

The High Calling

a bimonthly publication of The Francis Asbury Society

From the President's Desk

Is there anything more glorious and intoxicating than the church of Jesus Christ? Is there anything more disappointing and heart-breaking? In many ways the church is like Noah's ark: we couldn't stand the smells on the inside if it were not for the storm on the outside. The last time I checked, with all her faults and shortcomings, the body of Christ is still the one vehicle God has chosen to accomplish his purposes on earth.

This issue of *The High Calling* is dedicated to pastors and the churches they lead. In the pages that follow you will hear the voices of a few of that select company chosen by God to shepherd his flock. No calling is higher. None is more challenging. My prayer is that as you read and meditate on what is written here, you will be motivated to pray for the church and find creative ways to encourage her leadership.

*Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory **in the church** and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20–21).*

Thank God for the church!




The Outward Bound Church

By Matt Friedeman, professor at Wesley Biblical Seminary and pastor at DaySpring Community Church (Canton, Mississippi)



The late Charles Colson used to speak about the Soviet government's shrewd legislative ploy in 1929 when, attempting to wipe out the church, a law was passed not to prevent people from meeting on Sunday morning but to make

it a crime to conduct church school, to help the poor, to evangelize. "Stay in your churches on Sunday," said the officials, "and have church—period."

The implicit assumption? If Christians obeyed the law at this point, Christianity would perish. The church, by its nature, is outward bound. When she ceases to move toward the unchurched and the needy, the process of death begins. Knowing this, Colson added this stinger: "What the Soviet Communists did *by decree* in 1929, we're allowing to be done to us *by default*."

The local church is God's plan for distributing his holiness to the world. The vast majority of times the

word "church" comes up in the Bible, it is used of the local church; and from the day of Pentecost on, when the church was filled with the Spirit, it is obvious that God wasn't going to be pleased with a stationary and static group of believers. They were released to places of desperate need in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. And "released" meant going.

But even in Acts the temptation seemed to be to get stuck in one place. E. Stanley Jones makes the case in his studies of the church in Acts (*The Reconstruction of the Church—On What Pattern?*) that the disciples for the most part stayed in Jerusalem for years beyond what they should have and only when God forcibly recruited another (Paul) did they get the stinging message that they too were meant to be similarly moving to places beyond. The heart of God was not to find rest in one place. It was to "go, and make disciples of all nations."

Holiness churches, at their best, have always known this. John Wesley, in his "Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion" (Part III), boldly declared that Methodism should be:

employed, not in the highest, but in the meanest, and not in the easiest but the hottest, service—ease

Continued on page 2

and plenty we leave to those that want them. Let us go on in toil, in weariness, in painfulness, in cold or hunger, so we may but testify the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24). The rich, the honourable, the great, we are thoroughly willing (if it be the will of our Lord) to leave to you. Only let us alone with the poor, the vulgar, the base, the outcasts of men. Take also to yourselves “the saints of the world”: but suffer us “to call sinners to repentance”; even the most vile, the most ignorant, the most abandoned, the most fierce and savage of whom we can hear. To these we will go forth in the name of our Lord, desiring nothing, receiving nothing of any man (save the bread we eat while we are under his roof), and let it be seen whether God has sent us.

Wesley didn't want his people to merely go, but go to the “least” and the “worst.” It was what it meant to be Methodist, what it has always meant to be holy and Christ-like. Discipleship American-style has too often consisted of a Bible study or Sunday School class established for the thoughtful exploration of Scripture and perhaps a little accountability. Discipleship Jesus-style includes investing our lives in the hard and dark places to discern how we can apply the Gospel to the lost, the poor, and the diseased.

Our Predicament

It is all too easy to forget that our churches are mission outposts, set in an area to evangelize and compassionately nurture that community for Christ. This is the meaning of *cor incurvatus ad se* (a heart curved in on itself). The human heart, and a community of hearts in a church, will be sorely tempted to take care of itself. Tom Skinner, former chaplain for the Washington Redskins, once said that this was the meaning of the tithe for most of us—we tithe so we can have the best preacher in the nicest building with professional disciple-makers on the cushiest carpet and actually talk ourselves into thinking we are tithing to God!

A church unleashed knows that we tithe to a local church so that that local church can be poured into the community winning people to Jesus, touching those in prisons without hope, visiting the forgotten in nursing homes, instructing schoolchildren who can't read, etc. The opposite, then, of hearts curved in on themselves is *cordia excurvata ad alios*—hearts curved out to others.

The first of these others, of course, is our triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And when we honestly and

wholeheartedly worship the triune God we understand that he is God on mission. Thus, we follow that God into ministry.

Has anyone noticed how rare that is today in churches?

In a seminary class I distributed a diagram of a funnel and asked my students to assign various aspects of their local church ministry to the levels of the funnel. The large opening of the funnel, for instance, indicated the “come level” of the church—activities to which non-attenders might be invited. One of my students, Karl, dutifully named those activities of his church. As the funnel gradually narrowed, he made note of his local body's programs for the “grow level” part of the funnel, the “disciple level” and the “leadership level.” The spout at the bottom of the funnel offered students the opportunity to elaborate on how congregants leave the church to impact society. At the bottom of Karl's funnel, however, was something that was initially indiscernible to this professor's eye, so I asked him about it. Karl said that at the very bottom of his funnel was a cork. He explained, “That is because everything that is done in this church is

kept in this church to keep the church happy.”

For the most part, therein lies the problem with too much of the American church. We exist for ourselves, not others. We are frequently corked churches.

“When we honestly and wholeheartedly worship the triune God we understand that he is God on mission. Thus, we follow that God into ministry.”



Continued on page 6

Why I Love the Church

By Troy D. Keaton, Senior Pastor at EastLake Community Church (Moneta, VA)



I have spent the past 42 years closely connected to the local church and I love it! Born into a pastor's home, I am sure I attended church within the first week of my life. As was common, our week involved going to church on Sunday morning and Sunday evening, and then Wednesday for prayer meeting. Of course there were other services as well, usually a Sunday night youth service that preceded the main service and every Spring and Fall we had weeklong revival meetings where we went to church every night of the week.

In those days I wouldn't have won the award for the most respected member or the most engaged worshipper (perhaps I still wouldn't). I've run in the sanctuary, crawled under the pews, illegally toyed with the sound system, slept through sermons, played tackle football in the church basement, and perhaps a time or two written love notes on a tithing envelope.

I will admit my affection for the bride of Christ wasn't always as intense as it should have been. There were times when I didn't want to be there and paid no attention to the sermon and others where I prayed that God would deliver me from a teacher and Sunday school class that was incredibly boring. But somehow I developed a love for the church.

For the past 20 years, I have served as a senior pastor in a local church and my love remains intact. This view as a pastor has allowed me the opportunity to see some of the challenges of the church at a different level, more significant than those of my childhood. From this side of the altar, I've come to learn that good people have weaknesses, and I've tearfully listened to their stories of brokenness. At times I've witnessed the division of God's people and been grieved to see them struggle to get along. I've wrestled with God and myself as I've tried to accomplish the mission of the church with individuals who were content as things were and obstinate towards change. I've felt the pain of rejection and disappointment

from people that I love. I've worked alone, longing for better facilities, more resources, and a team to help with the work. It's not always been fun from this side, but I love the church more today than ever!

Let me share four reasons why I love the church.

I love the church because the church is people.

What I've come to know in a deeper way through the years is the church is not an organization, a building, or even a tradition. It is ordinary people trekking their way towards heaven.

As I look back on my childhood, I now realize what it was that made the church so attractive to me. I didn't like the green carpet, the paneling on the walls, or the smell of the musty basement. What caused me to run out the door to church was the reality that I was going to see my best friend or a pretty girl, or I was going to make friends with a new kid that day. It was people like Bro. Schinn, who

always gave us candy, that made those early impressions upon me. It was people!

Even now with bigger buildings, more resources, and a team that is on mission with God, my love for the church is centered in people. People like Deb, Bill, Nancy, Ernie, Gladys, Lottie, Gary, David, and hundreds more who are there each week with a smile, a kind word, and the faith to believe in what

God is doing. People who are willing to share love, give money, take out the trash, offer a ride, or fix a meal. Broken people, imperfect people, but people who are instruments of grace to others.

I love the church because the church is a force for good in this world.

Since its inception in the mid 30s AD, the church has been a powerful influence for righteousness, truth, and justice in the world.

Through the church, our doctrines have been secured and passed down to us. Through the church, the Gospel is presented to the world. Through the church, the evils of society are pushed back and defeated. It was the work of churches that helped us end slavery, and today the church continues to shine the light of truth and justice in the world.



"As I view my own life, it was my experiences in the church as a young person that taught me about God and led me to a relationship with Christ."

Continued on page 5

Where Are You?

By Larry Vickers, pastor of three United Methodist churches in Breckinridge County, KY, and FAS Board Member



In the early years of my ministry, I felt sometimes like a car speeding down the highway with no brakes and no steering wheel! As a nervous new pastor of a small country church, I began a Bible study on prayer. I opened the church on Wednesday evenings, and I invited the people to come and pray. Most Wednesday evenings, it was just me, and I often felt ineffective.

But as I look back, I realize it was that prayer meeting that sustained me—and it changed the church! Because one night Nancy* came in. For several weeks, her actions were the same. She would come in, quietly taking a seat as far away from the altar as she could, and soon after begin to cry—sometimes sobbing so violently that her whole body would tremble.

Later, Nancy told me, “I have been driving by this church for more than 20 years. Never once did I feel any need to stop and come in. Most of the time, the church was closed and no one was there anyway. But then I began to see a single car in the parking lot. I saw the lights turned down low. And then a voice inside of me began to tell me that I needed to stop and pray for a few minutes on my way home. I fought it off for as long as I could, but one night I just had to stop.”

Over the course of about six weeks, the Lord God began to move mightily in Nancy’s life. She started moving closer to the altar. Her tear-filled eyes began to glow with hope and joy. She started coming to church on Sundays. As she got to know some of the people, she started attending Sunday school. Then, she joined the church and started inviting her family, her son and daughter and their families. They started driving to church on Sunday mornings from Lexington. The church started to grow—deep and wide.

In Genesis 3:9, it is written: “*But the LORD God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’*” Note that the first record of the question, “Where are you?” was not from someone looking for God. It was the Lord God himself looking for someone. In Matthew 18 and Luke 19, Jesus’ mission and purpose is clearly stated: to seek and save the lost. God is still asking, “Where are you?”

I never did ask Nancy if she heard the Lord God call out to her, “Nancy, Nancy, where are you?” I didn’t have to.

*Name changed.

The Presence by A.E. Borthwick

By Jennie Lovell, Executive Assistant, FAS

This painting is a favorite of Dr. Kinlaw’s, because it illustrates to him that Jesus will meet you wherever you are. Take a moment to examine the painting.

Notice that the penitent woman is kneeling in the darkness at the back of the sanctuary, not at the brightly lit altar. Perhaps she feels unworthy to approach God in that holy place. Perhaps she is too ashamed to be seen by others in the cathedral. Or, perhaps, she is simply too weary from carrying her life’s burdens to walk down the long aisle.

Her reasons for kneeling in the back pew instead of the altar really don’t matter. *Her* location isn’t important; *his* is. He is right there beside her in her anguish, bringing his holy light, his presence, to her darkness.

As Rev. Vickers mentioned in his article, God still is asking, “Where are you?” It doesn’t matter where you are when you respond. He will be there, saying, “Here I am!”



This well-known picture, painted by the Edinburgh artist A. E. Borthwick in 1910 has an intriguing history. The scene is the Cathedral itself, where communion is being distributed to the faithful in the distance at the High Altar. In the foreground though, a kneeling penitent is comforted by the presence of Christ behind her, bathed in radiant light. The painting was the subject of a celebrated legal action after it was illegally sold while being exhibited in Europe during World War I. The painting was eventually returned to Scotland and Borthwick presented it to the Cathedral in 1944. It now hangs alongside another painting of the same title (but set in St Paul’s Cathedral, London) and painted by Borthwick in 1940.

(Photo and text taken from the St. Mary’s Cathedral, Edinburgh, website at: <http://www.cathedral.net/about/a-tour-of-the-cathedral/inside-the-cathedral.>)

As I view my own life, it was my experiences in the church as a young person that taught me about God and led me to a relationship with Christ. The church has been the healing place of broken families and a safe place for wounded souls. It is a place of redemption, forgiveness, accountability, and truth. And the church doesn't just reach its own. There are millions in the kingdom of God today who were rescued by the church, not raised in it.

I watched this happen first hand in the life of Calvin and Rosi. Although they had never been to church, a group from our church provided a wedding reception for them. This act of love and kindness was instrumental in them coming to Christ. The church has since walked beside them and nurtured them through many difficult days. These actions are a small reflection of the enormous influence the church holds in the world today.

I love the church because it is diverse and creative. The message of the church is universal and adaptable in all places and times. The incredible mission of the church is not bound to a particular expression. This underlying principle allows the church to proclaim its message and do its work among all people, generations, and cultures.

If we were to travel the globe together, we would see the diversity of the church. The church doesn't just apply to westerners, the elderly, or to those who have been predisposed to religion. As the expression of the love of God in Christ to the world, the church is as diverse as the people whom God has created.

And throughout history whenever Christ's church has struggled or gotten off track, he always leads us to a fresh revelation of himself and in turn a new and relevant expression of the church. I am thankful that the work and expression of the church is not bound to a pew, a practice, or a place!

I love the church because its triumph is inevitable. Behind every genuine community of believers is the prevailing wind of the words of Jesus: that the future is bright and victory is certain! No matter how difficult things may be in our local church at this moment or how troubling the circumstances of the world, the local church is still the representation of Christ to the world and is destined for a glorious future.

So, in these days of darkness when some have dismissed the importance of the church and have abandoned their affection for the bride of Christ, I have not. The head of the church is still on his throne, the people of the church are still its substance, the message of the church is still relevant and powerful, and the future of the church is bright! That's why I love the church.

Here I Am!

By Jerry Coleman, Dir. of FAS International



"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me,"
Revelation 3:20.

How intimate are you with Jesus? Jesus wants you to know him and his Father as much as Jesus knows him (see John 17). Jesus wants you to know, really know, the deep love the Father and Son have for you. Will you let him in?

Living in Europe for 17 years, our family realized that there are several layers of entry and familiarity in European hospitality.

The gate. Most homes have a gate at or near the street. Visitors press the ringer for access, and the host would choose to let the visitor onto the property—or not. I imagine if you are reading this, you have most likely let Jesus onto your personal property.

The front door. Once finding the front door, visitors would knock, and the host would let them in. Shoes, hats, gloves, coats, and scarves would be left at the door. Jesus wants to be comfortable and at home in our personal lives. Do we let him in?

The sitting room. Most visitors would be ushered into the formal sitting room. This room might serve as a sleeping room at night. But during the day, it is a place to relax and receive visitors in comfort. How comfortable is Jesus in your home?

The kitchen. In Ukraine, the kitchen is the place for intimate conversation among family and friends. Close friends would be issued directly into the kitchen—no matter how small or uncomfortable—for hours at a time. The visit would usually start with chai or tea, and then transition to a meal. Time stands still in the kitchen with close family and friends. Does Jesus have this kind of close, intimate access? Do you let him in?

Jesus stands at the door knocking, not forcing his way in. But the desire is the same...to come in...and eat with you and you with him.

How intimate will you be? Into what places and spaces will you invite him? The choice is up to you. Please don't keep Jesus outside of the deepest and closest places of your life.

Escape or Engagement

The late author Bob Briner gave us a snapshot of Dallas in his book *Roaring Lambs*. “I live in Dallas, Texas,” recalled Briner, “a community blessed by some of the biggest and most prestigious churches and evangelical institutions in America.” The author noted that Dallas Theological Seminary is housed in the city limits, as is a major Christian publisher, several evangelical television ministries, some of the top Christian radio stations in the country, Christian concerts and convocations constantly in and out of the metropolitan area, a number of relatively new mega-churches and dozens of historically important churches. Indeed, Dallas is cited from time to time as one of America’s evangelical “meccas.”

Why then, asked Briner, is Dallas also one of the “divorce and murder capitols” of the nation. Topless bars abound. Violent crime is rampant. AIDS, drugs and prostitution are ubiquitous. Race relations are as poor as can be found anywhere. Savings and loans shenanigans of the most flagrant variety were perpetuated in Dallas.

How do we reconcile these two conflicting pictures of the same city? Highlighting the theme of his tome, Briner wrote, “Dallas has a lot of lambs, but they aren’t roaring.” Briner was hard on Dallas; we could be equally so with our own cities. But the truth isn’t just that the lambs aren’t roaring; it’s that the lambs perhaps don’t love God (as in cherish and obey him) and, consequently, aren’t compelled to love and seek for holy change within their communities.

Noted evangelical John Stott once said that there are only two possible attitudes that Christians can adopt towards the world: escape or engagement. Escape means turning our backs on the world, basically segregating ourselves from the nastiness of the problems that beset us and steeling our hearts against the cries for help. Engagement means turning our faces towards the world in compassion, crying over the things that break the heart of God—getting our hands dirty and worn in service.

A Largely Forgotten Sermon

Many people who are familiar with John Wesley’s preaching have read his *52 Standard Sermons*. But there are many others! Try entering some additional numbers in a search engine. One of my favorites is Sermon #98—“On Visiting the Sick.” In it he calls works of mercy necessary to salvation and a real means of grace. By the sick he meant “all such as are in a state of affliction, whether of mind or body.” He knew some would prefer to send a physician or professional to tend to the sick but said that “this would not excuse you: His going would not fulfil your duty.” We ALL need to be involved, said Wesley, offering a loving touch, asking about the state of their souls, instructing them, leaving them literature (and coming back to ask them about their comprehension of it), and praying.

Again, “Who should go?” Said the evangelist: “All... who desire to escape everlasting fire and to inherit the everlasting kingdom... should practice this important duty.”

Begin, my dear brethren, begin now; else the impression which you now feel will wear off; and possibly, it may never return! What then will be the consequence—instead of hearing that word, “Come, ye blessed!—For I was sick, and ye visited me;” you must hear that awful sentence, “Depart, ye cursed!—For I was sick, and ye visited me not!”



“...if we were truly interested in keeping our children in church long into their adult years, we should regularly participate with them in heroic service.”

DaySpring Community Church

What you measure, matters. And so we have measured in local churches how much money we bring in, how many people attended worship and Sunday School. Perhaps even how many were baptized. These are fine things to count, even necessary. But at my Clinton, MS, church a few years ago we wondered how a church with its heart curved outward might count.

So every Sunday we started flashing the numbers up to both celebrate and hold ourselves accountable for our outward bound mission statement. For instance, we will count up how many of us were involved and how many

people were touched through the various ministries of our church including:

- Abortion clinic sidewalk counseling (again, how many of us were involved, how many women did we talk to and how many babies were saved)
- Prison ministry (how many of us, how many did we touch, how many were saved)
- Public school tutoring
- Missional Bible studies (Bible studies with un-churched people)

We are not a large church (250 in worship attendance) but God has had an enormous community influence using our laity. New ministries are always cropping up, and fresh initiatives frequently considered. But regularly displaying and emphasizing these numbers helps to keep the vision of outreach alive.

There is something else of vital importance—Christ-like discipleship. Jesus disciplined his men while on the move evangelistically and with compassionate ministry. I have hosted a national radio program, and one spring I had as my guests two different authors that were relying on two different bodies of research concerning youth ministry. I had a question for them—*“How do we keep your youth in church as they become adults? An inordinate number seem to be dropping out. What can we do to keep them attending?”* Interesting what they said independent of each other. Both remarked that if we were truly interested in keeping our children in church long into their adult years, we should regularly participate with them in heroic service. Evangelistic and compassionate ministry with our children leads them, apparently, to a long relationship with the Church and our God. Simply taking them to church and the best children and youth programs our cities have to offer isn't enough.

The Key

Whoever is spiritually sensitized to church-*outward-boundedness* needs to go, and others need to be beckoned to follow. Pastors should regularly emphasize ministry to prisons, hospitals, schools, and taverns. They need to participate themselves and take people along. So, too, Sunday school teachers, home Bible study teachers, auxiliary presidents, parents. And having gone, begin looking back to the flocks God has blessed you with and ask them to join you.

It is the way Jesus made disciples.

It is presumably how he wants us to make disciples today.

It is necessary to salvation.

It is a means to more blessing, His grace.

Balaam's Song

Numbers 22–24

By Stan Key

I know it sounds a little crass
To say my preacher is an ass;
But hear me out and you will find
I do not mean to be unkind.

And though it may seem quite absurd
That donkeys should proclaim God's Word,
Yet this is how God spoke to me
And taught me true humility.

I was a prophet, don't you see,
I wanted God to speak to me.
His voice is what I longed to hear
So I could make His message clear.

But I was arrogant and proud
And thought that if God spoke out loud
The orator that He'd select
Would have a bit more self-respect!

But carnal hearts are not the place
To comprehend the ways of grace;
And so God found another way
To tell me what He had to say.

He chose what I esteemed the least
Addressing me through that dumb beast!
I must confess, I find it odd
To comprehend the ways of God.

I would have turned and run away
But met an angel in my way,
With flaming sword that threatened me
If I refused to bow the knee.

So down I sat and meekly said,
“Lord, speak to me; don't strike me dead.”
I'll never, ever be the same
Since through an ass God called my name.

Thank God for donkeys who can preach
And rescue sinners out of reach.
What I have learned from donkey talk
Has taught me how to humbly walk.

So now perhaps, you'll let it pass
If my best preacher is an ass.
And if you join me on the pew
My beast can be your preacher too!

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When Jesus said, "Follow me," he was inviting us on a journey—with him.

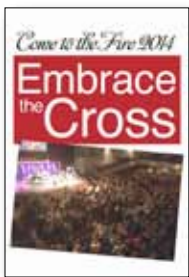
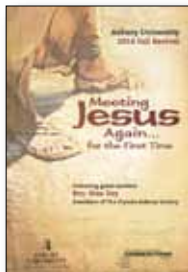
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**An Urgent Call
for Revival**

The High Calling—Sept–Oct 2014

The High Calling is a bimonthly publication of The Francis Asbury Society to serve as a link between FAS and its constituents, building loyalty and awareness so that the teaching and experience of Christian holiness may continue to be lived and proclaimed throughout the world.

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In This Issue:

- The Outward Bound Church
- Why I Love the Church
- Where Are You?
- Here I Am!
- *The Presence* by A.E. Borthwick
- Balaam's Song

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