

Commentary



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P.S. - God, can you fly?

The Westminster Press recently announced publication of a new book titled, "P.S. God, Can You Fly?" It is authored by R. Wayne Willis, pastor and chaplain in a childrens hospital. It's young patients are victims of life-threatening diseases including cancer.

When it is possible, he takes each child into the chapel and talks with them about God and prayer. Wisely, he suggests they write a prayer note to God and ask him any questions they would like to have answered and leave the note on the chapel altar.

The book is a collection of those simple but profound prayers to God. The author reminds his readers, "The children really mean what they pray." They don't use church pulpit style words some adults feel are necessary when approaching God.

The author reports on thirty of the prayer questions left on the children's chapel altar and on his attempt to answer for God.

The book's title, "P.S. God, Can You Fly," taken from one youngster's prayer note, brings back precious memories of being a pastor of four churches and serving my denomination at its national level. Pastors know Sunday school classes, children's sermons, Catechism classes and mid-week youth programs provide a setting for questions children ask God or about him and his plans for their lives.

When God is discussed, the usual question is, "What is God like?" Some attempt to answer that question by asking another "Is God an old man sitting on a throne in Heaven?" The most intriguing question I recall was asked by a sharp little five year old; A pastor-stumping one: "Who was God's Father and Mother?"

I remember another youngster who asked, "Is God like Santa Claus?" I felt he was worried a "Santa Claus like God" in keeping with the popular Christmas Song was "Making a list and checking it twice to see who is naughty or nice."

I discovered Adam and Eve in the creation account was an interesting subject for youngsters to discuss. In an attempt to encourage them to read their Bibles, I often asked, "What kind of fruit did God forbid them to eat in the Garden of Eden?" This was usually followed by the wrong answer, "An apple." I followed this by suggesting they ask their parents to help them find the right answer in the second chapter of Genesis. Excited, youngsters would come to the next class with the question, "Pastor, was it the fruit of the tree of Good and Evil?" - The Right Answer.

I recall being surprised on one occasion when "Jesus" was the subject of discussion with a group of older children and one asked, "Did Mary have a baby before she and Joseph were



Planned Parenthood battle

Let's not allow the sudden legal showdown between the Buena Vista County Sheriff's office and Planned Parenthood to get out of hand.

The issue of the moment is solving the tragic case of an infant's death, and making this into a battle of medical record privacy rights certainly won't help anyone but the ACLU types who live to get involved and stir up situations like this one.

So I'm going to suggest something outlandish. How about a compromise?

But first, here's the rub in a nutshell. A newborn baby's body is found in a trash chute at the local recycling plant. It's been discarded like trash.

The community is rightfully shocked. The sheriff's office is desperate to solve the case, but soon has nothing left to go on.

The sheriff wants to get a list of all women having a positive pregnancy test through the local Planned Parenthood office for a period of several months, in the longshot hope that tracing the list may lead to a woman who doesn't have a baby to show for her pregnancy.

Planned Parenthood argues that such a blanket approach would compromise the rights of perhaps up to 1,000 women in the area who depend on the confidentiality of their services.

The disagreement has landed in the lap of a local judge, and now is apparently being appealed to the state Supreme Court, with civil liberties experts from New York looking to get involved.

Why does it have to be that way? There's really no bad guy here. The sheriff is trying to solve a case any way that he can, and that's what we pay him for. Planned Parenthood is trying to protect the women who depend on them, which is their job, and if they have no confidentiality to offer, they have nothing.

What bothers me is that in the

midst of a high-profile civil liberties legal battle, we could lose sight of what we started out to do here.

Do right for a baby who never had a chance at life. Even if he lived just a day, he has a right to justice too.

There's a lot we still don't know about this case, and should not assume. Unfortunately, after more than a month, local officers are still waiting for a final autopsy report from the state medical examiner.

We do not know if the child was born alive or stillborn. If the former is true, someone could face charges up to first degree murder depending on the circumstances of the death. If the latter is true, there might be no charges or just a charge of improper disposal of remains.

We don't know the baby's race, where it was dumped in the county, or anything else we could use to further narrow down a search.

Of course, we have no reason to think the parent is a client of local Planned Parenthood, either. Like the never-solved case of Baby Doe found dead in a vacant Storm Lake trailer home several years before, I suspect that it is equally possible that this child came from some disturbed and desperate person or family just drifting through.

Yet if Planned Parenthood is our only chance for a solution, we should look at it. And the



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agency should see the need for that as well.

Depending on the circumstances, the mother of the baby could be in serious medical peril, and if not, is certainly in need of emotional and mental help.

If anyone knows the origin of this baby, or could find out, hiding the identity of the mother through silence might not be doing her such a favor.

Why do we have to have a court battle and subpoenaed records to move ahead?

Planned Parenthood CEO Jill June says that her agency "would like to help any way we could" in this investigation.

So, why don't they? Planned Parenthood could come out like a hero if they assemble a team from their 17 clinics to set out making contacts with the women who tested positive in pregnancy testing from BV during the appropriate time period. While such a process is fallible enough, they could at least check to see that all came out well in the path that the women chose - all good service businesses do follow-up checks.

That wouldn't violate confidentiality concerns as it would if the sheriff tracked them.

And if Planned Parenthood turned up anything suspicious, or were unable to find a woman, that information could be passed to the sheriff with a clearer conscience for a welfare check.

Waging a battle in the courts is only going to delay an already slim chance of solving the case, and won't help either the image of law enforcement or of Planned Parenthood.

Why not try dropping the case and sitting down together? Surely there is room for a compromise that could meet the sheriff's responsibilities and the agency's ideals at the same time.

That shouldn't be impossible. This community is looking for answers, and we should all get on the same team until we have them. Shouldn't we?

married?" Evidently this had been talked about at home. Fortunately this opened the door for explaining God through the Power of the Holy Spirit fathered her child.

Family experiences create questions in the minds of children. When explaining God as Father spelled with a capital, one boy asked, "Is God like my Father?" and bitterly added, "I hope not!"

At times pastors are backed into corners with unanswerable questions. The best advice is to explain God has wonderful plans for us. We must patiently wait to see what they are. This Chaplain Willis had to do with some of his small hospital bound friends.

God Bless.

Clarence C. Richardson is a retired Storm Lake pastor and a regular contributor to the Pilot-Tribune.

Pilot Editorial

Goodbye to Fortiers

Jane and Dick Fortier are leaving Storm Lake for Arizona after about 20 active years here, and they will be missed. The couple was a grand example of volunteerism, public service and involvement.

The list is hard to compile - Witter Gallery, Dollars for Scholars and several philanthropic efforts, organizing tournaments for basketball and tennis and intramural sports, donating trophies and medals for community and youth events, providing a "golden voice" of Tornado track and football, helping to organize a RAGBRAI visit, Christian Education direction and catechism teaching, even volunteer "reeffing" at countless sports events. (And ending up with a broken ankle at one!)

As important as their community efforts were, they were at least as much pure fun, and a great lasting love story right down to the tandem bike they could usually be found on.

They didn't want any fuss as they leave town, but it's important for such people to know that a little bit of Storm Lake's heart will go with them.



KUDOS - Hats' off to the Iowa Department of Transportation for their efforts to improve the BV Swan Project site and then turn over the deed to the county conservation board this week. A homely road project borrow pit thus becomes a beautiful public resource for a good environmental cause. At times the DOT must take a little land for a project right of way, but this is exactly how the policy of giving a little back in return should work. Storm Lake, BV County and swan lovers everywhere owe our DOT a lot of gratitude.

From Our Readers

LETTERS TO THE PILOT



Elder numbers grow rapidly

Older Americans Month gives us a reason to pause and think about the remarkably long lives most Americans can now look forward to, and about the challenges and opportunities that will face a rapidly aging America in the 21st century.

Of course, the truth is that American society has been aging rather steadily for some time now. A hundred years ago, the average life expectancy at birth was only about 40 years. But children born today can reasonably expect to live nearly twice that long - and many will live to be a hundred years old.

As someone who works for Social Security, I often think about the huge challenges that an aging America brings particularly the aging of the baby-boom generation. Baby-boomers are those 77 million Americans who were born between 1946 and 1964. Today, most are in their 40s. But the oldest is now 56.

Before too long, all those baby boomers will reach retirement age. Now I know it's hard to imagine a number as large as 77 million. But if you break it down a bit, it comes out to more than 10,000 people a day reaching retirement age - each and every day for nearly 20 years.

That's a lot of retirees - and this doubling of older Americans will subtly - and perhaps not so subtly - change the way America lives.

It's difficult to picture just what changes will occur. More wrinkle cream sales, early-bird dinner specials and senior merchandising discounts? Fewer body piercing pagodas and MTV specials? Who knows?

What we do know is that all of these retirees will need a source of dependable income to enjoy their increasingly long lives.

That's one reason why Social Security is so important. More than nine of 10 baby boomers will eventually receive a monthly Social Security retirement check, and it will provide a solid financial foundation as they make their retirement plans.

At the same time, I always tell people that Social Security will not be enough. The average monthly Social Security retirement benefit for all retired workers is about \$875. That's something they will be able to count on for as long as they live. But people will need more if they want to enjoy a comfortable retirement... and if they want to have something to leave to the next generation.

That's why Social Security, always has emphasized retirement planning for workers of all ages. Some of today's workers could, in fact, spend as many years in retirement as they did working. As a famous actress once observed, it is not how old you are, but how you are old. Being old with a little money is always better.

Social Security has a great little calculator on our website at www.ssa.gov/planners - that helps people work through what they'll be getting from Social Security.

So begin your financial planning early, just in case you become one of the many centenarians in the 21st century.

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