Repeat after me: It’s not, and never again will be, about getting new members. Recently, I read a short essay by Jan Edniston. Jan is a Presbyterian denominational official in Chicago who writes a blog called “A Church for Starving Artists.” In her provocative and thoughtful blog entry, after stating unequivocally It’s not, and never again will be, about getting new members. She goes on to say that it IS always about asking why.

We seem to be going through a radical shift in religious life in America—what Jan Edniston calls The Mother of All Church Culture Shifts, and it appears clear that it’s not and never again will be about getting new members. But when we ask why we may discover realizations that can be transformative. For instance:

*Why are we offering a Bible study in the back room of a bar on Wednesday nights?
*Why are we starting a new worship service on Sunday nights?
*Why are we feeding homeless adults on Friday nights?
*Why are we starting an “Open-mic” Coffee House?
*Why are we sponsoring a “Community Open Forum” on hot button issues in town?
*Why are we running a pre-school?

It’s not about getting people to join our churches. It’s about making disciples. It’s about serving the community. It’s about loving our neighbors. It’s about loving God. It’s never, ever again about building the membership and subsequently adding to our coffers and subsequently helping our congregations survive. Jesus didn’t die to perpetuate an institution.

As I think about this, it occurs to me that our most significant service to our community is our Early Childhood Center (which we sometimes affectionately refer to as our “nursery school,” though that language is outdated). Last week I watched as a lovely bunch of children participated in “moving up exercises” or “graduation.” Many proud parents and grandparents attended. The kids wowed us with an amazing repertoire of songs, accompanied by guitars, drums, piano, and laughter. The parents loved it. The audience applauded. There were cameras and i-phones out everywhere, recording the action. A very special day and I thought to myself, if Church in the Highlands ceased to exist, what would be the greatest loss to our community? And in an instant I knew the answer: The Early Childhood Center would be sorely missed, with parents having to scramble to find excellent, affordable, local, early childhood for their kids. Bottom line: Running a successful Early Childhood Center is an excellent way to serve God and to serve our community! There are other things we can do! Feeding hungry people through our Ecumenical Food Pantry is an excellent way to serve the needs of our community! Running an Open Mic Coffee House might be an excellent way of serving God and serving our community. Starting a new worship service on Sunday morning at 11:30 that featured gospel music and contemporary worship might be an excellent way of serving our community!
# The Church in the Highlands

**Pastor:**
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Teresa Franzoni  
914-949-2023 ph  
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**Moderator:**
Phil Hasluck  
914-949-4184

**Director of Music:**
Dr. Robert Chase  
914-949-2023

**Early Childhood Center:**
Administrative Director  
Joanie Bivas  
914-946-6132  
ecc@churchinhighlands.org

**Church Office Hours:**
Monday - Friday  
8:30 am - 1:30 pm

**Sunday Worship:**
10:00 am

**Bible Study:**
10:00 am Tuesdays

Visit our **NEW** website: churchinthehighlands.org

Like us on Facebook & follow us on Twitter

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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<th>Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>June 19</td>
<td>Official Board Meeting</td>
<td>11:30 am</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 19</td>
<td>Father’s Day</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>June 25</td>
<td>Memorial Service for Shirley Young</td>
<td>6:00 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 26</td>
<td>Baptism of Avery Quinn Thomas</td>
<td>10:00 am</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 26</td>
<td>Congregational Meeting</td>
<td>11:30 am</td>
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## Birthdays

- **Michael Williams**  
  June 5

- **Mimi Nacario**  
  June 7

- **Mareda Graves**  
  June 11

- **Debbie Mylek**  
  June 14

- **Tommy Nacario**  
  June 20

- **Kristen Mylek**  
  June 28

**Happy Birthday to You**

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## News & Updates

We are happy to share that our **BOILER HAS BEEN REPLACED & THAT THE HEAT IS WORKING!** Thankfully, warm and sunny weather has come our way so we will no longer need it for now. Once again, thank you for everyone’s patience, understanding, support and donations to our “Boiler Fund.” We could not have done this without all of your help.

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Pastor Gary will be on vacation from Monday, June 13 - Saturday, June 18. Should you need pastoral care during that time, please call the Church Office at 914-949-2023.

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**NURSERY SCHOOL**

It has surely been a busy year at the Early Childhood Center. During the month of May, the children went on a picnic at Saxon Woods. They had so much fun with all their teachers and friends. They also created many spring themed arts and crafts. They have been enjoying the warmer weather and being outside on the playground.

On June 2nd and 6th there were graduation ceremonies for the 4’s and Combo class. How exciting for the children to move on to the next chapter in their lives. It was a very special day for parents, grandparents and teachers as well.

Summer Camp at the Early Childhood Center began on Monday, June 13 and is off to a great start. Each week is a theme based program offering many indoor and outdoor activities. Lots of summer fun happening around here!

Directors,
Joanie Bivas and Joy Bergins

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**JESUS’ SOLIDARITY WITH THE LEAST OF THESE**

Jesus’ solidarity with “the least of these” plants him among the prophets. Jeremiah and Isaiah said the measure of a society is how it treats its least powerful. How would America measure up?

How do we treat those without adequate health care? How do we treat the elderly who can’t afford their medicine? How do we treat our poor neighboring countries? What are our priorities? Are they as George Herbert Walker Bush put it, to be a “kinder and gentler nation?” Do we send neighboring countries the food and medicine they need or do we send them fighter planes and guns? Our obligation to the poor and powerless has deep Biblical roots, echoing through the generations of prophets leading up to Jesus.

In the fullness of time, God entered the messiness of history. God entered into solidarity with the human family to show us the way. Jesus walked the dusty streets of Palestine in sandals. Jesus entered into solidarity with the poor and suffering. Authentic Christianity continues to enter into the fray of poverty and affliction. This is Christianity’s legacy—to show God’s love through service to “the least of these.”

Article written by Amos Smith of Southwest Conference Blog.
For this article and others please visit www.southwestconferenceblog.org
Is Your Church Prepared?
By Richard R. Hammar
(On-line Church Law & Tax Report 2014)

How should church members and staff respond to an active-shooter incident prior to the time that law enforcement officers arrive? No single response fits all situations; however, making sure each individual knows his or her options for response can help them react decisively and save valuable time. Depicting scenarios and considering response options in advance will assist individuals and groups in quickly selecting their best course of action. These are suggestions for responding to an active shooter from FEMA’s guide on Developing High Quality Emergency Operation Plans for Houses of Worship:

Congregational Meetings: It may valuable to schedule a time for an open conversation. Though some may find the conversation uncomfortable, they may find it reassuring to know that as a whole their church is thinking about how best to deal with this situation.

Respond Immediately: It is common for people confronted with a threat to deny the danger rather than respond. The guide recommends that churches train congregants and staff to respond immediately. For example, train congregants to recognize the sounds of danger, act and forcefully communicate the danger and necessary action.

Run: If it is safe to do so, the first course of action should be to run until in a safe location. Training should emphasize: leave personal belongings behind; visual escape routes, including those for individuals with disabilities; take others with them but do not stay because others will not go; call 911 when safe; and let others know where they are.

Hide: If running is not a safe option, then hide in as safe a place as possible. In addition: lock the doors; barricade doors; lock windows; turn off lights; silence all devices; remain silent; if possible, use strategies to communicate with first responders such as signaling through a window. Remain in place until given an all clear by law enforcement.

Fight: If neither running nor hiding is a safe option, as a last resort, when confronted by the shooter, adults in immediate danger should consider trying to disrupt or incapacitate the shooter by using aggressive force and items in their environment, such as fire extinguishers or chairs.
Creating a quiet, beautiful meditation center and peace garden with a labyrinth might be an excellent way to serve our over-stressed, over-worked community—a place where anyone could come to find quiet, and peace within.

What all of these ideas have in common is that they all involve loving our community and serving our community. What they are NOT about is “getting people to join our church...” Because here is the secret: when you just love people, when you cultivate a servant’s heart, when you offer a community what the community itself needs, people will notice. They will come. There is a deep hunger and thirst for connection in our world.

Repeat after me:
It’s not – and never again will be – about getting new members.
It IS about loving and serving our neighbors.

Thanks for reading.

Pastor Gary

Hey World, I’m Religious, Not Spiritual

Few sayings strike more fear into or evoke more apologies out of 21st century evangelicals than the ubiquitous:

I’m spiritual, not religious.

We hear it from skeptical family members, from tweed-jacketed professors, from latte-slurping millennials, and we fall all over ourselves to agree, to affirm and to identify. In fact, on more than one occasion, when people respond to the news of what I do for a living with the spiritual not religious dictum, I have answered back with a bright-eyed, “that’s great! Same with me!”

Because is not Jesus the end of religion? Isn’t religion for people who are afraid of going to hell while spirituality is for people who have been there? Don’t we want to walk by the Spirit? When people tell us they are spiritual-not-religious, doesn’t that mean we need to change our churches to fill that gap and meet that need? Doesn’t the whole S-N-R parlance suggest that our family members, professors and millennials yearn for the liberating truth of Spirit-fueled faith rather than the shackles of man-made religion? It seems this modern phraseology and modern urges are prime territory for Acts 17, understand the culture, more U2 songs in church please!, relational evangelism. In fact, let’s say it all together now, with feeling: I’M SPIRITUAL, NOT RELIGIOUS.

Except now I know that the spiritual, not religious line, is a canard at best, a load of bull at worst. Think of what someone, whether connected to church or not, is really saying when they claim that they are spiritual-not-religious:
I’m in this alone. I have a connection with God/Divinity that is unique to me.
I will not be bound by rules that I find inconvenient or unappealing.
My knowledge of sacred text will be limited to: “Don’t judge me!” (That IS in the bible, isn’t it?)
I am unwilling to submit myself to the idea that there is a community of people who have wisdom, strength and hope that I need to make life work.
I don’t have to hang around with hypocrites.
Newer is better and younger is smarter.
Best of all, I can make God into my image and thus never have to wrestle with the implications of what it means that I am made in his.
My highest responsibility is to be true to me.
That entire list — as well as the premises behind it — is antithetical to New Testament faith and to the historic Christian religion. Yes, religion.
Do you know where the word religion comes from? From the same root word as ligament (look close, you’ll see it). And what do ligaments do? Ligaments are connective tissue linking bone to bone. Ligaments purposely link one part of the body with another part of the body. Ligaments are the ultimate antidote to body isolation; they instead call out: “You can’t do this thing alone! We’re in it together.”
And that’s what religion offers that mere spirituality never can.
When I say without apology that I am religious, I am saying:

- I’m connected to a community without which I would make a mess of my life. That community is a gift to me and gifted by me, and I am accountable to it.
- I’m connected to history. I didn’t invent this Jesus story. Who would ever dream something like that up? No, I inherited his story. I am accountable not only to the story itself but to all those generations who passed it on until it landed in my lap, miraculously, in January 1979.
- I’m connected to all those hypocrites in my community and in my history. Thank God. Because there’s always room for one more.
- My community and my history mediate my direct connection with God. He breaks through on occasion in moments of splendid solitude, but I hear his word best in our patterned routines of gathering, praising, lamenting, loving and serving.
- My highest responsibility is to be true to my calling as a follower of the One who acted decisively in history. Being true to that calling may or may not result in personal satisfaction.
- I recognize that my religion consists of habits and practices that are not always convenient or even interesting … but they are always necessary.

I suppose what it means is this: It is only when I am sufficiently religious that I can be authentically spiritual.

Talbot Davis is pastor of Good Shepherd United Methodist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina and the author of Solve, Head Scratchers: When the Words of Jesus Don’t Make Sense, The Storm Before the Calm, and The Shadow of a Doubt, all from Abingdon Press.
Our Church Barbeque was a great success!!

Many thanks to Doug Johnson for being our head chef and for his diligence over the grill. Thank you to Linda Davies, Dian Garnsey, Linda Grossman and Barbara Loucks for being such wonderful hostesses. Thank you to Resea Burns Percesepe for helping with clean-up and Jeffrey Grossman for his help setting up tables. A special thank you to all who attended. GOD provided us with sunshine and a lot of fun.

A job well done by all!

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**PRAYERS FOR ORLANDO**

written by Connie Larkman, www.ucc.org

Solidarity and support shown for the LGBTQ community is bringing people together at vigils around the country honoring the victims of the deadliest mass shooting in American history. All across Florida, from Seattle to Cleveland, in Fargo, N.D., and in Brooklyn, N.Y., United Church of Christ members and clergy gathered to pray, to mourn the loss of 50 members and friends of the Orlando gay community gunned down in an act of hate and of terrorism early Sunday morning, June 12, at a nightclub where people gathered to dance, socialize and have fun. Just hours later, not too far from where the massacre at the Pulse nightclub took place, the Rev. John Vertigan, Conference Minister of the Florida Conference UCC, grieved the dead and prayed for the 53 injured. "I was honored to bring words of solidarity and peace to an overflowing vigil in Orlando," he said, "where people laughed and cried and lifted up the reality that ours is a God of unconditional love and in even in this instance: LOVE WILL WIN." Their grief is our grief. We pray for the families and friends of the 50 who were killed. We pray for the many injured and for their doctors and care-givers.
THE CHURCH IN THE HIGHLANDS
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Pastor’s e-mail: garypercesepe@gmail.com
www.churchinthehighlands.org

No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.

Happy Fathers Day

TO ALL THE FATHERS AND GRANDFATHERS
THANK YOU FOR ALL YOU DO!

If you have moved, changed your phone number or e-mail address, please let us know.
We want to be able to keep in touch.

If you would like to be removed from our mailing list and no longer receive a copy of The Highlands, please e-mail us or call our office. We hate to see you go but we understand and respect your request.