



WESTWOOD

The Spire • Fall 2015

BEING THE CHURCH



 WestwoodUMC.org

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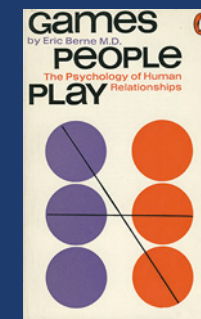
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BEING THE CHURCH

It's been decades since Eric Berne published his book, *Games People Play*. A pop psychology book of its era, it did a great job of explaining, in simple terms, our day-to-day human interactions and how these patterns can become repetitive, almost like games. One of those games most of us have experienced, and one which is especially visible in the church, is "Ain't It Awful?"



The beauty of this game is that there is no winner or loser. It provides the opportunity for participants to share their feelings of misery and dissatisfaction, perhaps about work, an institution — whatever the case may be — with no intent to solve anything. It's an experience of communal frustration and anxiety. It can be played day after day, and there is always room for another to participate. Mary Oliver, the poet, speaks of it in these terms:

*Tell me about despair, yours,
And I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.*

Many within the church enjoy playing this game of "Ain't It Awful?" They bemoan the changing culture, the people who "turn their backs on faith," the church being "forced to change because of culture." "If only things were the way they used to be," they cry. "If only people were more committed." "If only..." is a very long list. On the other hand, there are many within the church who do not play this game and instead choose to see how God, and faithful followers of Jesus, move ahead with history, looking for new opportunities. These people do not view change as anathema.

It's exciting to be a part of WUMC because we value history and tradition while focusing on the future and the exciting possibilities that are ahead. I have always believed that faith — and the church — are not intended to be static but instead are growing, maturing, always changing so that we might continue to be of great relevance to the world in which we live. Individuals in this congregation are hard at work "being the church" in vital and energizing ways.

As you read through this "Being the Church" issue, I hope you will have time to reflect on how important you are as a part of this dynamic, grace-giving community of Jesus followers. Happy reading!



PASTOR JOHN WOODALL has been serving United Methodist Congregations for twenty-five years in a number of capacities; Youth Minister, Education Minister, Minister of Evangelism, and now Senior Pastor. He is a graduate of the University of Southern California and Fuller Theological Seminary, and he and his spouse, Linda, have three young adult children (Mark, Elizabeth, Peter). When not at church, you might find him working in the garden, trying out new recipes, attending concerts, reading a good book, working a crossword, or sitting at the piano.



CHURCH BEYOND TO-DO LISTS ✝

Being the church is not a to-do list. This can be a difficult concept to shake, because so much of what the church *is* can be described by what it *does*. Make no mistake...the church is active! At Westwood UMC, however, we want to be clear that what we do flows out of our identity together as believers.

“You are more than what *you* do, and what we do flows out of who *we* are – together as the church.”

One of the helpful ways we have begun to conceptualize this identity and talk about our many activities is through the use of the **Jerusalem Cross**. This iconic image has a deep history, and Pastor John Woodall has worked with the church council to develop it as a tool that expresses our calling as a church community.

The cross provides four quadrants to highlight each of our four areas of focus. The themes that have emerged include Worship, Fellowship, Teaching, and Service. Each area corresponds to an ancient word that ties it to a historic activity of the church through the centuries.



PASTOR BO SANDERS is Minister of Children, Youth, & Families at Westwood UMC. He is in the process of completing a Ph.D. in Practical Theology at Claremont School of Theology with a passion for Sociology of Religion, Postcolonial Studies, Critical Race Theory, and Comparative Theology. He is a pastor, coffee shop theologian, tattoo evangelist, and soccer fan.

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WORSHIP (LITURGIA)

Westwood UMC is a worshiping community, and we have two distinct expressions in The Sanctuary and The Loft gatherings. While they are very different from one another, both gatherings share the same conviction that Sunday morning is a sacred time to pull people out of their everyday routine in order to collect and focus.

FELLOWSHIP (KOINONIA)

Part of being a church in a busy city is that there are numerous people coming and going in every direction. We want to be a welcoming community and a safe harbor for everyone who walks through the doors – whether a first-time visitor or a long-time member.

TEACHING (DIDACHE)

We are a thinking congregation, and thus, we take seriously the content of our presentations and follow-up conversations. Two important aspects of active engagement in this area involve reflection and response, which are the breathing in and breathing out of a healthy life of faith.

SERVICE (DIAKONIA)

Our ultimate aim is to glorify God, and this is seen in the way we extend grace to each other, minister hope in the world, and work for justice together. When we talk about conversion, we don't mean getting people to think like we do; we mean a turning from a me-centered life to a life lived to serve others and participate in the mission of God to heal the world.

These four areas provide a structure to our mission as a church. It is important to keep in mind that these activities flow out of *who we are* and *who we believe we are called to be* as a people of God in the world.

As a church, we are not interested in giving people more to do. Life is busy, and we all have enough to do already. This four-fold approach is helpful, because it expresses a purpose for why we do what we do and ultimately what it looks like to be a successful church.

Wouldn't it be awful if we didn't know why we spend so much time doing all that we do – even if we were successful? How much more is this true when you pool the collective passion, energy, and giftings of the people called by God to partner with God in God's work in the world?

What the church *does* flows out of who she is. We, as the people of God, have our identity in this calling to partner with God for this work in the world. It is vital to get that in the right order. Otherwise, someone might be under the impression that you are a Christian because of what you do. If that were the case, the church would fall into the trap of giving people to-do lists: be better, try harder, have more faith, etc.

The church has a powerful message! This is our overall proclamation (kerygma is our 5th ancient word). You are more than what you do, and what we do together flows out of who we believe we are. Our activity is an expression of our identity and not the other way around. We are more than just what we do! Because of who we are, we get to do incredible good in the world.

As we move forward toward the 2020 vision, we want to be clear that faith is more than a to-do list, because what we do is an expression of the faith that we have – together.

Waiting for Vengeance, But Greeted With Grace

Because I have migrated geographically, politically, and theologically, my social media following is littered with a variety of polarized perspectives. Over the past few weeks, my Facebook feed has felt like a high-velocity Ping Pong match between two Tasmanian devils fighting for the security of the whole planet, because we have become too conservative...no liberal...no secular...no inclusive...no sensitive...no racist...no gay...no post-gender. With great social change comes great negative commenting. The tone has risen from combative to violent to nuclear as lines were drawn, fingers pointed, and hate spewed. It has been a rather heartbreaking read leading me to finally delete my Facebook app to avoid the venom.



Gabe Lyons and Andrew Sullivan at "Q" Boston on April 23, 2015.

I feel a little like Rodney King crying, "Why can't we all just get along?"

Yet, I also feel the importance of the issues at hand. Racism boiling into genocide inside a sacred space is of cataclysmic importance. Access to civil liberties for all Americans freeing everyone to love who they love and marry who they choose really matters. Removing symbols that denigrate and demean from government buildings is imperative. However, when we become violent (even if only with keystrokes) towards our sisters and brothers on the other side, something terrible happens to us and to the world God loves.

In the midst of enduring this social media temper tantrum, I stumbled on a conversation between Andrew

Sullivan and Gabe Lyons. Andrew is an outspoken leader within the LGBTQ community, has written for TIME, The Atlantic, and the New York Times, and has been HIV positive for over a decade (www.andrewsullivan.com). Mr. Sullivan is a Harvard educated attorney who has fought hard for equal rights for the marginalized. He is also Catholic and a fairly hardline conservative - a conundrum by his own admission. Gabe Lyons is a conservative Christian writer (www.qideas.org) as well as the leader of "Q Society," a conservative evangelical conferencing network and web-magazine.

Gabe invited Andrew to a Q event in Boston. Their conversation took place after the President of Gordon College addressed the crowd. He made the assertion that conservative Christians in the US are now under deep persecution, and leaders should be in fear about the coming liberal onslaught that would deny funding and civil liberties to those who refused to support gay marriage.

As Andrew took the stage, I could feel the rhetoric rising in my head...lists of sarcastic comebacks, vitriolic retorts, and the appropriate Bible verse sightings to ensure God was on my side. I was sure that this sharp-witted and frank mouthpiece was going to dress down the primitive views of this misguided backwoods educator. The long-awaited change Mr. Sullivan so desperately worked for had finally come only to be demonized by a Christian leader through a whiny narrative of "persecution." Come ON! I waited for Andrew to rip him to shreds...but, something amazing happened.

Andrew didn't take his shots, no matter how cheap or well-deserved. Andrew didn't take up power and shout down these views now that the majority was on his side. Andrew...apologized.

As I continued to watch, I realized that my jaw had literally dropped. I sat there stunned...a pastor waiting for vengeance, but instead I was greeted with grace. Andrew went on to say that he was sorry that the president felt such fear and expressed a concern that anyone would have to change one iota of their religious conviction in order to participate fully in society. He expressed that it is not the goal of the movement to make anyone feel ostracized and regretted that some in the LGBTQ community were pushing others out. He expressed empathy for those who felt outside of accepted norms and for the hurt of being different than the majority. There is room for everyone, in his belief.

But, he wasn't done.

He went on to remind conservative leaders that the hurt they seem to be experiencing now in being out of step with culture is the core narrative for the gay community. He lamented how gay people had been ostracized, persecuted, shunned, beaten, subjected to hormone treatment, and killed. He reminded everyone that in the 80's and 90's the gay community experienced a mass tragedy; over 300,000 young people died due to HIV/AIDs. Then called "the gay cancer," this disease killed five times the number of Americans as the Vietnam War in roughly the same time period. He then mourned the church's culpability.

The effect of Andrew's words was amazing. I learned something that I hope we will consider.

Mr. Sullivan did not choose retribution. He could have continued the cycle of attack and counter attack by making those who disagreed further enemies. Instead, he chose to draw a wider circle, including those who were different. He did not do unto others what had been done to him. He empathized, included, and asked for forgiveness. He did not sweep things under the rug and pretend that there were not significant issues and hurts. At the same time, he didn't victimize.

What a message of grace and power it would be if the progressive church could be inclusive to those they disagreed with during this time of social upheaval. When inclusion has been asked for by one group, how terrible would it be for them to turn around and perpetrate the same sin? What would it mean if we didn't use our Facebook feeds to troll for arguments and browbeat those who have lost power, but respond with grace? To graciously say, "While you may have a different view, you are included." To compassionately draw connecting points of experience while holding boundaries of behavior.

Now that the tide has turned on the issue of gay marriage, may we not turn on our sisters and brothers resistant to change. May we realize that change often births enlightenment. May we love them toward a better future together.



PASTOR CHRIS SPEARMAN is Minister of Adult Programs at Westwood UMC where he facilitates educational environments, connection opportunities, and ways to unlock the life God dreams for us. He is a highly energetic, slightly disorganized, covertly competitive, and musical worshiper seeking to become all God has created him to be, and he loves the wildly unpredictable journey of pursuing God. Chris is a proud and growing husband to Paige, an exuberant father and jungle gym to sons Asher and Caleb and daughter Eden.

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WHAT DOES THE WORLD NEED?

What does this world need?

We have enough gimlet-eyed

Profiteers, gamblers, and scammers -

plenty of grabbers and grafters.

Cold-eyed, they look for a door to our souls,

A way to imprint us into their machines.

They know you will die for a chunk of cash.

They know you will sink the cash into shoddy goods.

They know they will win if they wait long enough.

Still...There was a time when everyone bowed

to the divine right of kings. At that time, a man -

many called him the Anointed One - gathered an army of -

Who? Fishermen, shepherds, tax collectors, scribes, the cast-offs of a society already made up of the broken, the forgotten, and the desperate.

Isn't it strange that now, in a society known for privilege and might, that our family birthright in Christ began with the poor and the lost?

We can give thanks when we enter our sanctuary on a Sunday - Give thanks for plenty to eat and shelter and friends.

Our family comes ready to be God's people by feeding the hungry, quenching thirst, clothing those in rags, and providing clean water where there once was dust.

We who gather on a Sunday are so alike in so many ways - we want to love and be loved, to play and work, to dance and rejoice in good fortune.

And yet those predators lurk...infusing us with fear, and hate, promoting injustice, anger, bitterness, aggression, war, cruelty, bullying...twisting love into hate, and blinding us to possibility.

We ask, O Creator of all, for the courage to devote the prayers of our hearts to you. Let us pray for the strength to break the traps holding the world's children, so they might have the future denied to so many now.

Whatever we have to give, let us dedicate it to you so that all may grow, dance, sing, and dream of a world You have already designed for us.

May it be so.



Jan Gonder retired from a career teaching English as a second language in Los Angeles Unified Schools. She also worked as a District-level advisor and school-level coordinator - all at the high school level. Now, she is preparing for a second career in selling hand-made jewelry. She has enjoyed many of Westwood Church's opportunities - Chancel Choir, handbells, Stephen Ministry, United Methodist Women, and the classes offered after church and in the evenings.

INVESTING in the FUTURE:

Eric & Peggy Fonkalsrud

Interwoven within the tapestry of our diverse church family are many “treasures” – people with a variety of gifts and talents that have accomplished tremendous things. One such “treasure” is Dr. Eric Fonkalsrud, a world-renowned pediatric surgeon, teacher, and re-



searcher. Born in the United States shortly after his parents immigrated from Norway, he spent his early life in Seattle, Washington, where his father, a civil engineer, was involved in designing bridges across the Columbia River. Following high school, he attended the

University of Washington, where he earned a Bachelor of Science in zoology. In addition, he was a member of the crew team for four years; their boat won the national championship twice during that time.

Eric completed a residency in general and thoracic surgery at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in 1957 and UCLA as well as a fellowship in pediatric surgery at Columbus Children’s Hospital.

In the 1960’s, Eric realized his “true calling” was to work in a university hospital setting. He stated, in an interview with American Academy of Pediatrics, “The university hospital has the advantage of full-time biochemistry, physiology, and other departments with so many different laboratories and research programs. That’s where I think my interest really was – bringing pediatric surgery more into the research level and participating not just with pediatricians with clinical papers, but getting out into the big national surgical societies and bringing pediatric surgery into the mainstream.”

Within eight years of earning his medical degree, Eric was appointed Chief of Pediatric Surgery at UCLA Medical Center. Clearly, his gifts were recognized and acknowledged early in his career, and his desire to contribute to the field of pediatric surgery and student mentorship were major factors in his life.

Over 15,000 Surgeries Performed

During his 36 year tenure as Professor and Chief of Pediatric Surgery, Dr. Fonkalsrud developed an active clinical and research program in the management of Inflammatory Bowel Disease in children and adults. His research led to surgery on 150 children and 600 adults, representing one of this country’s largest clinical experiences with this operation. Eric and his colleagues did their first human liver transplant in 1966, only three years after the first surgery of its kind, and they performed a total of four from 1966-1968, only the third group in the US to perform human liver transplants.

Through the ensuing years, he performed over 600 major cardiac operations, many of which utilized cardiopulmonary bypass, and he is a world-renowned authority on the management of congenital chest wall malformations, gastroesophageal reflux disease in children, and neonatal surgery - having performed more than 15,000 operations as the senior surgeon.

Although busy with his own practice, Dr. Fonkalsrud realized the importance of “giving back” to others. Not only did he volunteer as a surgeon at the Venice Family Clinic, but he mentored young medical students, with 14 residents going on to train in various Pediatric Fellowship Programs.

A few years ago, Dr. Fonkalsrud was honored at the annual meeting of the American College of Surgeons. This prestigious Surgical Forum, where hundreds of scientific presentations were made at the annual meeting of 65,000 members, was dedicated to him. As Professor Emeritus of Surgery at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA, he was honored for “his consummate contributions as a surgeon, investigator, mentor, and leader of the past 50 years.”

During his lengthy career, he authored 462 publications in scientific journals, 124 book chapters, and six books. In addition, he has served on the editorial boards of 15 major surgical journals and as president of nine regional, national, and international surgical societies.

In looking back over his career, Eric shared, “I have had a life filled with so many great opportunities. I thank God for giving me the judgment, wisdom, and guidance to make so many good decisions, as well as having the enthusiasm, creativity, and energy to enjoy my wonderful, supportive, and loving wife and great family while pursuing my medical career.”

Married for 56 Years

Eric and his wife, Peggy, have been married for 56 years, and they have four adult children – Eric, Jr., a project manager for IBM; Lynn, an artist; David, the director of a large public relations firm in San Francisco; and Robert, an engineer and project manager of the new Expo Light Train construction in Santa Monica. All four are married, and Eric and Peggy have four granddaughters and two grandsons.

The Fonkalsruds first attended Westwood Community Methodist Church in 1960, shortly after they were married and moved to Santa Monica from the east coast. They were very impressed with Reverend Mel Wheatley and his outstanding sermons and supporting staff, as well as the

superb ambience of the church with its outstanding choir and the many wonderful members (several of whom have become among their closest friends over the years).

Serving Within the Church

For many years, Eric was an usher and served as the medical advisor for the church. He and Peggy were chairpersons of the Family Life Committee for a few years and worked on the Christmas presentations of Mishka the Bear. They also served on the Interfaith Relations Committee. When Reverend Wheatley was elected as Bishop in the Colorado Conference, Eric served on the search committee to find his replacement.

When asked about his thoughts for the future of the church, he stated, “Our dreams are that, under the ministry of Reverend John Woodall, Westwood United Methodist Church will become one of the most significant Methodist churches in California and have a great positive impact on all persons, regardless of religious persuasion, in the state.”

Continued on the next page →

“Our dreams are that...Westwood United Methodist Church will become one of the most significant Methodist churches in California and have a great positive impact on all persons...”

photo by Patricia Schmidt



Planned Giving

Over the past two decades, Eric and Peggy’s family have established scholarships in perpetuity for third year medical students who are in the top third of their class and have severe financial hardship as determined by the Dean’s office at Johns Hopkins, University of Washington, and UCLA Medical Schools – each of which is an alma mater of Eric’s.

They have now chosen to establish a scholarship through Westwood United Methodist Church to support a ministerial student who has performed well during the first year in seminary, is having financial hardships, and is committed to becoming a minister in the United Methodist Church. They realize that the tuition is high for these ministerial candidates, that

compensation after graduation is low, and many are unable to pay off large debts. Their fear is that this may dissuade enthusiastic and bright young people from fulfilling their desire to study for the ministry and ultimately fill the shoes of Mel Wheatley, John Woodall, and the other great ministers of Westwood and other United Methodist Churches.

The important steps taken by Eric and Peggy Fonkalsrud are exemplary of “planned giving”, and they’ve chosen to express their deep faith and belief in the importance of spreading the good news of Jesus Christ to a world in need. Their decision to endow this scholarship is both a statement of “the church now” and “the church of the future.”



BETTE CALDWELL recently retired from Los Angeles City Schools after 50+ years as a teacher, counselor, and administrator. She joined Westwood United Methodist Church in 1964 and has been active in numerous ways - Editor of the Spire, Youth Council member and chairman, Sunday School teacher, co-leader of the Confirmation Classes, member of Administrative Council, Stephen Minister and Leader, and Chancel Choir member. Bette enjoys photography, traveling, and spending time with her 4-legged friends: one dog and three cats.



**CREATING AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY:
Utopian Dream or Do-able Reality?
How Paul Can Help Us**

 **FOLLOW-UP**
SUNDAYS at 11:30am
Westwood Fellowship Hall
with S. Scott Bartchy

- 8/16:** The God of the Bible is Committed to Creating a Radically Inclusive Community
- 8/23:** Paul’s Powerful Vision of a “Society of Siblings”
- 8/30:** God Changes and Empowers Individuals to Live in Health-Giving Community



Watching children grow in faith and participate in the life of the church is one of the great pleasures of being a pastor. This really came home to me earlier this Summer when I met a group of middle school youth and their parents early on a Sunday morning to load gear into a vehicle for a weeklong Sierra Service Project (SSP). One of the young women, Stella, overheard me telling a parent that I recently moved my office to the opposite end of the hallway. She perked up and asked if I had taken the self-portrait she drew for me to my new space. I laughed and assured her that I had.

This is my fifth Summer of taking kids to SSP, and it has been an honor to watch Stella move through Sunday School classes, join the Youth Group, and go on service trips. Next year, she will be in our confirmation class, and it will be a monumental day when she stands up before the congregation and confirms the faith that has been taught and modeled to her. Stella is just one of the dozens of reasons I love ministry.

When children participate in our Children’s Ministry program, our church and staff have an opportunity to partner with families:

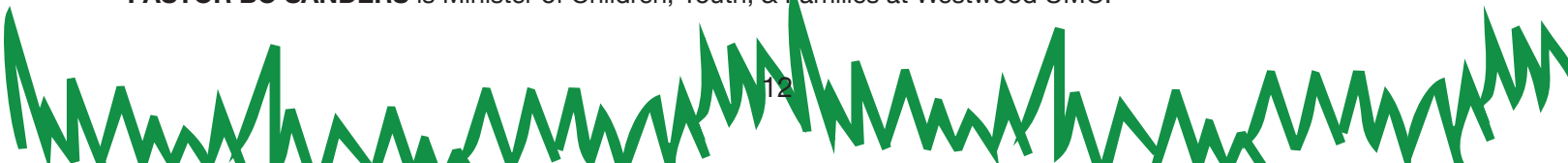
- **The church comes alongside parents** to partner and reinforce the lessons they are teaching at home. *The church can’t do it alone.*
- **The church supplements the experiences of the child** so they grow into a person of faith when it is time to leave their home. *Parents can’t do it alone.*
- **The church provides opportunities for the whole family** to participate in so that the child can imagine themselves as a member of God’s worldwide family. *None of us can do it alone.*



This Fall is another exciting time of transition in Children’s Ministry. We have a new curriculum on the way called ‘Deep Blue’ to expand and deepen our faith and understanding, and we are also adding another classroom for the K-5 age groups. This is perfect timing, because we are anticipating a bump in weekly participation as The Loft gathering moves to 10am.

Our mission is to create an environment that teaches Christian values and empowers children to grow in their faith as they participate in God’s world and the life of the church. I can’t think of a better way to spend our time and energy as a church family.

PASTOR BO SANDERS is Minister of Children, Youth, & Families at Westwood UMC.



ALL-CHURCH

SEPTEMBER 6th • 12-2pm

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Connect with friends and meet new people
while the kids enjoy a bounce house and games!

Fall FESTIVAL

Sunday, October 18th (12-2pm)
Westwood UMC Campus

Bring your family and invite your friends for a
FREE, fun-filled event including chili cook-off,
bounce house, games, prizes, & face painting.

INVITE YOUR
FRIENDS!



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SUNDAYS at 10am

Two Unique Gatherings Where Everyone is Welcome



The SANCTUARY

A sacred gathering with traditional liturgy, a thoughtful message, and resounding organ.

INFO: WestwoodUMC.org



The LOFT

An innovative gathering with spiritual conversation, creativity, coffee, and music.

INFO: TheLoftLA.org