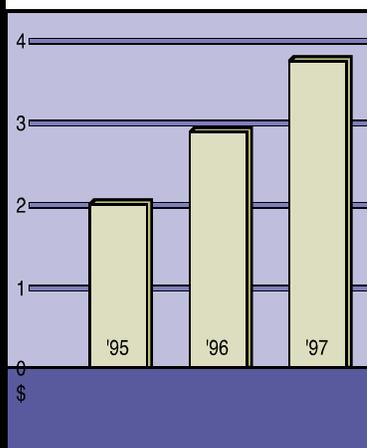


Renewal

From the Pastor's Desk ... How Extremely Religious!

The Reverend Dr. Byron E. Shafer



I've never been able to resist a good poll! Somewhere between my fascination with the science of statistics and my fascination with what makes people tick I've gotten hooked. So just as in the daily newspaper some of us read pretty much cover to cover say, the Arts Section, or the Sports Section, or the Business Section, or the Obituaries, that's about how intensely I read polls, especially when they're surveying people's feelings and attitudes about religion.

Now, when comparing polls of people in the United States with polls of people in other industrialized nations, I'm always totally amazed at how extremely religious we Americans say we are. And of course as one who teaches religion, and preaches religion, and communicates religion on the radio, that pleases me.

I mean, in what other major megalopolis in the Western world would you find a three-hour radio pro-

gram on religion whose Arbitron ratings are up there in the top 5% of all the programs broadcast during its time slot? And "Religion on the Line"—Sunday mornings from 6 to 9 (tune in next week!)—is actually, by far, the #1 rated radio show for all of Sunday morning in *one* of our city's boroughs—well, maybe not Manhattan! But you wouldn't believe how religious Staten Island is!

Way back in the Roman Empire of the first century A.D., in the days of the apostle Paul, the people of the Greek peninsula thought of themselves not only as the most philosophical folk around but also as the most religious. And among the peoples on the Greek peninsula, the most religious of them all were those in Athens. True, the Golden Age of Athens had been some 500 to 400 years earlier, in the days of Socrates and Plato and Aristotle, of Sophocles and Pericles and Thucydides. So the Athens of the first century A.D. was admittedly well past its prime. But it was still widely regarded as the most intellectual city of its time, and thinkers from far and wide came to it in order both to share and to learn great new ideas. As for religion, according to the reports of travelers, there were more statues of gods standing in Athens than in all the rest of Greece combined. Visitors

would joke that in Athens you could meet more gods than people. There were images of Zeus, and Hera, and Aphrodite, of Ares, and Athena, and Hephaestus, of Apollo, and Poseidon, and Hestia—yes, statues, statues, everywhere!

The Acts of the Apostles was written by the same author as the Gospel of Luke. In chapter 17, verses 16–31, the apostle Paul arrives in Athens to proclaim there for the first time the message of Christ. Inside, in the synagogue of Athens, Paul debates his fellow Jews,

Continued on page 3 >>

Inside this issue:	
From the Pastor's Desk	1
Transgender Clergywoman	2
Good Coffee/Good Cause	3
Claudia Hall Remembered	4
May the Force Be with Us	5
AIDS and Africa	6
Upper Manhattan Together	10
India and PC (USA)	10
CROP Walk	12

Transgender Clergywoman Challenges Methodists

by Joretta Purdue, United Methodist Church

The Rev. Rebecca Ann Steen just wanted to return to pastoral ministry, but her efforts have landed her at the center of a new debate for the United Methodist Church regarding the status of transgender clergy.

Steen, a clergy member of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, wants to end her voluntary leave and receive a pastoral appointment for the year that begins July 1. Others in the conference have said they do not believe a transgender person should be a pastor. Although the church's rulebook, the Book of Discipline, forbids ordination or assignment of "self-avowed, practicing homosexuals," it is silent on the issue of transgender clergy.

The clergywoman's efforts have been blocked, at least for the time being. A complaint has been filed against her during the conference's annual gathering, June 6-9. The complaint's content is confidential, but Bishop Felton Edwin May said on June 8 that it could affect Steen's availability for appointment. In addition, a hearing will be held later this month on whether Steen should be placed on involuntary leave.

Steen, 47, said she has no agenda "but to do the ministry that God has called and ordained me to do." Formerly the Rev. Richard A. Zomastny, she has three grown children and three grandchildren. She has been on voluntary leave since October 1999, when she underwent what she terms "gender reassignment," becoming the first known transgender clergy person in the United Methodist Church.

Calling what she did a sex-change operation is wrong because it is so much more than that, she told United Methodist

News Service in a telephone interview. It is a long process that involves many steps, she said.

"It's not something that someone undertakes lightly," she said. "It's never done without extensive counseling." It also is "not done without necessity. It's very critical in the lives of the people who do it."

The need comes from an understanding at an early age that one's spiritual and mental gender do not match one's physical gender, she said. Not everyone in that situation resolves it in the same way, she noted. Some people undergo the counseling and decide not to have medical procedures.

Morris Hawkins, president of the conference United Methodist Men, objects to the procedure, not the condition. "When you take that to the ultimate conclusion of having sexual reassignment surgery, you're saying to God, 'You are making a mistake that I can correct.'"

He views the surgery and attendant procedures as "the ultimate sin of selfishness." The sin occurs when one alters the physical form, an act that amounts to saying "we're not willing to accept the will of God in our life," he said.

Hawkins said he agreed with a two-page statement issued by eight conference clergy on June 8. The Renaissance Affirmation, named for the hotel where the conference was held June 6-9, states, "We expect to bring legislation before our annual conference in the next year that will provide biblical, ethical, theological and psychological reasons as to why someone suffering from gender identity disorder does not fit the necessary criteria for the ordained ministry."

The affirmation expresses the belief that "a transgendered person is and always will be a child of God and a person of sacred worth." It goes on to say, "We do not believe that such a person is able to fulfill the necessary require-

ments, gifts and graces to serve as a United Methodist clergy person." It affirms "that Christ desires wholeness for all people, in every aspect of life," while it objects to gender reassignment surgery as the proper medical treatment for gender identity disorder.

The document's preamble also addresses those people who might consider leaving the church because of concerns about transgender clergy. "To those persons, we are asking them to pause and give our Book of Discipline the chance to catch up with this issue." The Rev. Barry E. Hidey of Bel Air, Md., led the writing group, comprising two female and six male ministers.

May said the complaint against Steen would be handled by the procedures outlined in the Book of Discipline. Steen's "availability for appointment may be affected by this prayerful process," he said.

The bishop noted that matters discussed in the conference's clergy session should be treated confidentially. He said that his ruling on questions of law arising in that session will be published later – an apparent reference to the conference journal, which is expected out in October. In addition, all bishops' decisions of law are automatically reviewed by the church's Judicial Council, which will meet in late October, and its decisions are made public.

The Rev. Robert Kohler, with the denomination's Division of Ordained Ministry, said that Steen has a right to a hearing before involuntary leave can be imposed. The Book of Discipline gives the bishop, district superintendents and executive committee of the conference board of ministry the authority to assign

"Steen [says] she has no agenda 'but to do the ministry that God has called and ordained me to do.'"

Continued on page 13 >>

Good Coffee for a Good Cause

by Adam Keeble

The coffee you enjoy after church should make you feel good – in more ways than one – thanks to the Board of Deacons here at Rutgers.

Coffee is big business – so the coffee farmers must be on to a good thing, right?

Wrong. Across the world, coffee farmers are abandoning their farms, or turning to the more profitable coca plant (which harvests cocaine) just to survive.

While consumers here have never paid more for their

morning brew, the prices the farmers receive for their crop has never been lower. Bumper harvests in Brazil and Vietnam have flooded the market, meaning top quality beans are being sold for as little as 20 cents a pound – far less than it costs to grow, harvest and process the product.

All this is bad news for those who need their java. Quality will inevitably suffer, and with little incentive, growers of top-end beans will be out of business.

The Presbyterian Church

(U.S.A.) has taken a stand in forming the Presbyterian Coffee Project. In a partnership with Equal Exchange, an employee-owned non-profit that buys coffee exclusively from farmers in developing countries, beans are bought for at least five cents above the world market price.

Not only does this process cut out the middle men who syphon off the profits before they reach the farmers, it also guarantees a minimum price in an ever fluctuating

From the Pastor's Desk... continued from page 1 >>

arguing that Jesus is the Messiah for whom they've long been waiting. Then outside, in Athens's public square, Paul debates some Gentile philosophers—both Epicureans and Stoics.

The Epicureans were, in truth, not what *we* would call religious. They reasoned from the presence of so much suffering in life that whatever gods there are must be quite remote from the world, living in their own realm of bliss, inaccessible to reason and oblivious to human need and its remedy. So, according to the Epicureans, well-being and peace of mind are attained not by praying or offering sacrifice to the gods but by cultivating the simple pleasures of life.

The Stoics were much more religious. They believed in an eternal rational principle stemming from the mind of Zeus and permeating the universe, manifesting itself as “soul.” So happiness and well-being are attained by cultivating first this rational soul and then everything else that can't be taken away from one's own control—like the thought-process, and honor, and a sense of duty.

So in Athens's public square, its marketplace, Paul be-

gins to proclaim to these Epicurean and Stoic philosophers the good news made known through Jesus and through God's raising of Jesus from the dead. Now to these philosophers Paul's thoughts seem novel and different, if puzzling. Indeed they seem to think he's speaking of a new pair of gods named “Jesus” and “Resurrection,” the latter being Jesus's female consort! Intrigued, if confused, they want to hear more. So they lead Paul up the hill rising above the public square, to the Areopagus—a site near the place where Socrates had defended his views centuries earlier, a forum whose rock-cut seats are better-suited to lengthy listening than is standing in the marketplace.

Assuming the stance of a Greek orator before a seated audience, Paul speaks, and Jerusalem and Athens meet. Hebrew thought makes contact with Greek thought. Paul skillfully adduces features of Athens's own culture and builds upon them to lay the groundwork for proclaiming to his listeners the truth that the savior of the world has been born, crucified, and raised from the dead—far across the Mediterranean, to the south-east, in Palestine.

Paul begins his speech with sincere praise: “Athenians, I

see how extremely religious you are.” Among all the divine statues in your city, I even saw one inscribed, “To an unknown god.” Let me tell you about that “unknown god,” whose existence you have intuited but whose attributes you have not identified. Let me tell you about the God made known of old to Israel, the God whose reign has now been brought to earth by Jesus, by a man who has taught us to love each other and empowered us to do so. Let me tell you about this God, who may be unknown to you but who in fact is the Creator of heaven and earth, One who cannot be confined to any image or statue.

Paul continues: “Long ago, even before Socrates, one of your Greek writers, Epimenides of Crete, spoke of a god in whom “we live and move and have our being.” Then several centuries later, one of your poets, Aratus of Soli, said of Zeus, “we too are his offspring.” Well, these thinkers had the right idea but the wrong god. It is the true God, made known of old to Israel and made known now to us by the birth,

Continued on page 6 >>

Continued on page 9 >>

Claudia Hall Remembered

by Andy Achsen (first read at Claudia's memorial service)



Although we celebrated Claudia's 90th birthday in grand style last September here at Rutgers, I can tell you that Claudia was never 90!

For with Claudia there was truly no measuring with time. It was only six months ago, while having a heart-to-heart with her on her living-room sofa, Claudia asked me in all seriousness if I thought she should have a facelift. Now, I can't imagine where she ever got that idea from!

I met my "Sugar" - my pet name for Claudia - at West-Park Church when she was a spry young thing of 66. At first, I thought she was the quintessential "church lady," a do-gooder for sure. But she was very supportive of non-popular justice issues within the church - particularly the inclusion of gay and lesbian people and their ordination. Alice Hudson, Dave Taylor, Cliff Flanders and myself founded The Circle of More Light, a weekly prayer service sponsored by Gay and Lesbian folks at West-Park Church-- and Claudia helped give the group both its credibility and its durability. Not to mention that her sweet voice lifted our spirits, as well as our determination.

In recent years, I spent more consecutive Valentine's Days with Claudia than any other person to date. And I believe it was Claudia's naughty sense of humor that pulled her

through many things in life. Several months ago, after a dinner at La Caridad, a Cuban restaurant she came to like a lot, I walked Claudia to her door. She searched her handbag for her keys and then when she had them in hand, I noticed she playfully dropped them on the floor. As I bent over to pick them up, I said, "Sugar, I know what you're up to." I won't tell you exactly what Claudia said next, but it went something to the tune of, "The pleasure's all mine."

We had many laughs together. And even three weeks ago, when Claudia was in the Cardiac Care Unit, I was getting ready to leave and asked her if there was anything I could bring her: "You can bring me a rich man," was her reply. Well, Sugar, I have no doubt that there's more than one tugging at your wings. I love you and I'll miss you.

More memories of Claudia

Claudia was a friend, a role model, an angel and a bit of a devil, and a major saint in my life for some 30 years. She always knew how to make me smile, and she certainly knew how to make me cry. I loved her humor and her love of music, and "Summertime." I loved her stories, her memories, her fondness for her various "beaus," for dancing 'til dawn, and her wardrobe, of course! What a gal. Such style, such heart, such love. I bet she is with C.B. giving St. Peter what for!

- Alice Hudson

Since I don't know how to reach Claudia's family, I, too, would like to share with her Rutgers family my sadness and condolences at her passing. Claudia was love. Claudia was grace. She was humor -- spritely and sometimes devilish. She was a wonderful role model. A tiny woman with a huge spirit. Rutgers will not be the same without her.

- Elinor Bowles

I am very saddened by Claudia's death. She will be missed at Church on Sundays

- Umberto Fadani.

I barely knew Claudia Hall. Maybe I passed words with her once. But I always remember seeing her in the choir and at coffee hour and she, thus, became part of me. Also, to see her reminded me of one of my mothers, and that was something special. I thank her for being around me for the time that she was.

- C.C. Reilly

I did not know her long, but she always impressed as being immaculately dressed with wonderful hats. It is a serious loss to everyone who knew her.

May the Force Be with Us

by Adam Keeble

Hollywood would be hard pressed to illustrate the war of good against evil in a better way than in the Star Wars series.

The most recent episode, *The Attack of the Clones*, has been the huge hit it was expected to be this summer. But, despite its mass appeal, is there a deeper lesson to be learned from the intergalactic adventure?

George Lucas, who created the saga, was not trying to make a religious epic.

"I see Star Wars as taking all the issues that religion represents and trying to distill them down into a more modern and easily accessible construct," he says. "I remember when I was 10 years old, I asked my mother, 'If there's only one God, why are there so many religions?'"

"I've been pondering that question ever since, and the conclusion I've come to is that all the religions are true."

"I put the Force into the movie in order to try to awaken a certain kind of spirituality in young people - more a belief in God than a belief in any particular religious system.

"I wanted to make it so that young people would begin to ask questions about the mystery. Not having enough interest in the mysteries of life to ask the question, 'Is there a God or is there not a God?' - that is for me the worst thing that can happen. I think you should have an opinion about that. Or you should be saying, 'I'm looking. I'm very curious about this, and I am going to continue to look until I can find an answer, and if I can't find an answer, then I'll die trying.' I think it's important to have a belief system and to have faith."

Lucas is a firm believer in God. "I think there is a God. No question. What that God is



or what we know about that God, I'm not sure. The one thing I know about life and about the human race is that we've always tried to construct some kind of context for the unknown.

"Even the cavemen thought they had it figured out. I would say that cavemen understood on a scale of about 1. Now we've made it up to about 5. The only thing that most people don't realize is the scale goes to 1 million.

"When the film came out, almost every single religion took Star Wars and used it as an example of their religion; they were able to relate it to stories in the Bible, in the Koran and in the Torah.

"I am dealing with core issues that were valid 3,000 years ago and are still valid today, even though they're not in fashion."

One of the clearest comparisons to biblical stories comes in *The Empire Strikes Back*, when Darth Vader offers Luke Skywalker all the wealth and glory of the Empire to join him - a clear re-telling of the story of Satan tempting Jesus at the mountain.

Lucas explains: "That story also has been retold. Buddha was tempted in the same way. It's all through mythology. The gods are constantly tempting everybody and everything. So the idea of temptation is one of the things we struggle against, and the temptation obviously is the temptation to go to the dark side.

"One of the themes

throughout the films is that the Sith lords, when they started out thousands of years ago, embraced the dark side. They were greedy and self-centered and they all wanted to take over, so they killed each other. Eventually, there was only one left, and that one took on an apprentice. And for thousands of years, the master would teach the apprentice, the master would die, the apprentice would then teach another apprentice, become the master, and so on.

But there could never be any more than two of them, because if there were, they would try to get rid of the leader, which is exactly what Vader was trying to do, and that's exactly what the Emperor was trying to do. The Emperor was trying to get rid of Vader, and Vader was trying to get rid of the Emperor. And that is the antithesis of a symbiotic relationship, in which if you do that, you become cancer, and you eventually kill the host, and everything dies."

"There is the acknowledgment of a higher power, the idea that good is more powerful than evil, and the concept of the Force, which we as Christians would call the Spirit of God," says Scott Walker, a pastor, author and specialist in adult development.

"There is the acknowledgment of a higher power, the idea that good is more powerful than evil, and the concept of the Force, which we as Christians would call the Spirit of God."

Continued on page 9 >>

AIDS in Africa

by Christine Gorman



As a journalist, I handle a lot of news and information each day. But in the past few weeks I have been profoundly shaken by reports of an unprecedented crisis looming in southern Africa. It's really a double crisis--epitomized by the words "AIDS" and "famine" -- that

has hit countries as diverse as Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

And apart from a single editorial in the New York Times in June, there doesn't seem to be much awareness in the U.S. of the growing disaster.

We all know something about the devastating AIDS epidemic in Africa. The Peace and Social Justice Network at Rutgers hosted a symposium on Women and AIDS in Southern Africa last May 19. What is making matters desperately worse is the ever-deteriorating

Good Coffee...

continued from page 3 >>

market, giving hope to small farmers in rural regions.

Marian McClure of Worldwide Ministries believes coffee drinkers in the USA (as the consumers of 20 percent of all the coffee grown in the world) should consider where their brew has come from -- and at what cost.

"When economic globalization causes some of God's

food crisis.

In several countries, the maize crop, which is the primary source of food, has failed for a second year in a row--this on top of a 20-year drought. AIDS has killed 7 million farmers--women and men--in Africa. Civil unrest in Angola and Zimbabwe has rendered many fields barren. As a result, world health officials estimate that nearly 12 million people in southern Africa face famine conditions in the next few months.

Faced with this kind of information, it may be tempting to write off the whole situation as hopeless and get on with our lives. But despair has never been a Christian virtue. And it isn't one now.

Certainly, there are plenty of Africans who have not given up hope. After a slow start, the Catholic, Protestant and Coptic Christian communities have begun addressing the AIDS crisis head on. People of faith are also working together to create sustainable development projects and to reach out to the more than 13 million children orphaned by AIDS.

And I have to believe there are plenty of ways that we at Rutgers can help through a combination of education, ad-

children to suffer we can show God's love in concrete ways by our lifestyle choices as congregations and individuals."

The difference a few cents on a pound of coffee can make is immense. "We used to live in houses made of corn husks," says Don Miguel Sifontes, the president of a coffee co-operative in El Salvador that sells to Equal Exchange. "Now we have better work,

vocacy and fund-raising.

In fact, whether we realize it or not, we already started to help this past Easter with our donations to the One Great Hour of Sharing.

One third of the money for OGHS goes to Presbyterian Disaster Relief, which recently distributed 250 metric tons of fortified maize meal in Malawi and is gearing up a wider, regional response to the southern African famine. One third goes to the Presbyterian Hunger Program. And the rest goes to the Self-Development of Peoples Program, which works in partnership with local communities to find long-term solutions.

The question I have for Rutgers is, "Is God calling us to do more?" If you think so, talk to me, talk to Dave Taylor and the Peace and Social Justice Network, talk to a member of Session or one of the clergy. I've already learned about a few PCUSA programs we might want to explore further. Who knows where those conversations could lead?

[Christine chairs the Christian Education committee at Rutgers and serves on the Session and Long-Range Planning Committee. For more information on the web, visit <<http://www.pcusa.org/pda/>> or <http://www.usaid.gov/hum_response/ofda/> or <<http://www.careusa.org/>>]

better schools, homes and a greater brotherhood of decision makers."

In a world where coffee is the world's second most traded commodity after oil, Equal Exchange is fighting for a truly fair price, not to mention a better taste.

You can order coffee or get more information from www.equalexchange.com, or call (781) 830-0303.

Summer Worship Schedule 2002

Worship Service at 11:00 am

Infant Care from 10:45 am

Sunday School for ages 3–9 at 11:15 am

The Choir sings through July 7 and resumes September 8

Other Sundays feature music sung by one of our soloists

Preaching

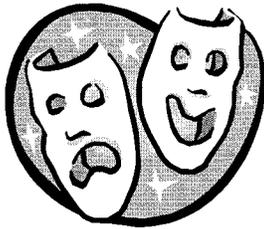
- July 7** The Reverend Dr. Byron E. Shafer
Marshall Williamson's final Sunday as Minister of Music
- July 14** The Reverend Dr. Byron E. Shafer, Holy Communion
The Reverend Dr. Janet L. Parker's final Sunday as Parish Associate
Music: Nathan Matthews and Sherry Zannoth
- July 21** The Reverend Dr. James Foster Reese
(Interim Executive Presbyter, Presbytery of New York City)
Music: Nathan Matthews and Bronwyn Thomas
- July 28** The Reverend Gregory A. Horn
(former Seminary Intern at Rutgers Church)
Music: Nathan Matthews and Bronwyn Thomas
- August 4** The Reverend Charles A. Amstein
Music: Nathan Matthews and Duncan Hartman
- August 11** The Reverend Lisa Hill (WSFSSH), Holy Communion
Music: Nathan Matthews and Sherry Zannoth
- August 18** "Sing to the Lord": a hymnsing led by Dr. Shafer and Mr. Davey
George Davey's first Sunday as Organist/Choir Director
Soloist: Bronwyn Thomas
- August 25** The Reverend Dr. Byron E. Shafer
Music: George Davey and Duncan Hartman
- Sept. 1** The Reverend Dr. Byron E. Shafer, Labor Day Weekend
Music: George Davey and Duncan Hartman
- Sept. 8** The Reverend Dr. Byron E. Shafer, Holy Communion
Music: George Davey and the Choir
- Sept. 15** **Homecoming Sunday**, The Reverend Dr. Byron E. Shafer

Remember the All-Church Picnic Saturday, July 13

At the Presbyterian Camp and Conference Center, Holmes, NY
Bus leaves Rutgers Church at 8:30 am and returns by 6:00 pm
Call 877-8227 and speak to Adam for information and reservations

Summer 2002 movies at Rutgers

236 West 73rd Street, 5th Floor (212) 877-8227



Tuesday Evenings

at 7:00pm

Free Admission

Air Conditioned

Popcorn and Lemonade served

from 6:30 pm

Discussion following each movie

led by Rutgers' Pastoral Staff

Hosted by DR. ROGER FRANKLIN



July 9th • Patch Adams (1998) Color, 116 mins.

Robin Williams is an unorthodox pediatric doctor who uses laughter to lift the spirits of his terminal patients.

July 16th • I'm Not Rappaport (1996) Color, 130 mins.

Two feisty octogenarians: an African-American building superintendent (**Ossie Davis**) and a Jewish left-wing radical (**Walter Matthau**) spend time squabbling on a Central Park bench in this movie version of the award-winning Broadway play.

July 23rd • The Mighty (1998) Color, 100 mins.

Sharon Stone stars in this story of two young misfits – one with a learning disability, the other with a rare bone disease. The two develop a strong bond in this heart-warming drama.

July 30th • Michael (1996) Color, 106 mins.

John Travolta takes the title role in this comedy about a group of tabloid journalists on the trail of a shabby, but charming angel on the run!

From the Pastor's Desk... continued from page 3 >>

death, and resurrection of Jesus—it is this God in whom “we live and move and have our being.” And it is this God, the Creator of all, whose offspring we are.

You see, Paul is here welcoming Greek philosophy and religion as a valued partner in dialogue about God. Paul is recognizing that Greek thinkers have been searching for God for centuries and have correctly reasoned and intuited many things about God. But Paul now wants to gather up the deep yearnings of this “extremely religious” people. He wants to gather them up in order to point these Athenians to the Risen Christ, for it is through knowledge of Christ that they can come to understand their Creator so much more fully.

Anyway, as I said at the outset, I never have been able to

resist a good poll! And one thing that polls make crystal clear is this: like ancient Athenians, we Americans are “extremely religious”; and like ancient Athens, America is a meeting ground where many religions make contact with each other and enter into respectful dialogue. To name but a few of *our* many religions: Christianity (in its Protestant, Catholic, Evangelical, and Orthodox versions), Judaism, Islam, Mormonism, Native American religions, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism.

The most recent poll exploring Religious America was conducted in late March for the PBS program “Religion and Ethics Newsweekly” and by the magazine *U.S. News and World Report*.

Some things in the poll

were not really surprising to me: nearly two-thirds of all us Americans say religion is “very important” in our lives, and some 20% more say it is “somewhat important.” That totals 87%, a statistic that’s held steady for many years. Then, too, a mere 14% of us Americans say we’ve “never” “experienced God’s presence or a spiritual force that felt very close,” whereas a whopping 46% of us say we’ve had such an experience in our lives not just once, twice, several times, but “many times.” We *are* an extremely religious people.

But what about our attitudes toward other religions. Do contemporary American Christians, like Paul of old, find virtue and/or truth in other religions’ quest for God? And

Continued on page 11 >>

May the Force Be with Us... cont. from page 5 >>



Of course, as fans of the series know, the Force – a mystical power that flows through the universe – can be abused by those who try to take short-cuts and master it quickly. Audiences this summer saw this as Anakin Skywalker becomes more and more like his eventual persona of Darth Vader.

The lure of the Dark Side in the movies is a powerful teacher, says Tom Beaudoin, author of *Virtual Faith* and co-leader of a GenX ministry at the Paulist Center in Boston.

“To have fear of the Dark Side is an unusual thing in my generation,” he says. “We weren’t raised to worry about the devil or about moral wrongs. The metaphor of the Dark Side has helped us make sense of what we already see and know as evil. You wouldn’t need the Force to be with you if there weren’t something to be afraid of.”

“Luke Skywalker learned to control his anger, lest it control him. His struggle to overcome his anger shows his emergence into self-actualization, becoming his true self,” says Beaudoin. “Part of being his own person is being in touch with the Force.”

Edward McNulty, publisher of *Visual Parables*, says: “*Star Wars* affirms that in the end, it’s not all about technology. It encourages us to trust the Force, to trust God. But we must

bring in a Christian standpoint as we interpret *Star Wars*. We can’t just take *Star Wars* as it is.

“*Star Wars* teaches courage, especially loyalty to friends. The audience loved it as Anakin goes back to save Padme in *Attack of the Clones*, when it would have been far easier to carry on, assuming she was beyond help.”

But perhaps the most telling and clear-cut philosopher in *Star Wars* is Yoda, the 800-year-old Jedi Master, whose simple lessons inspire with such authority.

Luke Skywalker stands aghast as this frail but wise guru uses the Force to lift Luke’s wrecked spaceship from the swamp where it has crashed.

“I don’t believe it!” Skywalker exclaims.

“And that is why – you fail,” replies Yoda.

Upper Manhattan Together

by the Reverend Dr. W. Scott Morton

In a recent Moment for Mission Joan Keener made some good points; for example, "The spirit of Upper Manhattan Together works from the center of the democratic faith: the source of power resides in people, and the government works for us... UMT's method is to show ordinary citizens how they can build power to effect change in their communities... There is a difference between problems in society (large, overwhelming, hard to solve) and issues (smaller, manageable, prone to solutions). For issues that we can tackle we find strategies, deciding whom to speak to, ways

to get in the door, and how to negotiate once we get there."

Then on May 8, at a large Assembly of Upper Manhattan Together, Rutgers Church, (a founding member of the organization), turned out 12 members, something of a record for us, for a meeting which all found unusually interesting. Present were five officers of the Metropolitan Police who are working closely with UMT. One of them, the new captain of the 30th precinct, is conducting a drug sweep along upper Broadway in cooperation with members of churches in the area which belong to UMT.

A gripping example of change in the quality of life came from a woman in a public housing complex. She was shocked when her daughter asked her to move away from the horrible place, with rats attacking little children, graffiti, broken elevators and all sorts of other problems. The mother had grown up there, and did not want to leave. So she set to work, got to know neighbors in UMT, researched and collected records and facts. Then together they approached the city housing authority, and after a long struggle succeeded in getting the whole complex cleaned up and put in order.



India tops list of PC(USA) beneficiaries overseas

reproduced from the PC (USA) Newswire

If you had to name the five countries that received the most money from the Presbyterian Church (USA) in 2001, which would be on your list?

No. 1 is easy: It's the United States.

According to the controller's office in Mission Support Services, the PC(USA) spent \$50,423,159 in "gifts, grants and special payments" in 2001, more than \$37 million of it in the United States.

The rest of the top five:

India	\$1,430,637
Switzerland	\$1,371,243
Zaire	\$ 876,392
Lebanon	\$ 819,249

Although only 2 percent of Indians are Christians, PC(USA) partner churches there are generally believed to have the best schools, hospitals and social-service agencies in the country. The PC(USA) also contributed substantial sums last year, through Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, for earthquake relief in India.

Switzerland made the list because of PC(USA) support of the World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and ACT, the international ecumenical disaster-relief agency - all with headquarters in Geneva.

Zaire has long been one of

the PC(USA)'s top-ranking mission fields in Africa.

In Lebanon, PC(USA) financial support aids the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon, the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, and many Lebanese Armenians, through the Jinishian Memorial Program.

The second five:

Puerto Rico	\$688,512
China	\$636,247
Brazil	\$544,408
Ethiopia	\$432,170
Armenia	\$416,980

From the Pastor's Desk... continued from page 9 >>

how do we frame the Christian truth-claim in our dialogue with other religions?

Well, one-third of all us American Christians say we are “very tolerant” of people of other faiths, and another 48% more say we are “somewhat tolerant.” Combined that’s a huge 81%. It has to be noted, however, that *non-Christians* register a somewhat different assessment of Christian tolerance. Only 54% of non-Christians think of Christians as being tolerant, whereas 81% of Christians think of ourselves as being tolerant. Still, tolerance is clearly the American Christian ideal.

And fully three-fourths of all us Christians affirm the statement that “America’s religious diversity is a source of strength and vitality to individual religious beliefs.”

Indeed, 77% of us Christians affirm this statement: “All religions have elements of truth.”

So the responses to a follow-up question should not surprise us. We Christians were asked to choose between saying, “Christians have a duty to convert people of other religious faiths to Christianity,” and saying, “Christians have a duty to be tolerant of people of other religious faiths and leave them alone.” Only 24% of us say we’ve a duty to convert others to Christianity, whereas 70% of us say we’ve a duty to be tolerant of persons of other faiths and to leave them alone.

Actually, I don’t like the choices the poll offered. I wouldn’t want to affirm either statement as phrased. Had I been conducting the poll, I would have added a third option, to see how many others of us would affirm the statement that I would want to endorse, rather than either of the two that were given. I would want to mark my

“x” next to: “Christians have a duty both to be tolerant of people of other faiths and to engage them in respectful religious dialogue.”

I’m *with* the 77% of Christians who believe that “all religions have elements of truth,” but I also believe, with the apostle Paul, that Christ is the fullest revelation of God the world has ever received. And that’s such good news that I want to discuss it with others, affirming the rich insights into God that other religions have had, allowing those insights to illumine and freshen aspects of my own faith, but still wanting to share with others the treasures of my own Christian religion. And that’s a whole lot of the reason why I’m as devoted to radio ministry and college teaching as I continue to be. For those are places “in the public square” where I can actively practice tolerance of people of other faiths while engaging them in significant religious dialogue, learning from them and also sharing with them.

How have I illumined and freshened aspects of my own faith through religious dialogue with others?

Well from Jews I have learned what it means for a community of faith to trust in the goodness of God, even in the face of incomprehensible communal suffering at the hands of a raw and demonic evil—like enslavement in ancient Egypt in the days of Moses, like the Holocaust during World War II, and, on a *much* smaller scale, like 9/11.

And from Muslims I have re-learned the value of practicing prayer and the presence of God amidst the routines of daily life.

Prompted by Native Americans I have freshened my commitment to an ancient Christian teaching that we hu-

mans are called to treasure the natural world created by God, not exploit it.

And Buddhists have illumined for me the importance of freeing oneself from the dominance of ego and of harnessing the inner power of mind and awareness.

And from Hindus I have learned to emphasize what *many* Christians have long underemphasized, neglected, forgotten, or even rejected—the *truth* of the incarnation of God, the *truth* that God has *actually* come to live among us.

Those are some of the ways I’ve been helped by people of other faiths. Now, in what ways have I sought to help them in return, by sharing some truths about God made known in the figure of Christ?

Well, I have sought to share with others our Christian understanding that the incarnation of God *in history* has been singular and unique and that it took place in the figure of Jesus, who embodied for us not only the perfection of human nature but also everything we’ve been seeking to understand about God’s nature.

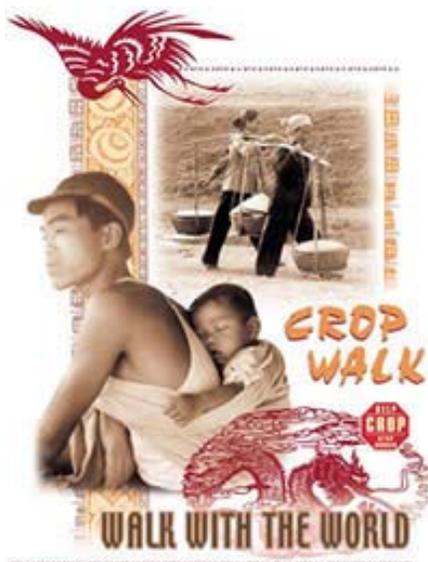
For as a Christian minister, I believe that Jesus was the human we are all created to be—a human living in perfect harmony with the Creator’s will. *And I also believe* that Jesus reveals to us the true nature of God—creative, transformative, and loving.

And as a Christian, I have also sought to share with others the heart of John 13:34–35—the commandment given to humankind by Jesus, the imperative to love one another just as Jesus has loved us.

And I have further-

“For as a Christian minister, I believe that Jesus was the human we are all created to be—a human living in perfect harmony with the Creator’s will.”

Continued on page 13 >>



What Do You Think?

by J.M.C.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. It takes more energy to stay mad, angry, upset, sad, and depressed than it does to let go.
2. Smiles cause fewer wrinkles than a frown.
3. It's easier to love than to hate.
4. Why give someone the satisfaction of knowing they control your thoughts and actions?
5. Life isn't a dress rehearsal, fast-forward or a re-run.
6. How can you hate someone you've never met or had the opportunity to talk to?
7. Who tells the whole truth? Who knows the real truth? Were you there when it happened?
8. Utilize your time and energy for things you know about and enjoy.
9. Just because he/she is your precious darling doesn't mean he/she is mine.
10. Every generation changes the story a little.

'Til next time...

CROP Walk Raises \$51,000

The 2002 New York City CROP Hunger Walk raised \$51,068.01 to combat hunger around the world and here in New York City.

Rutgers Church participated in the walk, under the enthusiastic leadership of Renee Lord and the Peace and Social Justice Network. The five walkers from Rutgers (Louisa Berry, Robin Berry, Renee Lord, Cheryl Pynch and Joy Rose) raised nearly \$500.

"Our Walk shows that a dedicated group of people, working together, really can make a difference," said the Rev. Dr. J. Oscar McCloud, chair of the committee which organized the Walk. "Thanks to their hard work and the generous contributions of individual donors, many hungry people who would not otherwise have food will be fed." Dr. McCloud is Associate Pastor at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, one of the congregations participating in the Walk.

The total included \$31,068.01 raised in donations, nearly double last year's total of \$16,000. This major increase made the Walk eligible for a \$20,000 challenge grant from the Sandy River Charitable Foundation, bringing the total to \$51,068.01.

In seven southern African countries, 17,000 children at risk of starvation are being served a highly nutritious cereal mix thanks to the New York City CROP Hunger Walk. The Walk, through Church World Service, helps fund food and nutrition programs in over 70 countries each year.

Here in New York City, 25% of the funds raised will benefit eleven Manhattan soup kitchens and food pantries. These include the Advent Lutheran Church Soup Kitchen, Broadway Community food for the homeless, The Celebrate Life Meal for people with AIDS at Middle Collegiate Church, Central Synagogue Breakfast Program, Church of the Epiphany Homeless Dinner, Creative Learning Center at Trinity Lutheran Church, The Dwelling Place for homeless women, St. Ignatius Episcopal Church soup kitchen, St. Mary's Episcopal Church soup kitchen, Saint Peter's Lutheran Church breakfast program, and West Side Campaign against Hunger, St. Paul and St. Andrew United Methodist Church.

Next year's Walk will be on Sunday, March 9, 2003. For more details, contact Mel Lehman, CROP Walk Organizer, 212-865-6115, e-mail ML9612921@aol.com. The CROP Hunger Walk is a community event sponsored by Church World Service and welcomes participation of congregations from all faith traditions. The New York City CROP Hunger Walk is one of nearly 2,000 CROP Walks held across America each year to raise funding for and awareness about hunger in the U.S. and around the world.

From the Pastor's Desk Continued from page 12 >>

more sought to share with others the confidence and the lack of fear Christians are able to experience in the face of death, because of the promise of eternal life that God has offered to humankind through the resurrection of Jesus.

These thoughts are the good news that Paul sought to share with those of other religions in Athens, and they are the good news that I believe we are able to

share with those of other religions in America.

Tolerance for others, coupled with respectful religious dialogue. It was the right way to be extremely religious in Athens, and it's the right way for us to be that way today.

Let us pray:

O God, in whom all of creation lives and moves and has

being, all of humankind *are* Your offspring. Lead us, in company both with other Christians and with persons of different faiths, to ever fuller knowledge both of You and of Your will for us. This we pray in the name of the Risen Christ. Amen.

Transgender Clergywoman Continued from page 2 >>

an interim leave of absence. An administrative review committee scrutinizes the process. If involuntary leave is assigned, it must be ratified or nullified by the conference clergy session, which isn't scheduled to meet again until June 2003.

In determining the appropriate supervisory response, the bishop can choose to pursue mediation between the complainant and Steen, according to procedures set forth in the Book of Discipline.

If the complaint is resolved to the satisfaction of both parties, that is the end of it. If it is not resolved, the bishop may dismiss it or allow it to proceed along one of two paths. One path could lead to a church trial. The other path often leads to remedial action related to ministerial effectiveness. The bishop decides whether a matter is a "judicial complaint" or an "administrative complaint." In either case, there are points in the process at which an appropriate body may decide the complaint is invalid.

As of late June 10, Steen was waiting to receive a copy of the complaint and to be informed of what the bishop is going to do.

The most difficult part of being on leave is the inability to participate in ministry, Steen said. "I cannot be faithful to my call." She has served congregations in three Maryland communities during her 17-year career.

She sought to return to active status last year but was asked to wait while study and discussion took place, she said. Last fall, a 12-member committee of conference clergy began a process that culminated in four one-time discussions that were open to the clergy and laity of the conference. These were facilitated by JUSTPEACE, a United Methodist mediation service.

"I am the first transgendered United Methodist clergy by circumstance, not by desire," Steen said. Transgender people serve as clergy in other mainline denominations, she said.

People take for granted the right to correct other congenital conditions such as hydrocephalus

or heart defects, she said. "I think a whole lot of this (controversy) has to do with our fears around gender and sexuality."

She wants people to understand that the process has been difficult for everyone involved, "and that my brothers and sisters in the faith are compassionate and caring. I am sorry for any distress this has caused anyone, and I'm praying for everyone for God's guidance and grace."

"I love the church, and I love my work," Steen said. She believes God wants her to continue ministry through the United Methodist Church, and she said she does not have the courage to face this issue without God's leadership.

The Reverend Erin Swenson of the PC (USA) is a transgender clergy person who *was* revalidated in her ministry by the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta.

As a More Light Church, Rutgers is committed to the full inclusion of transgender persons,

Rutgers Presbyterian Church

236 West 73rd Street
New York, NY 10023

Phone: 212-877-8227
Fax: 212-721-9154

