with. Think what these different names add to your understanding of God. Are there some names for God which are more comfortable for you to use... and others which you would seldom use? Why?

CHRISTIAN BASICS II -- CLASS II

JESUS THE CHRIST

PART 1

JESUS OF NAZARETH (Wholly Human)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	THE CHRIST SON OF GOD (Wholly Divine)
---	---------------------------	--

INSTRUCTIONS:

As you think of Jesus relation to other human beings, and to the Almighty, CIRCLE THE NUMBER ABOVE that you feel best represents your present faith position on the humanity/divinity of Jesus Christ.

(Solely human would be #1. Only and purely divine would be #7. Where would you place yourself today? Circle that number now.)

PART 2

After you have completed this first "decision", you may use the same scale from 1 to 7 to indicate how you think the following passages of Scripture portray Jesus the Christ.

YOUR RESPONSE

THE BIBLE PASSAGE

- A] _____ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. John 1:14
- B] _____ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. Luke 2:7
- C] _____ Jesus began to weep. John 11:35
- D] _____ The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Mark 1:1
- E] _____ He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. Matthew 4:2
- F] _____ (Jesus) was hungry. (He saw) in the distance a fig tree in leaf... When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves... He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." Mark 11:12-14
- G] _____ Then Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." Mark 11:21

PART 3

The following are names sometimes used for Jesus. Indicate a number on the "Jesus the Christ Scale" that you think each name evokes for you.

- | | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| ___ Savior | ___ Great Physician | ___ Good Shepherd |
| ___ Rabbi - Teacher | ___ Suffering Servant | ___ Word of God |
| ___ Great Prophet | ___ Friend | ___ Son of God |
| ___ Prince of Peace | ___ The Vine | ___ Bread of Life |

CHRISTIAN BASICS III -- WEEK 3

The following images or "names" have been used to represent the Holy Spirit - the third person of the Trinity. Rate them in relation to their meaning for you as you presently relate to God. On a scale from 1 to 10, (with 1 being not very helpful, and 10 being most helpful to me) rate your experience for each of the representations of the Holy Spirit.

	#		#	
A.		Guide (Jn 16:13)	F.	Assurance
B.		Comforter (14:16)	G.	Breath of God (Gen 2.7)
C.		Advocate (Jn.14:16)	H.	Reminder (Jn 14:26)
D.		Wind (Gen.1:2)	I.	Encourager
E.		Guarantee (2 Cor 5:5)	J.	Enforcer

The tasks of the Holy Spirit in Scripture and in Church tradition have been diverse and numerous. "Gifts" of the Spirit as well as "fruits" of the Spirit are enumerated in 1 Corinthians 12 and Galatians 5. Gifts seem to be vocations or skills, while fruits seem to be the results of the indwelling Spirit. Try your hand at separating the "Gifts" from the "fruits" in the following list.

the utterance of wisdom	love
the utterance of knowledge	joy
faith	peace
healing gifts	patience
the working of miracles	kindness
prophecy	generosity
the discernment of spirits	faithfulness
various kinds of tongues	gentleness
interpretation of tongues	self-control

APPENDIX #6

SHARING OUR FAITH

VISITOR PREPARATION

September 26, 1995

- I. Upon arrival hand out *Spirituality Wheel Indicator* by Corinne Ware and give the group time to fill it out.
- II. Opening Prayer.
- III. Hand out additional piece on the wheel and discuss what each area means. Discuss where each person landed on the wheel and that one has no more value than another. They are just different. The people we encounter on our visits are also likely to fall in different areas. We need to accept that people's faith may look different than ours.
- IV. Go through the logistics of visiting.
 - Pass out the different sheets that need to be followed and handed out and discuss each.
 - Pass around the sign up sheet.
- V. Discuss the trial visits that took place in July.
- VI. Hand out visiting tips by Gwen Burnett.

APPENDIX #7

Christian Basics

EVALUATION

Please complete the following form and return it to the church office.

1. This class has helped me in my faith development and understanding of Christianity by . . .

2. For me, the best part of the class was . . .

3. For me, the worst part of the class was . . .

4. If the class is offered again, make sure that you do not change the following . . .

5. If the class is offered again make sure that you do change the following . . .

6. I believe the class should/should not be offered again because . . .

7. I wish the class had spent some time focusing on . . .

8. Was the class meaningful to you or not and why. Please comment.

9. I would also like to say . . .

APPENDIX #8

SHARING OUR FAITH
VISIT EVALUATION

Date of visit:

Time of visit:

Name of family visited:

Names of church members making the visit:

Did you phone ahead or arrive unannounced?

What was the family's initial reaction to the visit?

Did the family invite you inside?

What did you talk about?

What questions did you ask the family?

What questions did the family ask you?

How did the visit end?

How long did the visit last?

Were arrangements made for follow-up calls or meetings?

What aspect of the visit was most successful/rewarding?

What aspect of the visit might have been improved?

How might you have been better prepared to make the visit?

What advice would you like to pass on to other church members who are making visits?

APPENDIX #9

SHARING OUR FAITH

Name:

My greatest fear about visiting was . . .

Did any of your fears of visiting come true?

Did your visits and the prospect of going visiting make you think more about your faith? If so, how?

Do you feel like you had the opportunity to share your faith on your visits?

Would you continue visiting? Please comment on why you would or would not do it again.

Should we continue this program of visitation? Please comment?

Was the Christian Basics class a helpful step in preparing for your visits?

Was the evening of preparation helpful?

Please add anything else you would like to share.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ammerman, Nancy T. "Golden Rule Christianity". unpublished paper for Candler School of Theology, Emory University.
- Boys, Mary C. Education for Citizenship and Discipleship. New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989.
- Brueggemann, Walter. Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993.
- Brueggemann, Walter. Hope Within History. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987.
- Buechner, Frederick. Listen to Your Life. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992.
- Burnett, Gwen Kelly. "Tips to turn a home visitation disaster into a winning experience", *The Disciple*. November 1994.
- Carroll, Jackson W., Carl S. Dudley & William McKinney. Handbook for Congregational Studies. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986.
- Carter, Stephen L. The Culture of Disbelief. New York: Basic Books, 1993.
- Collins, James C. & Jerry I. Porras. Built to Last. New York: HarperCollins, 1994.
- Copenhaver, Martin B. "Christianity Doesn't Make Sense ... Praise be to God!", *Colleague: A Journal of Theological Reflection by Pastors of the United Church of Christ*, Vol. XVIII, No. 2, March 1996.
- Copenhaver, Martin B. To Begin at the Beginning. Cleveland: United Church Press, 1994.
- Dudley, Carl S. & Earle Hilgert. New Testament Tensions and the Contemporary Church. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.
- Dudley, Carl S. & Sally A. Johnson. Energizing the Congregation. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993.
- Fackre, Dorothy & Gabriel Fackre. Christian Basics. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991.
- Fackre, Gabriel. Conversation in Faith. Boston: United Church Press, 1968.
- Fauth, Robert T. So You are a Church Member. New York: United Church Press, 1964.

- Garrett, James Leo Jr. The Concept of the Believer's Church. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1969.
- Gunnemann, Louis H. The Shaping of the United Church of Christ. New York: United Church Press, 1977.
- Gunnemann, Louis H. United and Uniting. New York: United Church Press, 1987.
- Hadaway, C. Kirk. Church Growth Principles. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991.
- Hadaway, C. Kirk & David A. Roozen. Rerouting the Mainstream. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. Dispatches From the Front. Durham: Duke University Press, 1994.
- Hauerwas, Stanley & William H. Willimon. Resident Aliens. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989.
- Hoge, Dean R., Benton Johnson & Donald A. Luidens. Vanishing Boundries. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994.
- Kingsley, William L. Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Connecticut. New Haven: J. H. Benham Printer, 1861.
- Lewis, C. S. Mere Christianity. New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1943.
- Lindbeck, George. The Nature of Doctrine. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984.
- Luther, Martin. Lenker Edition. Volume XII, #3.
- Mead, Loren B. More Than Numbers. Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1993.
- Muehl, William. Why Preach? Why Listen?. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972.
- Niebuhr, H. Richard. Christ and Culture. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1951.
- Roof, Wade Clark & William McKinney. American Mainline Religion. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987.
- Roof, Wade Clark. A Generation of Seekers. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.
- Sample, Tex. U.S. Lifestyles and the Mainline Church. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990.

- Stott, John R. Basic Christianity. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1958.
- Starkey, Marion L. The Congregational Way. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966.
- Steinke, Peter L. How Your Church Family Works. Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1993.
- Taylor, David T. *Social Resolutions of the Connecticut Conference United Church of Christ: 1970-1995*.
- Ware, Corinne. Discover Your Spirituality Type. Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1995.
- Willimon, William H. Making Disciples. Inver Grove Heights, MN: Logos Productions, 1990.
- Zikmund, Barbara Brown. Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ. New York: United Church Press, 1984.
- Zikmund, Barbara Brown. Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ -- Volume II. New York: United Church Press, 1987.