

Faith Report

Rejoicing: Divine Encounters By Pastor Stan Long

I recently had conversations with my two sons who are in Philadelphia about their spiritual walks, and we eventually came around to the subject of their commitment to church. They are both asking tough questions about the one they attend. Like many before them, they wonder, "Is this still the church for me?" There are issues of social interactions, and of understanding and embracing a church's theology, mission, vision, and worship style. They also face transportation challenges. For Josh and Tim there is the added sticky issue that they are both paid musicians at the same church.

This has me asking a few questions: Why do people choose to worship God? What motivates them? How do they decide where to go to worship Him? We know that for most worshippers at FCF there is a commitment to **celebrate and apply the reconciling work of Christ, to build grace-filled disciples of Christ and have an impact on Pen Lucy, Baltimore and the world.** These tenets are the core of our mission and vision. Some people are sold out to the mission and vision but for others it is a new and intriguing idea that they are sampling and evaluating. The very word "celebrate" reminds

us of joyfully gathering for a purpose. We are aware of the very necessary horizontal element, i.e., gathering together so that our faith and service might be stimulated and spurred on. (Hebrews 10:24-25). But more and more we ought to come not only to see and be stimulated by people, but to meet God. There is this unforgotten, primary vertical element to worship. In Genesis 28, Jacob encountered the Lord and observed a "ladder" (stairway) reaching down from heaven to earth. Jesus, the incarnate Son, is the ladder (John 1:49-51). It is only in Him that we encounter God.

As we walk with Him, we see him in the sick, poor, needy (Matthew 25:31-46) and in the body of believing sons and daughters (Acts 9:4-5). God promises that when we gather each week in the name of Jesus, He is present. Divine, spiritual encounters will take place. We come to offer prayers, to worship, to confess our sins, to commit our hearts, to hear the Lord's word that we might be reminded of it, believe in it and commit ourselves to obey it, and to taste the Lord's word through the monthly drama of the Lord's Supper. If, after hearing the preacher's benediction, and the musicians' last chord or the last "Amen" or "Hallelujah" from the front pews, we depart having not yet encountered the Lord, then our worship has not been all that it needs to be.

The carefully prepared liturgy is merely empty words in a bulletin or a PowerPoint projection. It is only as our hearts are prepared spiritually, and we offer up to the throne of grace our repentance and our earnest commitment to Him that the Holy Spirit is enabled to provide an atmosphere where we may all together experience the fullness of the presence of the Lord. ♦

¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. ¹⁹Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 5:17-20





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*United that the
world would
know*

*⁹After this I looked
and there before me
was a great multitude
that no one could
count, from every
nation, tribe, people
and language, stand-
ing before the throne
and in front of the
Lamb. They were
wearing white robes
and were holding
palm branches in
their hands. ¹⁰And
they cried out in a
loud voice:
"Salvation belongs
to our God,
who sits on the
throne,
and to the Lamb."
Rev. 7:9-10*

FUW FUNd RUN

By Don Rittler

The 1st Annual Faith Urban Works **FUNd Run**, held as part of the Baltimore Running Festival in October, saw 44 runners from FCF raise over \$35,000 for Faith Urban Works (FUW)! The Leadership Team started recruiting runners in March, and they in turn contacted potential sponsors to support them. In addition to raising money, we also raised awareness of the ministries that are served by FUW, i.e. Baltimore Christian School (BCS) and Pen Lucy Action Network (PLAN). God richly blessed the entire FUNd Run adventure and we now look forward to watching how He will bless the children and youth in the Pen Lucy neighborhood through BCS and PLAN.

Some of our folks ran or walked a race for the first time, improving their health and stamina in the process. Some became very competitive and set goals while some just struggled to complete the race, but everyone had fun. BCS and PLAN also had a 26-lap run at the school, and the Home and School Association put on a great pasta dinner for the runners the night before.



FUNd Run Team members Don Rittler,
Sandy Clark and Gary Coiro

What is next? FUNd Run 2009. It will be another opportunity to publicize the ministries of FUW, to raise financial support for the youth of Pen Lucy, and for the people of FCF to commit to improving their health while helping the Pen Lucy community.

What can you do? First, pray about FUNd Run 2009. Second, think how you can commit to being a part of it. Third, consider joining the Leadership Team. Look out for plans and announcements early in the New Year.

Finally, the FUNd Run Team thanks all of you who supported this first Running Festival adventure. Without you and all of the donors we would not have achieved such great results. God has surely blessed each of us. ♦

DEACON'S CORNER

The Deacons express glory to God for the generous contributions made by the congregation through the Mercy Ministry envelopes. The Deacons have assisted 11 different individuals this year. Nine were members of FCF or Covenant Group participants and two were affiliated with BCS. A total of over \$5,700 was used to assist with such needs as BG&E bills, bus passes, rent, car payments and phone bills. The mercy needs will not be part of the 2009 annual budget so we urge your continued support of the Deacons Mercy Ministry through the Mercy Ministry envelopes in each pew. ♦

"Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ." Galatians 6:2

Dates For Your Calendar

- Dec. 6 Christmas Bazaar 2:00 p.m.
Children/Youth Advent
Program at 4:00 p.m.**
- Dec. 7 Adult Advent Concert
6:00 p.m.**
- Dec. 10 No Faith Leadership Night**
- Dec. 13 PLAN Good Samaritan
Christmas Store 10:00 a.m. —
1:00 p.m.**
- Dec. 24 Christmas Eve Service 7 p.m.**
- Dec. 25 Christmas Day—office closed**
- Dec. 28 11 a.m. service only**
- Jan. 21 Annual Congregational
Meeting and dinner**