

**First Presbyterian Church, Sylacauga, AL  
The Rev. James B. Stanford III  
November 22, 2009**

**Hebrews 10:35 – 11:3  
“Pump It Up”**

(We return to last week’s scripture because there’s so much that we need to hear in this lesson from Hebrews. I have also had Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of Ephesians 4:1-3 in the bulletin, because of the unique thoughts provided in those verses. Please read it when you have an opportunity.)

**“Need-Oriented Evangelism: Sharing the gospel in ways that meets the questions and needs of those outside the church.**

From the time I joined the church at age 10 until I was ordained at age 25 I was a member of Druid Hills Presbyterian Church in Atlanta. My family began attending Druid Hills when I was six years old, so, growing up, this was the only Presbyterian church I was familiar with.

Located on Ponce de Leon Avenue, it wasn’t downtown Atlanta but it was close. A church of over 1,000 members, several of its pastors were past Moderators of PCUS General Assembly. Since it was close to the headquarters of the old southern church, it attracted many of the denominations leaders and their families. With Columbia Seminary nearby, professors from there would come preach for us.

At age 25 the good Lord called me to my first churches, one of which was a rural church of about 120 members, located in a farming community. It was also a Presbyterian church with a long history; it celebrated its 100 anniversary while I was there as pastor.

After being pastor there about a year, the head of the Board of Deacons, who was my age and a good friend, came to me and said, “Preacher (that’s what they called me), we haven’t had a revival in almost two years. When are we going to have a revival?” I stammered: “Presbyterians don’t have revivals.” “Oh, yes, we do,” he said, and I replied, “I’ve been Presbyterian all my life, and I have never seen a Presbyterian Church have a revival.”

Well, I helped them plan a revival, and we brought in a speaker whom they suggested. I was not impressed.

Time passed, and this same Deacon came one day and said, “Preacher (that’s what they called me), when are you going to give an altar call?” To which I stammered: “Presbyterians don’t give altar calls.” “Oh, yes, they do,” he said. And I replied: “I’ve been a Presbyterian all my life, and I have never heard an altar

call given in a Presbyterian Church.” Well, I learned to give an altar call ... or a reasonable facsimile there of ... but I wasn’t impressed.

As I grew up at Druid Hills, I learned about missions. The sister of one of our pastors was a missionary in Taiwan, and through her I became pen pals with a boy my age in the Presbyterian Church there. I learned that, as Christians, we were to be witnesses to our Lord, and it was our responsibility to spread the Good News about Jesus Christ.

But does it surprise you to learn that no Presbyterian I knew in Atlanta ever mentioned evangelism? Until then, I had been Presbyterian all my life, and no one ever talked about evangelism or how to do it.

In August of 2007, through the Natural Church Development survey, we discovered that we do the best job here at First Presbyterian with Holistic Small Groups and Loving Relationships. AND ... we discovered that, out of eight characteristics or factors, the one we felt needed the most attention was Need-oriented Evangelism. This became our “minimum factor”. Inspiring Worship Services followed that.

Need-oriented evangelism? What is that? The Long Range Planning Committee, which included Pastor Hugh and myself, wrestled with what that meant. I discovered that I wasn’t so alone in not understanding evangelism.

We went and read what we could on the subject, and we discovered that evangelism grew out of a church’s vision and/or mission. So the Long Range Planning Committee came up with a new mission statement that met the appropriate criteria. You have seen it on the newsletter and bulletin: **WE LIVE GOD’S LOVE THROUGH OUR CARE FOR OTHERS EVERYDAY.**

The committee went on to think about “smart goals”. **S M A R T** stands for Specific ... Measurable ... Achievable ... Relevant ... Time-based. We discovered that, instead of trying to do ten things, it is better to do two (2) things and do them well. Also, ... that it is important to involve as many people as we can in the effort, not as passive observers, but as active participants, for it is when God’s people are equipped and encouraged to use their God-given gifts that things begin to happen.

The Long Range Planning Committee asked the committees of the session to suggest ways of doing “need-oriented evangelism” in their areas. They are still waiting for suggestions.

Meanwhile, the next focus was on “inspiring worship services”, and we began to involve the youth more in the leadership of worship, both as liturgist and as participants in skits that highlighted the scripture lesson. The congregation, in turn, encouraged them, and today, we have a group of young

people who have become comfortable standing before the congregation and speaking. We also involved the young youth as acolytes and crucifers (or cross-bearers). Because we had the ability to reproduce music and insert it into the bulletin, we integrated more praise music into the worship, along with going back and singing gospel favorites.

I know that I have made mistakes, and together we as a congregation have made mistakes. I will mention two: first, we were probably looking for the proverbial quick fix. Instead of selecting two or three elementary ways to do evangelism that were timed-based and measurable, we floundered trying to come up with bigger plans.

Consider the difference between cutting flowers and growing them in the garden. To be sure, cut flowers are beautiful, but such beauty is brief because soon they'll wither and die and have to be thrown away ... while the beauty of flowers in the garden is more lasting. To gather up cut flowers is to look for that "proverbial quick fix", when it may be that the best way is to open up space for the flowers to grow among us. Just as there are no quick fixes in life, so are there none in ministry. Rather, we trust "in the slow work of God". (Theillard de Chardin)

Second, even though there were valid reasons to stop the Wednesday Kids program, we failed to recognize that the changes that had occurred were really "need-oriented" changes. Remember what I said last week. The real meaning of each characteristic is to be found in the adjectives: in this case, "need-oriented". Look at the definition of need-oriented evangelism: "Sharing the gospel in ways that meet the questions and needs of those outside the church." The Wednesday Kids program was no longer meeting the needs of those within the church. However, it was meeting the needs of those outside the church ... whether it was as an after-school program (or even a baby-sitting program) ... or as a chance for children within and outside the church to be involved in music and drama. At a time when we were supposed to be focusing on need-oriented evangelism, we failed to recognize that the need and the program were in place. Though there were headaches, I miss the kids and their involvement, limited though it may have been. I think our church has missed out on them as well. I know that we have missed some of our members and non-members who used to be more involved. Now, you certainly may disagree with my assessment, but I hope that in hindsight you will see what I am saying in terms of need-oriented evangelism.

As I have read and re-read, I've discovered that even Christian Schwarz, the man who founded NCD, also has problems in this area. The material he provides concerning need-oriented evangelism is less informative than any of the other eight factors he writes about. In Schwarz's concept "need-oriented evangelism" is evangelism that is based more on what others want from us. It is to be concerned about who they are ... what they value ... what they need ... and then ask how can we re-think how to reach them and include them.

To be serious about need-oriented evangelism is to think of ways to open the doors of this church and of the heart of our congregation to the world outside. As your pastor, I have a sense of the heart of this congregation. It is the image of a great, big, radiant heart, beginning to open ... opening some more ... then opening even more to embrace and encourage and heal every single person that it touches ... everyone who feels its warmth ... even those who just witness it from a distance. Remember, loving-relationships ranked as one of our “maximum” characteristics or factors.

That image of an expanding heart is the key, because of course, it is the very heart of God. Evangelism really isn't our work at all --- except to the extent that we're instruments and reflections ... mirrors and prisms of God's own expanding heart. Whatever we do to reach out into our community ... whether it is toward pre-Christians, non-Christians, or ex-Christians ... whatever we do **MUST** (underline that word and make it bold) it **MUST** flow out of the church's own vision and values ... out of a church's identity and its essence.

Last Sunday afternoon, two people commented on my sermon ... and one of them was a youth. At their youth meeting that night, I understand they discussed some of the ideas I presented in the sermon, and one of the young people exclaimed: “We've got to “pump it up.”

In terms of our hearts and God hearts, what better image can there be than to “pump it up” and get God's love and grace circulating.

### Resources

Erin Dunigan, “Natural Church Growth: Schwarz Book Helps Churches Focus and Change,” **PRESSING NEWS** of The Presbytery of Western Colorado, January-February, 2008.

Jill Oglesby Evans, “Need-Oriented Evangelism – The Hidden Depths of Many a Heart,” Emory Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, GA, October 15, 2006.

Christian A. Schwarz, **NATURAL CHURCH DEVELOPMENT: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches**, ChurchSmart Resources, 2006.

Christian A. Schwarz, “The Strong Little Church: An Interview with Christian A. Schwarz,” faithsite.com, 2000.