

# OFF THE BEATEN PATH

By Marcus Meyer

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Marcus W. Meyer

# MENU

The Price of Tea	5
A Clear View	15
A Time for Prayer	26
RIAB	33
Buford on Choosing a Church	38
Dreamland TV – Church Council	42
Pearly Gates Restaurant	55
A Tale of Two Tents	64
Humbleman	72
Buford on Church Stewardship and Finance	83
Payroll Department	86
The Great Stone Burglary	98
Brain Wars	110
Dreamland TV – Building Committee	119
Angel 0024	128

# MENU

Stranger Than ...	140
Buford on Making a Call	148
A Telltale Goat	151
The Greeters	160
Dogville II	173
Basketball's Not Fair	181
Strike Three	196
The Unflappable Mayor Jay Blue	204
Buford on Auto Repair	210

# MENU

## THE PRICE OF TEA

*Jerry Parkman told me this story last Tuesday at the Men's Bible Study. He had recently returned from England after visiting his cousin, Lord Faversham, of London. Now, Jerry is generally a forthright man, but occasionally, exaggeration can tempt him. It is with that disclaimer that I absolve myself from any connection with the content.*

*Pastor Fred Anderson*

My cousin, or as we more formally call him, Lord Faversham, is an interesting man. Learned, though not to the extent that you feel threatened by his knowledge, he maintains a calm, steady demeanor through some of the most stressful situations. One Friday afternoon, I sat in the parlor reading a leather-bound copy of Dickens' *Hard Times* when Lord Faversham and his elegant and equally unflappable wife, Lady Gloria, joined me.

“Jolly fine afternoon, Jerald,” said Lord Faversham. “Wouldn’t you say so, dear?”

“Yes, dear,” replied Gloria.

“Don’t mind us, Jerald,” the owner of the house said. “We’re just about for a spot of tea and a round of current events with *The Times*. Would you care for a cup? I could have Annie bring an extra.”

“That’s okay,” I answered. “I’m fine.”

“So be it.”

When Annie came into the parlor with the tray of teapot and cups, she saw that there was another person in the room. “Begging your pardon, sir,” she said to the head of the household. “Does the gentleman care for some tea?”

“No, Annie, he’s tiptop. Thank you.”

Shortly after Annie left, Lord Faversham came upon an article in *The Times* that he felt obliged to share with his wife. “I see,” he said. “Now that’s interesting.”

“What’s that, dear?” asked Gloria.

“It says here that the rector of St. Ann’s reported having substantial problems with bats in the church belfry. After engaging the services of a pest control establishment to come out and get rid of them on Monday, more bats than ever showed up on Tuesday. The rector tried three other services, but they were all unsuccessful in ridding the belfry of the bats. He called his friend, the rector over at St. Mark’s in Darbeyton, for advice. His friend gave him the phone number for Pastor Walker at the local Lutheran church. The rector at St. Ann’s called the Lutheran pastor, who promptly came over to St. Ann’s. The Lutheran pastor went up into the belfry, and after sizing up the situation, immediately baptized and confirmed the bats, and they haven’t seen them since.”

“Can you imagine the embarrassment, having to call in a Lutheran?” said Lady Gloria.

“Indeed. I see here in Trevor’s Gardening column that he’s recommending you start your spring planting now. Shall we get James started on the new dogwood for the driveway?”

“Oh, he already did that this morning, dear,” answered his wife. She got up and walked to the large bay window, where she said, “If you look out here, dear, you can see where he put it ... oh, my. Perhaps you should speak with James, dear.”

“Why? What has the daft old gentleman done now?”

“It appears as though he’s tied Rover to a wooden plank, dug a hole, and planted the plank in the hole.”

“Ring the bell for me, will you, dear? And tell Annie to call in James, please.”

James entered the parlor and said, “Aye, you called for me, sir?”

“Yes, James. We asked you to plant the new dogwood down by the driveway.”

“Aye, that I did, sir.”

“No, James, you tied Rover the dog onto a plank and planted the plank.”

“Aye, sir. I planted the dog on a piece of wood.”



Raising his voice about ten decibels, Lord Faversham yelled, “James, we wanted the new dogwood tree planted, not Rover on a plank.”

“Aye, sir. You have another dog to plant?”

“No, James. A dogwood tree, not a dog on wood.”

“Aye, sir. You want me to buy another dog?”

Finally leaning over to about an inch from James’ ear, the master yelled, “No, James. Unplant the dogwood. Dig up the dogwood you just planted. I don’t want any dogwood planted.”

“Aye, sir.”

“Gloria, does Randolph have the car ready for our trip into town today?”

“Yes, as far as I know, dear.”

“Would you have Annie call him into the parlor?”

“Yes, dear.”

“Mr. Faversham, Randolph is here,” said Annie a few minutes later.

“Randolph, no Randolph, we’re behind you. A little to your left. Watch out for the table. Now, turnabout. There you go.”

“Yes, sir, you called.”

“Randolph, that’s my wife. I’m over to the left. There you go. Now, Randolph, does the car have plenty of petrol?”

“Yes, sir, it did.”

“What do you mean, it did?”

“Well, sir, I took it in at 8 o’clock this morning and filled it up completely. I used a little petrol to get back home, though. So, we would have to account for whatever was used between then and this noon when I got back home.”

“I don’t understand, Randolph. That’s four hours, and it only takes 15 minutes to get here from town.”

“Begging your pardon, sir, but I got lost several times.”

“I see, Randolph. Well, carry on.”

“Now, dear,” reminded his wife. “You know how easily this weather clouds up Randolph’s glasses.”

“I trust then that we shall hope the fog has lifted by the time we’re ready to go.”

“Yes, dear.”

“I say, Jerald, do you smell something?” asked Lord Faversham.

“Yes, it smells like smoke,” I answered.

“Gloria, do you smell smoke?”

“Yes, dear. Do you think the kitchen’s on fire again?”

“Ring Annie, please?”

“You rang for me, sir?” asked Annie, when she came into the parlor.

“Annie, is the kitchen on fire again?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Very well. Carry on.”

“Gloria, would you call the insurance company?”

“Yes, dear. What about the fire brigade?”

“Oh, they’ve probably seen it by now.”

Jumping up out of his chair in reaction to another article in *The Times*, Lord Faversham raised his voice unexpectedly, “They shan’t get away with this. Gloria, did you know they’re raising the price of tea again? I’ll put an end to this straightway. May I have the phone, please? Yes, Prime Minister Brown, this is Lord Faversham. What is the meaning of this, raising the price of tea again? What? ... Drought and all. Shortage of tea leaves? What are you chaps down there at Parliament going to do about it? What? Nothing you can do about it. Call who? I bloody well will, thank you. Can you believe it, Gloria?”

“The phone is ringing, dear. Do you want me to answer it?”

“Yes, by all means.”

“It’s for you, dear.”

“Well, who is it?”

“It’s the Lord.”

“Lord who?”

“It’s the Lord.”

“Hello. Yes, sir, it has been a while. You heard that I wanted to speak with you. Well, sir, it’s about the ... last Sunday ... well, last Sunday, they had the finals, you know. Yes, it was a close game, Angels 7 and Devils 6. As it should be, yes, sir ... what I wanted to talk to you about was the price ... the Sunday before last ... well, we were on holiday at that time. The Sunday before that ... well, I’m not sure I remember ... you do keep score? ... next Sunday? We shall endeavor to do that, sir ... yes, sir? Oh, yes, what I wanted to talk to you about was the ... the price of tea. It’s going up again, you know ... yes, sir, I will take that up with Parliament. Yes, sir, the first time I can. And thank, thank you, sir.”

“Gloria, next time He calls, tell him I’m not here.”

“Do you think that’s wise, dear?”

At that point, I left the parlor. What with all their talking and the smoke, I found it hard to read my book.

## A CLEAR VIEW

*When John Colton retired, he and his wife moved to the Jack Valley area. About two months after setting up residence in a condominium, they transferred their membership to St. Peter. Much of John's life is classified and will remain so until he meets his Creator and ultimate Employer. Two months ago, he received permission to release several case files for the greater good of mankind. The following is an account of the both tragic and redemptive case of Allen Forrester, who exemplified the premise that it's never too soon to clean the windows through which you look at life.*

*Pastor Fred Anderson*

Stepping out of the elevator onto the 42nd floor, John Colton cast his eyes toward the sign on the wall directing him to Suites 4201 thru 4210. An easy pace brought him to Suite 4208 on the left

without passing anyone in the hall. Opening the door, he saw numerous people working behind a counter with a receptionist's desk on the right.

“Good afternoon, sir,” the receptionist said. “How may I help you today?”

“My name's John Colton and I have an appointment with Jason Belle.”

“Yes, Mr. Colton,” said the young lady. “Mr. Belle just called me. He's running a few minutes late, but he said you could just go back to his office and wait, if you don't mind.”

“Certainly,” replied John.

“It's the fourth door on the right.”

“Thank you.”

When John entered Mr. Belle's office, he found a maintenance man cleaning the spacious window area that provided a magnificent view of the city.

“I'm sorry, sir,” said the maintenance man. “I didn't think they were using this office today. I just need about another minute to finish.”



“Take your time, my friend. I’m just waiting right now anyway. I imagine you’ve heard your share of comments about doing windows over the years.”

“Occupational hazard, I’m afraid.”

“Well, there’s nothing like a clean window to clear up the view, especially one of such a beautiful city,” said John.

“If you want a clean window, there’s nothing like what I have in the cart over there to make it totally clear.”

The maintenance man and John nodded to each other and then the window washer left the office. John opened the middle drawer of the maintenance cart where he found a large brown envelope and a compact disk player. He opened the envelope, pulled out a picture, and turned on the disk player.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Colton. The man you are looking at is Allen Forrester, a wealthy businessman. He is a C & E, Christmas and Easter attendee only. Traditional religious organizations

have been unable to access Mr. Forrester's buried soul. Your assignment is to bring Allen Forrester back into the fold. There is one very important point in this case, John. You only have twenty-four hours to complete this assignment, because Allen Forrester will die in a traffic accident tomorrow. Good luck, John."

John put the envelope and the disk into his coat pocket and walked out of Jason Belle's office. He quickly called his team and briefed them on the case. When he got back to his apartment, he found his team, Rudy, Jennifer, and Sean, waiting for him. They began to lay out the plan for the mission.

"There is a very key point we have to remember in our approach to Allen Forrester," said the leader. "We can't change him. That will require a greater power. What we can do, though, is to create a situation that may help him open up to that greater power. Unfortunately, we must work fast, and the situation must be one of desperation to succeed. Do you know what you're going to use, Sean?"

“Yes, John,” answered Sean. “We’re going to use a derivative of sodium pertherachloride.”

“Are there any side effects to it?” asked John. “It is imperative that Mr. Forrester be cognizant and completely in control of his mind when the time comes.”

“Its effects are strictly limited to profuse sweating, a dry mouth, and the illusion of heat stress. We will also administer a knockout drug to move him from Jennifer’s apartment.”

“Good,” said John. “Can we manage the clothes in such a short time, Rudy?”

“We’re all set, John,” answered Rudy. “We have a special lead woven insert that can be stitched inside his coat in a matter of minutes. The insert will add eighty pounds evenly distributed throughout the coat’s structure. He’ll never know why he’s gotten so weak.”

“Okay. Now, Jennifer, Allen Forrester has a weakness for women. We’re going to use that as our set up. With his wife away at our arrangement, he will be at his usual table for lunch at Hülligan’s

Restaurant. He will be alone, and you'll be sitting across from him. It's up to you to get him back to your apartment."

"I don't think that will be a problem, John," the beautiful young woman said.

"What about his wife?" asked Rudy. "Will she be aware of anything that's going on?"

"Meredith Forrester has known about her husband's weakness for years. She's a very loving and forgiving woman, even if he's never openly asked for that forgiveness. The only thing she'll know about what we're doing is what she sees in the end. We've arranged for her to be present when he breaks."

"Do you think he will break, John?" asked Sean.

"I hope so, Sean. His eternity depends on it."

Sean and Rudy stayed at Jennifer's apartment to finish up a few things, while John and Jennifer left to go to Hülligan's Restaurant. Jennifer had little trouble persuading the host to seat her across

from Forrester's table. Once the businessman arrived, the host seated him, and from that point it fell into Jennifer's capable hands. When Jennifer and Forrester left the restaurant, John alerted Sean and Rudy as to the timing.

"Why don't you get comfortable on the sofa while I fix us some drinks," suggested Jennifer. "What's your pleasure, honey?"

"Scotch," said Forrester. "On the rocks."

"Okay, sugar. Coming right up." Slipping the drug into his drink, Jennifer continued, "Now, tell me what you like to do for fun, Allen."

"Well, for starters, I ... I ..."

When his head fell back, Sean and Rudy came out of the bedroom and John came in from outside the apartment. While John and Rudy removed Forrester's coat and gave it to Jennifer to sew in the liner, Sean administered the sodium pertherrachloride derivative injection. As soon as Jennifer finished stitching the liner in Forrester's coat, they packed up and headed for the van in the parking garage. After driving for an hour, the team

and their subject arrived at the edge of a small patch of desert near the Fillagree Mountains.

“Okay, let’s set up over there,” said John. “We can use that cactus and we can stay out of sight behind those rocks. It’s far enough away from the road that he won’t hear the car that’s bringing his wife. How’s he doing, Sean?”

“He’s doing fine, John. Once I wake him up, I’ll have about thirty seconds to get back behind the rocks.”

With everything set, Rudy and John got Forrester back into his coat and laid him on the hot desert sand. Sean brought him around and joined the rest of the team at their observation point.

Trying to get oriented, Allen pushed up onto his knees and tried to stand, but the extra weight made him sink back to the ground. “How did I get here?” he thought. “I’m so thirsty. Sand. All I see is sand. I need water. A long, tall drink of water ... I’d give everything I own for some water.”

The businessman looked ahead to see what appeared to be the wreck of an old dune buggy.

Crawling fifty feet to reach the wreck, he desperately hoped there would be some salvation there. He grabbed the side of the rusty carcass and pulled himself up. Again, the weighted coat bore heavy on his frame, and he sat back down, leaning up against the body of the dune buggy. He looked straight ahead to see what appeared to be a canteen at the foot of a tall cactus. He crawled over to the cactus, picked up the canteen, and shook it. Hearing something inside, he unscrewed the cap and poured a little into the cap. After detecting nothing unusual in its appearance or smell, he took a swig. After a few wild gulps and a splash on the forehead, he looked up at the tall cactus with a broad horizontal branch. Somewhere in his mind, an image emerged, perhaps brought to the surface by the cross-like shadow of the cactus on the sand or the sheer improbability of finding an old canteen still full of water at the base of that cactus. He did not question why the image emerged, for his mind could only grapple with the image itself. The image cast a light into his past, something he had never fully faced. As the path he had taken in life became visible, he could see the litter of his actions.

“What have I done with my life? God, I am so sorry. I know I don’t deserve your love. I beg your forgiveness ... and my wife, what have I done to her? I betrayed her so many times. How could I have been so blind? I only hope she will forgive me.”

Meredith Forrester came out from behind the rocks, walked over to him, and knelt down beside him.

“Meredith. I am so glad to see you ... I am so sorry, Meredith. Please forgive me for all those times I betrayed you. You had to know and yet, you stayed with me. I will change. Somehow, God has spoken to me out in this desert. He has called me back. Next Sunday I will go to church with you. I will go to church with you every Sunday for the rest of my life. I realize how wrong I have been. I can see things so clearly now. I love you, Meredith.”

“I know, Allen. I know. I love you, too.”



When Meredith looked back towards the rocks, she saw a cloud of dust rise up behind them; she watched as the wind carried it away.

## A TIME FOR PRAYER

*Jonathan Sperry is a professor at the university in Jack Valley and an occasional visitor here at St. Peter's. Jonathan often took time for a little camping and hunting in the Dakset Mountains. He relished the solitude and majesty that nature so bountifully supplied in the mountains. The peaks and valleys constantly provided Jonathan with practical and perhaps even boldly inspirational texts for his lectures at the university.*

*What occurred this one particular weekend will always serve as a defining moment in the distinguished career of the man. Always a teacher with a straight-forward, sober demeanor in his lectures, he added a certain element of controversy to his professional standing upon his return from the mountains this time. Some of his colleagues insist that his story stretches the limit of believability a little more each time someone repeats it.*

The fading light of the red hued ball in the west cast an eerie glow on the cliff overlooking Jonathan's campsite. A cacophony of insect, animal, and rustling tree sounds only added to the strange feeling that the camper experienced. He had been coming to the area for a long time and he couldn't ever recall sensing such uneasiness before. As the night wore on, Jonathan watched the last glowing embers of his campfire dwindle. Settling into his bedroll, he reached out to feel the cold steel of the loaded shotgun by his side. The weapon provided just enough peace of mind for him to fall asleep.

When the morning broke, Jonathan got up from his sleeping site and walked down to the edge of a babbling brook situated just beyond a grove of trees. The cold fresh water that he splashed on his face swept away any remaining thought of going back to his warm bedroll. Invigorated, he headed back to his campsite for a breakfast of bacon and

eggs. As Jonathan stepped out into the open from the trees, he stood face to face with the biggest mountain lion he had ever seen. Why the creature didn't attack right away, he didn't understand. Staring into the eyes of the big cat, the camper sensed that he was being sized up for a number of meals.

Unfortunately, the cat stood between him and the shotgun he left behind at the campsite. Looking for an escape path, Jonathan, in a momentary lapse of judgment, chose to climb the closest tree. Once he reached the second limb up, he began to dwell on his choice. By the time he reached the third limb, he looked back to see the big cat closing in.

Jonathan then made another hasty but necessary decision. He hoped that if he went out on that third limb, he might be able to drop to the ground and get back to his shotgun before his opponent could back down. His next problem then became clear as the trajectory leaving the limb would put him right onto a jagged outcrop of rock. He couldn't go back to the main trunk, for the cat was now on the third limb too.

Perhaps ... it was a time for prayer. And so, Jonathan began his earnest plea to the Almighty. “Dear Lord, I’m in a tough spot right now, and I could sure use your help.”

The cat edged closer.

“If you’d only get me out of this spot, I promise to officially join St. Peter’s and not to miss one Sunday of church for an entire year.”

The cat edged closer.

“Okay, two years. Two years of perfect attendance.”

The cat edged even closer.

“Lord, maybe you could just let that cat lose his balance and fall out of this tree. Not so he’d get hurt, but just enough to stun him and I’d have time to get back to my campsite.”

Jonathan could feel the hot breath of the big cat now only two feet away.

“Okay, Lord, maybe I’m being selfish here, only thinking of myself. Lord, I’d like to pray for this cat. I’m only thinking of his health. My body

fat is way out of whack, so if he were to eat me it could have serious implications for his well-being. And then there's my cholesterol level. Why should this fine animal suffer from ingesting all my bad dietary decisions? Lord, please give this cat all the wisdom you can in this regard."

After finishing his earnest prayer to the Lord, Jonathan struggled with the critical question of whose timetable would prevail—the Lord's, the cat's, or his. He received an immediate answer with the cracking sound of wood. When the tree limb that he was on snapped, he fell straight to the ground, somehow missing the jagged edge of the rocks. When he hit the ground, he felt a sharp pain in his right knee, but it didn't stop him from hobbling as fast as he could toward his campsite. Once he reached his bedroll, he grabbed his shotgun, released the safety, and turned to shoot the cat that he fully expected to be right behind him. But Jonathan saw no cat anywhere on the path behind him.

A more cautious man would have immediately broken camp, packed up his truck, and left the area. Jonathan, though, gave in to an abnormal

curiosity as to the whereabouts of the cat. With his finger on the trigger of the shotgun, he slowly limped back down the path to the point of his encounter with the cat. What he saw at the base of the tree that he had climbed bewildered him. The big mountain lion and a small squirrel appeared to be playing with each other. The squirrel ran into a hollow in the tree and then emerged with a large walnut. He dropped it at the foot of the cat and stepped back. The mountain lion batted the walnut away and the squirrel then took off and retrieved it, again dropping it in front of the cat. The lion then ate the walnut while the squirrel ran back into the tree to bring out another one. When Jonathan left to go back to his camp, the two were still engaged in their game.

When his knee wouldn't stop throbbing, Jonathan decided to pack up, head home, and get into the doctor. As he started backing up his truck to get turned around, he saw the mountain lion and the squirrel sitting by his campsite. They watched him drive off and when he looked into his rearview mirror, he saw them wave goodbye.

Since the only witnesses to this incident were Jonathan, the mountain lion, the squirrel, and maybe the Lord, there have been no contrary accounts recorded. Recently, other oral versions have surfaced attributing even more human qualities to the lion and the squirrel, but they are undoubtedly just fabrications.

I, personally, have direct knowledge of only two points regarding Jonathan and his story.

First, upon his return from the mountains, Professor Sperry has authored a publication for the university entitled “Dietary Anomalies of the Mountain Lion”.

Second, Jonathan Sperry has gained an expanded spiritual vision as a committed full-time member here at St. Peter’s since the incident.

Pastor Fred



# RIAB

*For those individuals who could not make it to church last Sunday morning, whether that be from a physical disability or a spiritual misinterpretation, St. Peter broadcasted its services on 1280 AM at eleven o'clock in the morning. Somewhere in the vague forest of responsibility, a party of authority approved the following commercial spot that, in hindsight, perhaps should not have aired. Despite the questionable judgment of the phantom authority, the commercial received a substantial amount of positive feedback in the evangelical community. Therefore, I give you the text of that commercial, in the spirit of public interest, of course.*

*Pastor Fred Anderson*

Hi, Larry Money here. I want to introduce you to a revolutionary new product that will give

you peace of mind whenever you need it. Yes, that's right, my friends, RIAB—Religion in a Bottle.

Guys, that hot new chick in the secretarial pool getting a little chummy? Got a little lipstick on your collar? No problem! Just spray on RIAB and the stain is gone instantly. RIAB's powerful cleaning compounds will remove over a dozen different soul stainers. RIAB's unique mixture of chemicals will also turn dangerous perfumes such as Passion Flower and Midnight Madness into a harmless citrus scent. Hey, you're home free.

Ladies, did that \$500.00 check you wrote to the jeweler bust your budget this month? Afraid of what your husband will say when he gets the bank statement? Just get to the canceled check before he does, spray it with RIAB, and Smith's Jewelers quickly turns into Father Brown's Home for Orphans. No muss. No fuss.

Kids, RIAB is good for all ages. Got a big red "F" on your math test? Have to get it signed? Just spray on RIAB and that "F" turns into an "A" with

the words “An angel to work with” appearing underneath it. Before taking it back to school, spray it again with RIAB, and that “A” returns to an “F”. No big deal, you got it signed, didn’t you?

Friends, these are troubling times. If you’re out in the world and you find yourself in a perilous situation, maybe your very life in danger, don’t panic. Included in our RIAB package is an emergency, one dose capsule that you can attach to your keychain. Just take out your handkerchief, pour on the dose, and hold it to your forehead. Within thirty seconds you will have total recall of the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, the Apostles’ Creed, the 23rd Psalm, and John 3:16.

What would you expect to pay for this amazing little bottle of RIAB? \$59.95, no! \$39.95, no! For a limited time only, have complete spiritual security for only \$19.95. That’s RIAB - Religion in a Bottle. Call 1-XXX-XXX-XXX (FCC regulations do not permit written publication of this toll-free number) to place your order.

Do you really have a lot of problems? Are you a huge sinner? For only \$2.00 more, I will supersize your order with this whopping 5-gallon can of RIAB. Yes, that's RIAB—Religion in a Bottle. Call now. Our operators are standing by.

Wait, there's more! If you call within the next thirty minutes, I will also send you, free of charge, a six-month supply of "Confesso" pills. How do they work, you ask? If you've spent all evening at the bar and you reek of alcohol and smoke, just take two Confesso pills before you go into the house. When your wife reads you the riot act, don't make excuses, just confess to everything. Confesso pills will make you sound so authentic and penitent that she will believe you, forgive you, and, best of all, she'll forget the whole thing.

If the IRS calls you in for an audit, just take a Confesso pill one hour before leaving for the appointment and take two more before you walk into the office. Confesso pill's patented tear-inducing formula will produce a prolific outburst of wet stuff. Combine that with the confession that it was all your brother-in-law's fault, and you were only

trying to protect him since his lobotomy, and you will walk out of that IRS audit with a minimal amount of fiscal damage.

Hurry, while supplies last. Call and place your order for RIAB—Religion in a Bottle. Don't be caught dead without it.

## BUFORD ON CHOOSING A CHURCH

*Some of you may already be familiar with Buford. For those who have never discovered the valuable insight he provides, let me give a brief bio. Buford Douglas is an equipment mechanic out at The Homestead, the farm of Clint and Cindy Lincoln. Clint, Cindy, their children, and Buford, are all members of St. John Lutheran Church in Cedar Crossing. The folks around Cedar Crossing and Oak County have long absorbed the wisdom of this remarkable man on an array of subjects. The following selections come from Buford's Handy Tips given to the assemblage during our recent annual planning session.*

*I suppose that I should state the obvious—those present and on the receiving end of these selections are a conservative-minded group. As is his habit, Buford offers understated and overstated, subtle and not-so-subtle, and sometimes exaggerated points for consumption. I like to believe that*

*most of this advice isn't directly applicable to St. John ... I ... think. Consider yourselves fairly warned and assimilate what you will.*

*Pastor Arnold Schmidt*

While traveling this diverse country, should you choose to stop and visit a church along the way, then keep your mind open to the following possibilities:

You'll know this church is not for you, if ...

... upon entering the narthex area, you observe that all four members of the ushering staff are wearing pink Bermuda shorts with tiny little yellow flowers all over them.

... you accidentally misread the starting time for the service, and you arrive an hour early, only to find that there are already several people there

and they appear to be engaged in fisticuffs over the right to sit in the front two rows.

... during the singing of the doxology more than 50% of the congregation have moved to the aisles and are on their backs with their arms and legs just aflailin.

... upon entering the narthex area, you are greeted by three gentlemen in dark suits, wearing sunglasses, and talking with funny accents, who after explaining to you they are glad to have you as a visitor, then proceed to hang about your neck a large target with a little red bullseye that is near the level of your bellybutton.

... during the passing of the offering plates, you observe there to be a built-in credit card processor on the side of the plate.

... upon entering the communion line, you think you see something hanging from the nostril of the reverend ahead and instead of properly preparing yourself for the Eucharist, you spend the entire time in line trying to think of a way to tell him



tactfully of your observation. When you arrive at the front of the line, you then notice that the object is not what you perceived it to be, but it is merely a nose ring that the reverend is wearing.

... upon entering the sanctuary, you see a conservatively adorned crucifix hanging upon the wall in front of you and when you turn around to your wife to comment on it, you notice a twenty-foot high, neon bordered portrait of Reverend Joe hanging on the back wall.

... before entering the church for worship you take a quick tour of the campus facilities and find proudly displayed in the church office Reverend Joe's educational diplomas. Out of simple curiosity, you look to see where the reverend gained his knowledge, and you observe that he graduated from Billie Bob's Correspondence School of Theology and Advanced Studies in Astrology.

# DREAMLAND TV

## Church Council

Sometimes Pastor Anderson felt a little overwhelmed at the rapid passage of time. It only seemed like yesterday that he stepped into the pulpit for his last sermon. Yet Thursday evening had rolled around once again, and so he entered the inner sanctum of his den to prepare for the upcoming Sunday. Sitting in his comfortable office chair, he pulled up to the desk and opened the Bible. After late service, the congregation would elect a new slate of officers and committee members in the traditional potluck voter's meeting, so he thought perhaps something on the individual gifts and talents given to us would be a suitable sermon topic.

“Let's see,” said the reverend. “Perhaps something from Paul. Yes, Ephesians 4. 11 to, ah ... 16.” He continued to read aloud, “And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for

building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint ...”

Pastor Anderson did not finish reading the passage because he was, understandably, exhausted from the day. He laid his head down on his desk and fell into a deep slumber. What follows is all that Pastor Anderson could remember of a midnight excursion into the incomprehensible world of dreams.

“Good evening, ladies and gentlemen,” said Sam Slumber, in a hushed tone. “I’m reporting to you for Dreamland TV Network tonight. We’re interrupting your sleep for a special broadcast from

the council chamber of St. Peter Church. We join the council now, already in progress.”

“Thank you for the reading of the minutes of last month’s meeting, Miss Rogers,” said Elmo, the chairman of the council meeting and a goofy-looking character wearing a tall green hat with floppy black ears. “I think we’re ready for our committee reports ...”

Before Elmo could finish his sentence, Ted, the macho-looking Hardware Man, burst into the meeting and apologized, “I’m sorry I’m late, guys. The church just got that new riding lawn mower, and I had to make a few adjustments. It only had a puny twelve horse engine on it, but fortunately, I had a spare fifty horse Harley engine at home. Man, you can flat out mow some grass with that sucker now.”

Entering the council chamber behind the Trustees chairman, a deputy sheriff interrupted the meeting, “Excuse me. I need to speak with the person who was just operating that cool mower with the Harley engine.”

Before turning around, Ted proudly exclaimed, “All right, it’s about time someone recognized what I do around here.”

“Are you the operator of that souped up mower, sir?” asked the deputy.

After turning around, Ted answered a little less proudly, “That, ah ... would be me.”

“I got you doing forty in a five mile per hour mowing zone. I’ll need to see some ID, sir ... Thank you, sir. Just sign here. Have a good day.”

Slapping the ticket to his forehead, the Trustees chairman motioned for Elmo to continue with the meeting.

“Uh, Board of Elders, do you have your report?” the goofy-looking chairman asked.

“Yes, Mr. Chairman,” answered Vinnie, the Board of Elders representative. “On behalf of myself and my ... uh, associates, Sal, Bruno, and Vito, we would like to report that we made thirty-four calls on delinquent members of the congregation last quarter. It pleases me to no end to say that ever

since they got out of the hospital, all thirty-four members have been very faithful in their attendance. Our goal for the upcoming months will involve a rather intense program for bringing those who have fallen behind in their pledges up to a level that, shall we say, more closely matches our needs. We don't expect any, shall we say, opposition to our program."

"Uh, thank you, Vinnie, for that encouraging news," said Elmo. "Outreach, I believe you are next."

"Yee-hah," exclaimed Calamity, as she twirled the lasso over her head. "The Board of Outreach would like to report that we brought in fifty new ... excuse me one minute." With lasso in hand, Calamity ran out the council chamber door onto the street bordering the church. Two minutes later she returned with a young man roped and tied in the finest of knots. "As I was saying, The Board of Outreach would like to report that we brought in fifty new member prospects last quarter. Unfortunately, we have one minor technical problem with our program we haven't been able to solve yet."

“And what would that be, Madam Outreach Chairwoman?” inquired Elmo.

“Once we untie the rope, the member prospect leaves,” replied Calamity. Pointing to the young man running out of the council chamber, she adds, “See, just like that one.”

“Perhaps Vinnie could give you some advice on their technique,” offered Elmo.

“We’d be happy to enlighten the members of the Outreach Committee on any tactical aspects required,” commented Vinnie.

“Thanks, Vinnie, but when you really get down to it, we can only bring them in,” said Calamity. “It’s up to Pastor Anderson to keep ‘em here.”

“Uh, thank you, Calamity. Fellowship, you’re next ... Fellowship ... Fellowship.”

“Hey, genius,” yelled the chairman of the Board of Education, as he kicked Fellowship’s chair. “You’re up, Rip Van Winkle.”

“Make mine a double,” said the groggy Fellowship representative.

“Your report, sir,” said Elmo. “We need the report from the Board of Fellowship.”

“Yes,” replied Randolph P. Farnsworth, the chairman of the Board of Fellowship.

“Well,” pleaded Elmo. “What do you have to report?”

“Oh, my report. Yes, of course ... oh, here it is. Very good. We would like to report that we held our annual dinner dance last month.”

“And how many attended the event?” asked Elmo.

“Including the band?” asked Randolph.

“Yes.”

“We had two,” answered Randolph.

“Two hundred,” said Elmo. “That’s pretty good.”

“Uh, no, just two.”



“Well, how many were in the band?” inquired Elmo.

“Two.”

“What plans do you have to increase attendance next year?” asked the meeting chairman.

“We’re going to hire a larger band,” stated Randolph, proudly.

“Sounds reasonable,” declared Elmo. “Uh, thank you. Education, I believe that brings us to you.”

“Yeah, man,” said Rocky, the leather-clad chairman of the Board of Education. “The Board of Education is pleased to report that the entire Sunday School felt greatly rewarded by the field trip we took to Daytona last week.”

“Uh, I’ve had several concerned parents comment on the timing, it being Bike Week and all,” said Elmo.

“Man, you know that same thought struck me when we got there. All I can tell you, man, is God works in mysterious ways sometimes.”

“Uh, yes,” said Elmo. “Mr. Chairman, I’ve had several parents question the apparent lack of actual Bible study going on during the Sunday School hour.”

“Man, there you go with that again. People are always on my case about Bible study. Look, I tell you what, if we take a book of the Bible and devote an entire year to intense study of it, will that get you off my back?”

“That seems reasonable,” answered Elmo. “What book did you have in mind?”

“Man, the only way to go is Obadiah.”

“Yes ... ss,” continued Elmo. “Uh, Stewardship, are you ready?”

“Yes, sir,” answered Lenny. “Stewardship would like to report, uh, excuse me one minute while I get this phone call. Hello. Envelope 43?” Pulling out a well-worn notebook, Lenny looked up envelope 43 and replied, “Okay, #43 is 10 to 1 to stay at the same rate or less than last year. Uh, huh. I gotta tell ya, their third teenager just got his driver’s license and the wife just got laid off from

her job. You want a hundred on them going up this year? Got ya covered, babe.”

“You were saying about the stewardship program this year?” asked Elmo.

“Oh, yeah. We want to say that, uh, excuse me while I get this call. Hello. #84?” Looking up #84, Lenny then said, “Okay, #84 is 2 to 1 to go up this year. Yeah, sure. Well, you know their last kid graduated from college and Jim just got a big promotion. Fifty to stay the same? ... Got ya covered, babe.”

“Uh, Lenny, uh, there have been some rumors that the District may not approve of this stewardship program,” stated Elmo.

“I seriously doubt, uh, hang on. Hello. What are the odds of the District approving our stewardship program?” Again, checking his notebook, Lenny answered, “Right now, we’re at even money, but I think as time goes on that could change to 2 to 1 that they will approve. Okay, you want five hundred that they’ll reject it? ... You’re on, Monsignor O’Reilly.”

“Uh, Trustees, I guess we’re ready for your report now,” said Elmo.

“Well, you already know about the new lawn mower,” said Ted. “I installed a new mega-power booster in the main electrical box.” As it suddenly got very dark in the council chamber, Ted said, “Hold on, let me have a look at that.”

As Ted checked out the malfunctioning lights, he expressed several inaudible phrases and then let out a rather boisterous, “Ye ... ow!” The lights continued to flicker as those remaining in the council room detected a slight odor of burning flesh. Eventually, the lights returned to full working order and Ted, shaking his hands somewhat vigorously, returned to the council room.

“Mr. Chairman, what about that additional air vent above us?” asked Elmo.

“No problem,” answered the Trustees chairman. “I’ll mark it out right now. Just let me get a ladder.”

A ladder in Ted’s hands brought forth scant good news. Before Elmo could even check to see if

the church's insurance policy had been updated, Ted managed, in surreal slow motion, to knock out everyone sitting in the council room with the ladder. When he realized what he had done, Ted laid down the ladder and pulled out his cell phone. Strangely enough, he had the emergency room of the local hospital pre-programmed in his cell phone, so the ambulance arrived in short order. When he went to open the door for the EMTs, he tripped on the ladder, fell, and hit his head on a table. As they loaded him into the ambulance, the EMT's exchanged money as if there had been a wager of some sort. Just before the ambulance door closed, Ted looked back and said, "It was Pastor Anderson's fault."

With a jolt, Pastor Anderson's head came up off the desk.

"Wow, what a nightmare!" the good reverend exclaimed. "Where was I? Oh, yeah." Picking up his Bible, he began reading aloud once more, "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint ...”

Pastor Anderson did not finish reading the verse, as his mind could not let go of his dream. Instead, he pulled out some notepaper and a pen and began writing, “Dear Bob, just a note to let you know that I love you, man, and I really appreciate the job you’re doing as President of our congregation.” He tore off another sheet of paper and continued writing, “Dear Mort, just a note to let you know that I love you, man, and I really appreciate the job you’re doing as chairman of the Board of Elders.” He tore off yet another sheet of paper and continued, “Dear Mary, just a note to tell you I love you, and I really appreciate the job you’re doing as chairwoman of the Outreach Committee.”

The reverend eventually got back to writing his sermon with a whole new perspective.

# PEARLY GATES RESTAURANT

*Sean O'Grady is a member of St. Peter who is currently away at college in another state. He called me one day and started telling me about this story that he and his buddies had written.*

*Just off campus, there was a restaurant called Hell's Kitchen and they bragged about having the spiciest food in the world. On a diametrically opposite corner sat a restaurant called The Garden of Eden and they specialized in gourmet salads. On yet a third corner sat the Pizza Inn. The young men were sitting at a table outside the pizza joint where they could see the other two restaurants. As is customary to lads of their age, they started messing around and came up with this group story. They submitted it to the college paper, but it was rejected for being too religiously controversial. Sean then sent it to me since he thinks I'm attracted to religious controversy.*

*Pastor Fred Anderson*

Walking down the brick path leading up to the restaurant, I felt tired. After rounding a bend, I came to a fork in the path. Shrouded in a foggy mist, the small signs identifying the two paths could only be read by standing six inches in front of them. The fork to the left read “Smoking Area” and the fork to the right read “Restaurant”. The plant underneath the “Smoking Area” sign was leafless and black. In fact, when looking across what landscape I could see toward the smoking area, all I saw was hideous black shapes draped in the gray fog. I veered right on the path to the restaurant. There were numerous other signs on that path. One said, “Under Same Management for Over 2000 Years” and another said, “Soul Food Served Here”.

I finally reached the front of the restaurant, opened the heavy wooden door, and went inside. The hostess who greeted me looked exactly like a girl I had a crush on in high school, but I knew that couldn’t be, unless the air up here prevented aging.



“Welcome to the Pearly Gates Restaurant, Fred,” said the hostess.

“Thank you,” I replied, as I searched for her name tag. “Thank you, uh, Jennifer.” That was also my high school crush’s name. “How did you know my name?”

“From your name tag, sir,” answered Jennifer.

I looked down at my shirt and sure enough I had a name tag on, but I didn’t remember putting it there.

“I hope you didn’t have any trouble finding us,” said Jennifer. “Travel in a cloud can be kind of tricky sometimes.”

“Uh, no, I didn’t have any trouble.”

“Would you like smoking or nonsmoking seating?” asked my hostess.

“Uh, I didn’t know I had a choice anymore.”

“Of course, you have a choice, Fred. Your experience here at the Pearly Gates Restaurant will be

the last series of choices you have, though. So, we always suggest you make wise decisions.”

I don’t know why I even hesitated at the question. I don’t smoke.

“If you want to sit in the smoking section, I will need to see your Personal Fire Insurance Card.”

“Personal Fire Insurance Card? Uh, no, I don’t think I have one of those, so I guess I’ll take nonsmoking.”

Jennifer led me back to the nonsmoking section and seated me at a table with a broad view of the dining area.

“Michael will be your waiter, Fred,” said my hostess. “He’ll be with you shortly. Have a pleasant meal.”

“Thank you, Jennifer.”

When I opened the menu, the only thing I found inside was a copy of Dante’s *Inferno*. A young man with a very angelic face soon approached my table.

“Welcome to the Pearly Gates, sir. My name is Michael, and I will be your server this evening. Can I start you off with an appetizer or a drink?”

“Uh, Michael, I opened up the menu, and all I found was a copy of Dante’s *Inferno*.”

“I’m sorry, sir. I don’t know how that got in there. That belongs with the menus for the smoking section. Let me go get you the proper menu.”

As I waited for Michael to return, I glanced around the room and noticed the delightful décor. If I hadn’t known better, I’d say it looked like the Garden of Eden—at least as I might have imagined it. Michael soon came back with the proper menu.

“I do apologize for the mix up, sir. In this room, you certainly don’t need to worry about Dante’s *Inferno*. Now, what would you like to drink?”

“I’ll have a nice cold water, no lemon.”

“Very good, sir. I’ll give you a few minutes to look over the menu.”

“Thank you, Michael.”

When I opened the menu, I found pages upon pages of epicurean delights from platters of grapes, pomegranates, and figs to the house special titled “A Feast for the Kings”. I eventually made up my mind, placed my order with Michael, and sat back to relax. A musician came around and asked me if I had any requests.

“Do you know ‘Amazing Grace’?” I asked.

“Certainly, sir. That is one of our most popular requests.”

As my mind melted to the music, I noticed a server walk by with a flaming dish—probably Cherries Jubilee—and go through a set of doors at the far end of the restaurant. I only had a moment to see what the room held as the doors closed rather quickly. All I can say is that it looked smoky and orange inside. My meal was scrumptious, and I told Michael to give my compliments to the chef.

“All I need now, Michael, is the check.”

“Sir, the man at table 3 picked up the tab for you,” said Michael. “He’s right over there ... I’m sorry, it appears he’s already gone.”

“Well, what a surprise. I wish I could have thanked him.”

“Now, Mr. Anderson, you of all people shouldn’t be surprised at that.”

“Yes ... you are undoubtedly right. What about your tip?”

“Already covered, sir. We work on a different pay system here at the Pearly Gates Restaurant.”

Well-fed, I walked out the exit into a greenhouse filled with row upon row of beautiful flowers. There were two men dressed in what I could best describe as dazzling clothes, tending to the flowers. I thought about going over to talk to them, but the bright light around them hurt my eyes, so I kept walking to the outside. The view outside the greenhouse was even more amazing than the beautiful flowers inside the greenhouse. Off to the left, though, I saw what appeared to be a back entrance for the restaurant. A hearse with a placard that said St. Matthew Christian Church backed up to the entrance. Dozens more long black hearses with different placards lined up in wait. I continued on and

came upon a serene pond with mirror images of the gold and red autumn trees that lined its banks. A little dog stood on top of a small wooden bridge ahead of me. He had a good-sized bone in his mouth and when he looked down into the pond, he saw his reflection, and strangely, dropped his bone into the water. I eventually wound back around towards the front of the restaurant where I saw a line of taxicabs sitting and waiting. I approached the first one in line, opened the back door, and got inside.

The driver of the cab turned around and with a devilish grin said, “Any last requests?”

I immediately got out and decided to walk back home. As I left the restaurant grounds or cloud, I thought about something Mark Twain once said, “The good Lord didn’t create anything without a purpose, but the fly comes close.”

*What we can glean from all that, I’m not sure. If I had seen Joseph up there, I would have asked*

*him to interpret it for me. So, I'll leave it up to you to select any portion and learn from it. I don't know if you have to be eating pizza or not to gain full insight.*

*Fred Anderson*

## A TALE OF TWO TENTS

*This story came by way of Jennifer Cole, one of St John's family now attending a major university out of state. Her roommate wrote it for an assignment in a creative writing class. She didn't say what grade she received.*

*Pastor Arnie*

Deep within the concrete jungle, there lies an oasis of lush verdant grass. How this area came to escape the rigid construction surrounding it, nobody could remember. Eventually the city came into ownership and turned it into a park. On one particular day, two tents sat next to each other on that lush green grass. All appeared to be quiet within the tents during the afternoon. As the orange sun finally disappeared below the purple clouds, the muted streetlights cast no light into the two tents. Soon, though, flickering candles added a



luminous power to the shadows and silhouettes coming from within. If you stood close and if there wasn't any traffic going by, you could hear faint little voices.

"Hello, next door," said the occupant of the tent on the left. "My name is Johnny. What's yours?"

"My name is Pauline," replied the occupant of the tent on the right.

"What are you going to do tonight?" asked Johnny.

"How do you know it's night and not day?" asked Pauline. "It always seems dark to me."

"I guess from the candlelight," answered Johnny. "Not that I've had a lot of time to think about it, but why would you need the candle if it is daytime?"

"I guess I get confused with the candlelight and the glow that faintly fills the tent sometimes," said Pauline. "I must confess, Johnny, there are many things I don't understand."

“Yeah, me too,” replied Johnny. “But I figure it’s only a matter of time. I think we will learn a lot more when we get out tomorrow.”

“You are so wise, Johnny,” said Pauline. “Tonight, I think I will do a little exercising. Maybe some deep knee bends, kicking, and leg stretching.”

“That’s good, Pauline. I did a lot of kicking yesterday.”

“What do you want to do when they let us out tomorrow morning, Johnny?”

“I want to go out and buy a dog ... a big dog.”

“Why a dog, Johnny?”

“I’ve heard they were a good thing to have. I think I heard one sniffing around the tent the other day.”

“Oh ... I want a cat,” declared Pauline.

“A cat?” questioned Johnny. “Why a cat?”

“I felt one lying next to the tent a couple of days ago,” said Pauline. “I’ve heard dogs can be

loud with their barking and all. This cat just seemed to make a low rumble. It sounded very relaxing.”

“Maybe it just had indigestion,” said Johnny.

“No ... no, there was a certain, how do you say ... dignity to it. Not like a noisy, unruly dog.”

“After I get my dog, I want a baseball glove for Christmas,” stated Johnny.

“A baseball glove?” asked Pauline. “Only one glove? A proper lady always wears two gloves, each one with some lace.”

“Baseball gloves have lacing,” countered Johnny.

“I don’t know for sure, but I don’t think it’s the same,” said Pauline.

“How about a swing in the backyard?” asked Johnny.

“Yeah, one that would go really high.”

“What’s your favorite ice cream, Pauline?”

“I like chocolate mint. There has always seemed to be plenty of it around. How about you?”

“Strawberry Pecan with olives.”

“When I get out of here, tomorrow,” said Pauline. “I want wherever I stay to have lots of dolls around. Maybe a doll from every country in the world.”

“I want there to be lots of cars and tough looking trucks.”

“Dolls.”

“Cars and trucks.”

“Dolls.”

“Cars and trucks.”

“Do you hear that, Johnny?”

“Hear what?”

“That pounding.”

“Pounding?” asked Johnny. “Oh, that’s probably just your heart.”

“My heart?”

“Yeah, everybody has a heart ... yeah, I’m sure it’s your heart.”

“Oh ... do you think the people that put up these tents know we’re here?”

“Definitely,” said Johnny. “Especially after they hear your heart. When I did my kicking exercise yesterday, I could sense a lot of movement outside the tent.”

“So, you think they love that we’re here?”

“Of course, how could they not love someone as handsome as I am and someone as beautiful as you?”

“Do you think I’m beautiful, Johnny?”

“Well, I’ve never actually seen you, but if I’m this handsome, then a girl such as you has to be beautiful.”

“That’s wonderful.”

As the night wore on, Johnny and Pauline continued talking about all the things they were going to do when they left the tent. The candlelight continued to show lively shadows in the night. When the full moon reached the top of the sky, the candle in the right tent flickered strangely. Johnny

saw what looked like hideous monsters coming from the tent as Pauline appeared to be doing her leg exercises. And then the shadows stopped, for the candle went out.

“Pauline ... Pauline, are you okay?”

The tent on the right sat eerily quiet. Johnny became confused. Was it now day or night? Pauline never talked to Johnny again. And Johnny didn't know why. They had so many plans and so many things to enjoy. Perhaps he would see her on the path outside the tent. Johnny's tent hadn't seemed to change. The candle still shone its light, but somehow, he felt different. He couldn't explain why, but he knew that Pauline's tent seemed to be filled with ... nothing. Maybe he would see her one day when he was walking his big dog in the park.

When Johnny got out of the tent the next day, he continued his journey through life just like he had planned. He eventually got married and had three children of his own. One day, while walking through the lush green grass of the local park with his kids, he noticed an empty swing. Johnny

walked over to the swing and gave it a push ... a push real high.

## HUMBLEMAN

*While many municipal governments struggle to solve the ever-growing list of human moral ailments, few have sought a solution such as the one Profitville pursued. I am not a personal witness to any of this story, and thus, cannot authenticate any portion of it. I pass it along in the event that a community elsewhere may benefit from the supposed experience. It is the least I can do, given my position as a moral and spiritual leader in Profitville.*

*Pastor Fred Anderson*

Deep within the fortified complex of administrative offices in the large city of Profitville, seven men and three women gathered in utmost secrecy.



“Please, please, we must remain calm,” pleaded Mayor Aston. “One at a time. Councilman Roberts, you may speak first.”

“It’s a jungle in the streets,” lamented Councilman Roberts. “Looting. Break-ins. Robberies.”

Councilman Adams interjected strongly, “Just because the people from my district have money, don’t think for one minute that they’re going to pay for all this chaos.”

“What about the business district?” asked Councilwoman Miller. “There’s corruption at every corporate level.”

“There’s no question it’s rampant in every sector of our society,” added Mayor Aston. “I don’t think we have any choice. We must call him in.”

“Do you really think he can do it?” asked Councilman Orthene.

“Does he have the courage and strength to handle such a massive problem?” questioned Councilman McSwain.

“We truly need a miracle,” said Councilwoman Bayer.

“Yes, we surely do,” said Mayor Aston. “I believe he can do it. All in favor of seeking his assistance, say aye.”

“Aye,” the Council said in unison.

Speaking into the intercom, Mayor Aston called his secretary, “Miss Jones, please send him in.”

“He’s coming, Mayor,” answered Miss Jones.

With bravado and complete confidence, a dashing and ruggedly built gentleman entered the council chamber.

“Yes, it is I, Humbleman,” the gentleman stated in a matter-of-fact manner that oozed with gusto.

Underneath her breath, Councilwoman Bayer sighed, “What a man!”

“You’ve been briefed on the situation, Humbleman?” asked Mayor Aston.

“Yes, your capable Miss Jones gave me all the details.”

“Can you help us, Humbleman?” questioned Councilman Orthene.

“I would not be here otherwise, sir.”

“Please don’t take offense, Humbleman,” said Councilman Adams. “Have you ever taken on a problem of this magnitude?”

“Ladies and gentlemen, I have conquered Mt. Caramushi, previously considered impossible. I have crossed Death Valley in the middle of summer. I have fought the frozen tundra of the Arctic cap in the dead of winter. Rest assured, I will find the answer for you, because I am ... Humbleman.”

“What a man!” murmured Councilwoman Miller.

“I must depart posthaste,” declared Humbleman. “Mayor, I will call you as soon as I have something for you.”

Humbleman left the safe confines of the council chamber and entered the jungle of the

streets. He remained ever vigilant, for the jungle held many deadly assassins—both physical and spiritual. Balancing confidence with humility, the man weighed every scene and every character of human life that crossed his remarkable eye.

Somewhere between 42nd and 43rd Streets, a heated argument between two men caught his ear. When he turned to his right, he saw one man holding up his wallet and the other man holding up a hot dog. As much as he could gather, the man holding up the wallet said the other man would have to pry it out of his cold dead hands before he'd ever pay for such an inferior hot dog. The two men soon came to blows, but their fisticuffs were more show than actual injury-producing. Eventually, the irate customer left, and the vendor went back to selling his dogs.

Just as he was about to leave the scene, Humbleman gave one more glance to the hot dog vendor's cart. Noticing something at the base of one of the wheels, he put on his gloves while he casually walked over to the vendor. In order to keep any suspicions to a minimum, he ordered an item from the

menu. Pulling out his wallet to pay, he feigned clumsiness and dropped his money. As he bent down to pick up the money, he also picked up the item he had seen and slipped it into a plastic bag he had in his pocket. Humbleman's vast experience in the dangers lurking around every corner had made him diligent as to carrying around empty plastic bags in his pocket. Hailing a taxi, our hero felt a surge in his calculating spirit.

Pulling out his cell phone, he called the mayor of the beleaguered city, "Mayor, I believe I have found the problem. I know that you must be in the laboratory by now, so would you please tell Doctor Wimbush to get ready? I am returning forthwith, specimen in hand."

"Will do, Humbleman," answered the mayor. "I knew we could count on you."

"Your confidence in me is not unwarranted, Mayor Aston. After all, I am ... Humbleman."

A woman standing near where Humbleman waited for the taxi said to herself, "What a man!"

“The A & M Truck Stop, please,” said Humbleman to the taxi driver. “Without a moment to spare.”

Upon his arrival at the aforementioned destination, he casually walked over to a long-nosed Kenworth tractor hooked up to a forty-five-foot van trailer with the logo of Mabel Murphy’s Home-Baked Pies on its sides. With a special coded knock, Humbleman gained access to the mobile laboratory through the rear doors of the big rig.

“Humbleman,” said Doctor Wimbush.

“Ah, Doctor Wimbush, how good to see you again.”

“The pleasure is all mine,” replied the able scientist. “What do we have?”

Humbleman handed the bag with the specimen to Doctor Wimbush and said, “I believe you will find the contents very interesting, good sir.”

Using special laboratory forceps, the doctor carefully removed the specimen from the bag and exclaimed, “Ah, yah. Notice the leather like

protective covering that surrounds the specimen. If I am not mistaken, there should be a narrow opening on the side of the covering ... ah, yah. By gently spreading the sides of the opening, I should be able to gain access to the root of the object. Now, by using these special laboratory tweezers, I will remove it from its leather covering. Ah, yah, there it is, my friend—*Currencius paperificus*. I think I may have something on this in my files.”

“Permit me to offer an interpretation, Mayor,” said Humbleman. “In layman’s terms, what we have is a common man’s leather wallet with what appears to be a common twenty-dollar bill inside. Please do not worry, Mayor, the items before you were not purloined, but merely found upon the ground. You are not complicit in any criminal activity, as the wallet and its contents will be returned to the owner of said wallet per the identification in the window section as soon as we have completed our thorough examination. I know that some might consider it as stretching the limits of moral behavior, but the future of an entire city, if not an entire nation, is at stake.”

“I have no reason to doubt what you say,” replied the mayor. “You are the epitome of honor and decency. You are, after all, ... Humbleman.”

The good scientist disappeared behind the curtain that hid the inner sanctum of secret files he maintained. After a short period of clanging, banging, and shuffling of papers, Doctor Wimbush returned with some charts.

“Yah, here we go,” declared the scientific genius. Pointing to the first of two charts, he continued, “As you can see, we have a tree that suffers from a fatal disease. The mode of infection works thusly: The *Currencius paperificus* invades the root structure and taxes the carbohydrate reserve of the tree. By secreting various hormones, the *Currencius paperificus* creates an addictive dependency in the vegetative system above ground. Because of this love affair, so to speak, the reproductive system of the tree brings forth all kinds of malformed fruit.”

“If I may once again be permitted to offer an interpretation, Mayor,” injected Humbleman.



“When the general population eats the evil fruit of the tree, so to speak, it consumes organic compounds that prevent inhibition of primitive man’s carnal instincts. Thus, we have the appearance of greed, lust, untruths, and the brazen criminal behavior so rampant in the city. Perhaps an old proverb would apply, ‘For the love of money is the root of all evil’.”

“Is there a cure, Doctor Wimbush?” begged the mayor.

“Fortunately, as you can see in this second chart, there is a species of tree in the *Cruciferus* genus that has provided such a cure. Though its original habitat was near the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, it is ubiquitous now. Taking a scion in the shape of a cross from this tree, we can graft it deep into the heart of the infected tree. As the graft takes hold, it establishes a physiological bond with the sapwood. The hormonal compounds that the invading *Currencius paperificus* secretes must now flow through the graft area. Remarkably, the wood of the *Cruciferus* graft has the power to transform these compounds into a form that helps to

promote the setting of good fruit. Ultimately, the food chain passes these benefits on to the general population.”

Mayor Aston shook Humbleman’s firm hand and said, “Well, Humbleman, it looks like we owe you a huge debt of gratitude for your remarkable discovery.”

“You do not owe me anything, Mayor. It is what I do. For I am ... Humbleman.”

The young female laboratory assistant standing nearby murmured softly, “What a man!”

A sharp bolt of lightning struck the ground not far from Mabel Murphy’s Home-Baked Pies semi-trailer. The rumble of immediate thunder shook the mobile laboratory so violently that those who inhabited it became visibly shaken. Who could blame them if they questioned their own senses when a booming voice followed the thunder saying, “Well done, Humbleman. I am pleased.”

# BUFORD ON CHURCH STEWARDSHIP AND FINANCE

*The following is another presentation given by Buford at the Annual Voter's Luncheon. It is another classic example of his wisdom. Financially conservative members would do well to heed his advice.*

*Pastor Arnold Schmidt*

Many of you here today are directly or indirectly involved with the church's finances, as well as with its stewardship outreach. As is so often the case with church administration, the status quo rarely draws questions. Nevertheless ...

Perhaps you should reevaluate your Church Finance and Stewardship program, if...

... your Investment Committee has recently considered calling Nigeria to see if they need any of your funds to resolve a banking issue.

... the church treasurer reports that there are 142 different checking accounts being used by the various Boards and Committees with each one seeking a 50% increase in this year's budget.

... your church is in Cedar Crossing and this year's budget planning session is in Las Vegas, Nevada.

... the Stewardship Committee nomination list for new members for the Board of Stewardship contains over twelve people who have only visited the church once in the last five years.

... the chief incentive that your Stewardship Board is going to use to try to increase individual pledges is a free hula hoop for each \$100.00 per week increase.

... the Stewardship Board insists that the pastor preach on the topic of money for 24 weeks straight prior to this year's pledge Sunday.

... the featured speaker for the upcoming Stewardship Sunday is also a part-time bookie with an office in the back of the Red Dog Saloon.

... there has been a large spike in hospital calls by the pastor after the Stewardship Home Visiting Committee headed by Vinnie, Sal, and Bruno reported a 100% success rate in achieving individual pledge increases.

... the minutes of the last Finance Committee meeting sound anything like this: The resulting net zero line is an extrapolation of a combination of CHOAD and PHISA ratios arrived at by subdividing line 14 into all retroactive surplus payments but only to the extent that they affect the Altar Guild's budget by less than 20% of the Pastor's Discretionary Fund.

## PAYROLL DEPARTMENT

*Tom Washburn works for a big corporation in Profitville in the payroll department. He says there are usually about two days out of the month when things get really quiet in their department. Some employees, with perhaps a little too much down time during those two days, have developed the art of fabricating tales to pass the idle periods. At least the one that follows is relevant to their department. Tom added a spiritual twist to it, and thus I include it in this volume.*

*Pastor Fred Anderson*

It was always a long path to the end of Friday for Julian Smith. Monday always seemed only a half-step away. He only had one more elevator ride to go to reach the end of Friday's path. Then he would be free, at least until Monday. He allowed a bit of extra time for the final step in collecting his

pay because the company had made major changes in its payroll process, and he knew the first week always presented a few glitches here and there. Mr. Smith entered the office of the payroll department looking to pick up the fruits of his labor for the week. He dutifully waited in line until a clerk became available. Finally, he crossed the blue courtesy line and stepped up to the counter.

“May I help you?” asked the clerk named Mary.

“Yes, I’m here to pick up my pay,” replied Julian.

“Do you have your timesheet and your JK4 Authorization?” asked Mary.

“Yes,” answered Julian. “You will find everything here in this folder.”

The clerk opened the folder and then opened a drawer to her right. She began stamping the papers in Julian’s folder. After a while, Julian lost track of how many times she stamped the three sheets of paper in his file folder. Finally, Mary put

a big red stamp on the front page of Form JK4 that showed she had completed all the proper stamping.

“Take these papers over to the cashier,” directed the clerk.

“Okay,” said Julian. “Thank ... thank you.”

Julian walked over to the line of people waiting outside the cashier’s office. Seven coworkers in line and one in the office stood between him and his weekend. When it came time for him to be served, he walked into the cashier’s office, closed the door behind him, and handed his papers to the cashier with a certain sense of relief that the process neared completion. James, the current cashier, looked at Julian’s papers and then set them down on the counter.

“Mr. Smith, would you please stand over here on this line,” said James.

The cashier then pulled a tape measure from his pocket and began to take Julian’s physical measurements. First, he measured his height and then the width of his shoulders.



“Hey, what’s going on?” asked Julian.

“Sir, I must get the correct dimensions,” answered the clerk.

“For what?” asked Julian. “Oh, I know. We’re getting new uniforms, right?”

Glaring at his coworker, James asked, “Do you prefer pine, cherry, or bronze?”

“For a uniform?” asked Julian, incredulously.

“Really, sir,” said the cashier. “This will be your final selection. It is hardly a decision to make light of.”

“Uhhh ... I think there’s been some mistake. I just came here to get my pay.”

Looking disgusted, the cashier handed Julian his papers and said, “You will examine the bottom paragraph of the last page, sir.”

Julian grabbed the papers, looked to the last paragraph, and began reading aloud, “The wages of sin is death. Uh ... no, wait, I didn’t see this before. I’ll ... I’ll be right back.”

With papers in hand, Julian ran back to the first line where the clerk processed his papers. Fortunately, he only had to wait for a minute to see the same clerk that had stamped all his paperwork.

“I’m sorry, ma’am,” said Julian. “I was here a few minutes ago, and ... and you approved all my forms with the stamps and all, and I think you made a mistake, or rather I think a mistake occurred somewhere in the process.”

“Let me have a look for you,” Mary replied. “No, everything seems to be in order.”

“But it says, ‘The wages of sin is death’. I just came here to get what I earned, you know, what I put in all this time for. This paperwork must belong to someone else or something. Look, here’s my social security card, my driver’s license, my voter’s card. And here, here’s my blood donor’s card.”

“Very impressive,” said the clerk. “But it doesn’t change anything.”

“Look, I want to speak to a supervisor,” demanded Julian in desperation. “I want what I’m entitled to.”

“Very well, sir,” replied Mary. Picking up the phone, Mary dialed a number and said, “Mr. Jenkins, we have another one who wants what he’s entitled to. Mr. Jenkins will be right with you.”

“Uh, thank you,” said Julian.

The supervisor, a tall man, came out of his office and walked over to Mary’s station. Taking the papers from Mary, he examined them, and then addressed Julian.

“Now, Mr. Smith, how can we help you?”

“I just came here to get paid. This young lady seemed to have everything under control and then I went to the cashier and he started taking my measurements and ... and then he showed me the part about ‘The wages of sin is death’ and I said something is wrong and Mary said everything is in order and then I said I wanted to see a supervisor and then she called you and that’s where we’re at.”

“My dear Mr. Smith, please come back to my office ... Here, have

a seat. Let me explain the situation. You see, those of us in the payroll department like to look at the bigger picture of life. Let's do some numbers. For example, how many hours a day do you sleep?"

"What?"

"How many hours a day do you sleep?"

"Seven or eight."

"Good. Now, Mr. Smith, how much time do you spend eating per day?"

"Two hours per day, maybe."

"Cleaning, dressing, personal hygiene?"

"Uh, about one," said Julian.

"Now, counting travel time, how many hours per day do you give to making a living?"

"Monday through Friday, about ten each day and then sometimes five on Saturday."

"Okay, Mr. Smith, I want you to be completely honest on this next one. How much television do you watch each night?"

“Uh, well, let’s see. I guess maybe two or three hours.”

“All right, then. The following question is based on a weekly figure instead of daily. How much time do you devote to spiritual matters?”

“You mean like going to church, prayer, and stuff like that?”

“Yes, Mr. Smith.”

“Umm, three maybe.”

“Well, let me get the old computer up and running here. According to these calculations, from a time perspective, you have earned a whopping 1.79% return on your Creator’s investment in you. In comparison, let’s see, television has earned, oh ... giving you the benefit of the doubt, 8.3%. Eating is also 8.3%. Sleeping 29%. Need I go on?”

“Wait a minute,” countered Julian. “What about my offering every week? That could be converted to time, couldn’t it?”

“Sure. Okay, how much do you give each week?”

Julian looked around nervously, even though there was no one else in the room. Then he leaned over and whispered in Mr. Jenkins' ear.

“That much? Well, let's see, that raises the figure from a 1.79% to a 1.82% return on investment for the Creator.”

“What if I promise to do better? Like giving more money and more time? Will that do anything?”

“Well, those are noble gestures, indeed,” replied Mr. Jenkins. “But I'm afraid their potential for getting you out of this hole is almost nil. Let me show you a couple of other things. You are forty-eight. This chart shows you the life expectancy of humans two-hundred years ago. You wouldn't have much time left if you had lived back then, would you? Now this next chart shows the life expectancy of humans today. It would appear you have quite a few years still to go, doesn't it?”

“Yes, thankfully,” said Julian.

“Ah, but here's the kicker. In order to analyze these types of charts properly, you must use the Co-

Inflationary Time Indexing Factor to get an accurate comparison. If we use that, you should have been dead last year ... However, just to get a dollars and cents handle on this, let's assume you live for thirty more years. Because of the negative compounded interest bias, even if you worked for your Creator twenty-four hours a day, every day of those thirty remaining years, you wouldn't even be able to scratch the surface of the debt you owe."

Sinking lower in his chair, Julian pleaded, "Isn't there anything I can do?"

Sizing up the man before him, Mr. Jenkins said, "I tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to let you speak to our financial aid counselor."

"Do you really think he can help me?"

"Well, I've seen some miserable wretches go into his office and come out totally changed and renewed."

"Thank you, Mr. Jenkins."

Julian walked over to the financial aid office. He knocked on the door and waited. When a voice

said, “Come in”, he opened the door and went inside. As soon as he closed the door behind him, the entire room became engulfed in an exceedingly bright light.

“I’m sorry, it’s so bright, I can’t really see you,” said Julian. “Mr. Jenkins sent me over here to see if you could give me some financial counseling and perhaps a little help with debt reduction.”

Approximately fifteen minutes later, Julian Smith walked out of the financial aid counselor’s office with a marked bounce in his pace. He went back to the clerk that waited on him when he first came into the payroll office.

“Yes, may I help you?” the clerk asked.

“I’m sure you remember me. I was here earlier, you know, the one with the problem you had to call Mr. Jenkins about.”

“Sure, Mr. Smith,” she said. “Did you get things worked out?”



“Yes, I did. My debt’s paid in full, and here’s my receipt from the financial aid counselor. So, I’m here to start over.”

Standing and extending her hand, Mary said, “Congratulations, Mr. Smith. Just take your papers over to the cashier.”

Julian walked over to the cashier’s office and waited in line. When his turn came, he walked inside, closed the door, and presented his payroll papers and his red-stamped, paid-in-full receipt.

“Mr. Smith, would you please stand over here on this line,” said James, the cashier.

The cashier then pulled a tape measure from his pocket and began to take Julian’s physical measurements. First, he measured his height and then the width of his shoulders.

“Hey, what’s going on?” asked Julian. “I thought I had this all cleared up.”

“Relax, Mr. Smith,” said the cashier. “Under the Financial Aid Counselor’s program, everyone gets a new set of clothes to wear.”

# THE GREAT STONE BURGLARY

My partner and I pulled the weekend shift after a rough Friday that included an earthquake and a freaky three hours of darkness in the middle of the day. We didn't have anything of significance on Saturday, so we recouped some of our energy. On Sunday morning, at about 0600, we got the call.

We arrived on the scene and immediately found several security guards who appeared to be dead. We checked for pulses and confirmed they were not dead, but rather in a catatonic state. Two women stood near an entrance to a tomb. We approached them to see if they had witnessed anything.

“Excuse me, ma’am. I’m Sergeant March and this is my partner, Detective Jones. We’re from the burglary division, and we’re responding to a call of a break-in of a tomb. Do you know anything about that or about what happened to these guards?”

“He’s not there,” said one woman.

“Who’s not there, ma’am?”

“Our Lord.”

“Does your Lord have a name, ma’am?”

“Yes, it is Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth.”

“And what is your name, ma’am?” asked Det. Jones.

“Mary. Mary Magdalene.”

“And yours?” asked Det. Jones of the other woman.

“Mary.”

“Mary, uh?”

“The other Mary.”

“Did you ladies see anything?” asked Sgt. March.

“There was an earthquake and then an angel came and rolled back the stone.”

“I see. So, you say one man rolled that enormous stone away all by himself?”

“Yes.”

“Can you describe this man, ma’am?” asked Det. Jones.

“His appearance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow.”

“Did the man say anything, ma’am?” asked Sgt. March.

“Yes. He said to not be afraid, because he knew that we were looking for Jesus. He said he wasn’t there because he had risen from the dead. Then he showed us where Jesus had been laying. He also told us to go tell His disciples he had risen from the dead.”

“So, let me get this straight. Your friend Angel came and rolled away that great stone all by himself. Then he told you that the dead body of your friend Jesus wasn’t there because he had risen from the dead. He also told you to go tell the rest of Jesus’s friends. Is that your statement?”

“Yes.”

“And you’re sticking by that?”

“Yes.”

“What about the security guards?”

“They must have been afraid of what they had seen.”

“Okay, Mary and ... Mary. Give Detective Jones the rest of your information and then you can go.”

Sgt. March walked over to the security guards, who now appeared to be awake. “You guys okay?”

“Yeah, sure,” said one guard.

“What happened here?”

“What do you mean?” asked another guard.

“Well, I assume you guys were supposed to be guarding this tomb. You aren’t aware that someone rolled away the great stone over there and the body that was in that tomb taken?”

“No, we don’t know anything about that. We must have fallen asleep or something.”

Leading them over to the tomb, Sgt. March continued to interrogate the guards, “You guys didn’t see anything? You didn’t see a man whose appearance was like lightning and his raiment white as snow?”

“No. No, we didn’t see anybody. One guy couldn’t have moved that stone. His gang must have come while we were asleep and stole him.”

“Who was this guy that he needed to have someone guarding his tomb?”

“We don’t know anything. We just followed our orders.”

“Well, gentlemen, I’d say you have some explaining to do to someone.”

Det. Jones finished up with the women and then went over to his partner. “The guards have anything to say?”

“Not really. Claimed they were asleep. They said this man Jesus must have had a gang that came and stole the body while they were out.”

“What do you think, Sarge? Was there some kind of scam here? Do you want me to call bunco?”

“No, no. There is definitely something going on here, but for now, I think we have to continue working this as a burglary. Let’s have a look in the tomb.”

“There’s a pile of linen cloth,” said Det. Jones.

“And a napkin or something all rolled up over there,” added Sgt. March.

“Look, Sarge. There appears to be something all over this cloth. An image, maybe?”

“I don’t know. We’ll let forensics figure that out. With a body involved here, we should call in CSI.”

When they finished up at the scene, the detectives headed for Galilee to see if they could get a line on this supposed gang of Jesus’s. While they were on the road, they ran into the Mary’s from the crime scene.

“Well, ladies, anything you want to add to your previous statements?” asked Sgt. March. “Maybe something along the way jogged your memories?”

“We saw him.”

“You saw Jesus up and walking around?”

“Yes.”

“Did he say anything?”

“He said not to touch him, because he had not yet ascended to the Father. He told us to go tell the others.”

“Okay, ladies, we’ll add that to your statements. Be careful on the road.”

“What do you think, Sarge? A hallucination, maybe?”

“Could be, but they didn’t look like they were on anything.”

The following day, the detectives ran across two men from Emmaus who also claimed to have seen and spoken with this Jesus of Nazareth. They



continued asking questions, and they followed every lead given them. A background check on a man by the name of Peter revealed that he was one of Jesus's lieutenants and the one in charge since Jesus's purported death.

"This guy, Peter, has a previous, Sarge. Seems he cut off some guy's ear, but his boss apparently patched the guy up and there were no charges filed. Background on this Jesus says he was a carpenter, but I don't know too many carpenters who know how to reattach an ear without surgery. Supposedly, one member of the gang, a guy called Judas, ratted out the leader, Jesus."

"Yeah, this case gets more mysterious every day."

"And check out these gang members. Quite a motley crew. Mostly fishermen, but there is a tax collector, a fitting addition to any gang, I suppose."

"Indeed," replied Sgt. March.

About eight days into the investigation, they got a tip that this gang of Jesus's was holed up in a house. With a backup squad standing by, the two

men approached the house in question. Knocking on the door, they wondered who or what might be in the modest looking house.

A man answered the door, and the detectives identified themselves, “Good afternoon, sir. I’m Sergeant March and this is Detective Jones. We need to have a word with you. May we come in?”

“Yes, of course,” the man answered.

When they entered the room, they saw twelve men present. Normally, they would have called for backup to enter the building with them when presented with such a situation, but the room had a certain aura of peace about it.

“We’re looking for a man called Jesus of Nazareth. Have you seen or heard from him?”

“Yes, he is our Lord, and we have seen him,” answered the one called Peter.

“And what is your name, sir?” asked Sgt. March.

“Peter, sir.”

“Okay, here’s what we need to do, guys. We need to get a statement from each of you, so if you’ll just be patient and cooperate, we can be on our way in a little bit. Detective Jones will start with the man on the end, and I’ll take you first, Peter.”

Just as Sgt. March started to talk to Peter, Det. Jones said, “Sarge, you better come over here.”

“What’s up?” Sgt. March asked.

“Okay, tell the sergeant here who you say you are.”

“Jesus of Nazareth.”

“Do you have any ID?” asked Sgt. March.

Jesus held out his hands to show where the nails had been.

“Well, my friend, we have a lot of questions for you.”

After an extensive interrogation, Sgt. March and Det. Jones stepped outside the house to confer.

“What do you think, Sarge?”

“Well, Joe, this has been a very interesting case, but I don’t see any criminal activity here. How can there be a burglary when the supposedly stolen body is, in fact, freely walking around?”

“True, but there’s probably some law that we could hang them with.”

“No, I think we just need to fill out our reports and turn them in.”

“The powers that be are probably not going to like this.”

“Probably not, but we’ve got the facts on our side.”

“Do you believe what this man Jesus said, Sarge?”

“Yes, Joe. We’ve seen him with our own eyes. He’s not a ghost. He is alive. And, as far as I’m concerned, The Great Stone Burglary case is closed.”

“Yeah, Sarge, I believe him, too. But the question is, if after we file this account, will anyone who has not actually seen him believe this story?”

“Only time will tell, partner. Only time will tell.”

## BRAIN WARS

*Pastor Schmidt recently competed in Cedar Crossing's 14th Annual Bowling Tournament. He has always felt, when given a little free time, that he should take part in affairs of the community. His score in the tournament, unfortunately, was not high—let's not sugarcoat this, in fact, it was the lowest score in the contest. It did merit him the "booby prize" award—two free passes to the taping of the "Brain Wars" television show in Rainbow Springs. Rarely one to not take advantage of anything deemed free, he and Mary attended the show as Cedar Crossing's delegates to a greater understanding of the human mind.*

Five, four, three, two, one — “Live from Rainbow Springs, it's Brain Wars,” announced the baritone voiced director. The studio audience hit their cue with a thunderous round of applause.

Dashing out on stage, a nattily dressed gentleman raised his arms and the audience once again broke out in applause.

“And your host, Mr. Bob ‘Go for Broke’ Morgan,” continued the director.

“Good evening, ladies and gentlemen,” said the much-admired host. “Welcome to Brain Wars, the quiz show that has many of the finest minds in the world standing on edge. Get those cerebrums warmed up and let’s have a party. I’d like to introduce my lovely assistant, Miss Bambi Bambusa. Come on now, folks, let’s hear it for Bambi ... What do you say, audience? Are you ready?”

Miss Bambi held up a sign that said, “We’re ready, Bob”, and the audience followed her prompting.

“Okay, then,” said Bob ‘Go for Broke’ Morgan. “Our returning champion is chairman of the History Department at Ballmore College and a senior fellow at the Medford Institute. Ladies and gentlemen, let’s welcome back Professor Kurt Strong

... Well, Professor, are you ready to meet your opponent?”

“Yes, Bob. I believe I’m up for the challenge.”

As Bambi escorted the new contestant to his podium, Bob said, “Good evening, sir. And your name is?”

“Bob, my name is Morris. Morris Calabash, but you can call me Rocky.”

“Alright, Rocky. Where are you from?”

“Bob, I’m just a simple tourist from Hole-in-the-Wall, Texas.”

“Hole-in-the-Wall, Texas! Sounds like a fun place to be.”

“Bob, you can disparage me and my family all you want, but don’t mess with Texas.”

“Sorry, Rocky,” said Bob. “No offense intended. Are you ready to test your brain, Rocky?”

“I reckon so, Bob.”



“Okay, Miss Bambi, may I have the envelope, please?”

As Bob opened the envelope, Bambi wrote the category on the board. “Alright, our category tonight is ‘The Bible’. Professor, as returning champion, you have the first question. Can you name the thirteen letters of Paul in the order that they appear in the Bible?”

“Yes, Bob, that would be Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon.”

“That is correct, Professor. You have the first point.” Bambi hung a number 1 on the professor’s podium as Bob turned to Rocky. “Okay, Morris, I mean, Rocky. You are up to bat. Your question is ... who wrote The Bible?”

“Is this a trick question, Bob?”

“No, Rocky. Who wrote The Bible?”

“Miss Bambi did. I just seen her write it on the board.”

“That’s absolutely correct, Rocky.”

Miss Bambi held up the applause sign and then hung a number 1 on Rocky’s podium.

From out of the back of the audience a woman yelled out, “Yee-haw, Rocky. Atta boy!”

Pointing to the woman, Rocky said proudly, “That there’s my wife, Hannah Mae. Hey Hannah.”

“Okay, we’re all tied up at 1 to 1. Back to you, Professor. Can you name the books that comprise the Pentateuch?”

“Yes, Bob, that would be Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.”

“That’s it, Professor.” As Bambi hung a number 2 on the professor’s podium, Bob turned to Rocky again. “Alr-r-r-right, Rocky. Are you ready for question number 2?”

“Let er rip, Bob.”

“In the book of Matthew, we are told that Jesus, when he started his ministry, chose twelve disciples to help him in his mission. Judas, one of the twelve, later betrayed Jesus and eventually killed

himself. In the book of Acts, we are told that a man named Matthias was chosen to replace Judas as a disciple. Your question then is ... after Matthias replaced Judas, how many disciples were there?"

Rocky folded his arms and then put one hand up to his chin, as if in deep concentration. He soon went through a lengthy series of 'air' ciphering and finger counting.

"I need your answer, Rocky."

"I'm gonna take a stab in the dark on this one, Bob. I think there were twelve."

"That's absolutely correct."

Bambi held up the applause sign and hung a number 2 on Rocky's podium.

From the back of the audience came, "Yee-haw, attaboy, Rocky."

"Okay, Professor, it's back to you one more time. This is a fill-in-the-blank. In the book of Matthew, we are given the following genealogy: And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and

Rehoboam the father of \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ the father of Asa ...”

“Hmm, Bob, I believe that was Ebijah.”

“Oh, Professor, that was so close. The answer is Abijah, not Ebijah. I’m sorry. I can’t give you that point.”

Bambi grabbed the microphone and said, “A-a-a-w-w-w.”

“Okay, Rocky. It’s all up to you. If you get this point, you win the war. Are you ready?”

“I’m just filled with trepidation, Bob.”

“Hang in there, big guy. This is also a fill-in-the-blank. We divide the Bible into two parts. The first part is the Old Testament, and the second part is the \_\_\_\_\_ Testament.”

Rocky fidgeted about, shifted from one foot to the other, and scratched his head. Then he tugged on his right ear, put his hands in his pockets, and closed his eyes.

“This is it, Rocky,” said Bob. “Don’t blow it.”

“Boy, howdy. I sure wish I ... I knew.”

“That’s it, Rocky ... ‘New’. You are our new champion.”

Bambi held up the applause sign and hung a number 3 on Rocky’s podium.

From out of the back of the audience came, “Yee-haw, attaboy, Rocky.”

“Come on over here, Rocky. Hannah Mae, why don’t you come on up here, too. Oh, come on now folks, let’s hear it one more time for Morris ‘Rocky’ Calabash. Okay, let’s see what you’ve won. Bambi, may I have the envelope, please. Oh, Rocky, this is nice. Real nice. You and your lovely wife, Hannah Mae, have won a two-week vacation package to the luxurious Einstein Theory Resort. In addition to that, we also have for you, your very own, personalized ‘Inflate-O-Brain’.”

“I’m too choked up to talk, Bob.”

“Well, ladies and gentlemen, there you have it. Another week. Another champion. Remember, always use a big word when a small one would do.

Until next time, from all of us here at Brain Wars,  
be good and love your mother!

# DREAMLAND TV

## Building Committee

*As per that great philosopher, Yogi Berra,  
“It’s like déjà vu, all over again.”*

The night before the important Building Committee meeting, Pastor Anderson nervously made notes of everything he thought should be covered in the final planning session before engaging an architect to expand the church facilities.

Pastor Anderson and his wife, Becky, had just gotten home from a delicious meal at Vernal and Doris Magnuson’s in celebration of Vernal’s sixty-sixth birthday. Doris fixed her famous roast duck à l’orange, a treat served on the rarest of occasions. Vernal’s birthday certainly qualified as such an occasion because with the way she and her husband fought all the time, nobody thought Vernal would make it to sixty-six. At any rate, Pastor Anderson had at least three helpings of the duck, something

he would later regret, as he forgot that duck always made him dream the weirdest of dreams.

When he finished the last of his notes, he got ready for bed and slipped under the covers next to his wife. Being exhausted from the day, the good reverend fell asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow. Somewhere in the next seven hours, the duck paid him a visit.

“Good evening, ladies and gentlemen,” said Sam Slumber in a hushed tone. “I’m reporting to you for Dreamland TV Network tonight. We’re interrupting your sleep for a special broadcast from the parish hall of St. Peter’s Lutheran Church, where the Building Committee has gathered for an important planning session. We join them now, already in progress.”

“Uh, thank you for that inspiring introduction, Pastor Anderson,” said Elmo, the President of the congregation and a goofy-looking character wearing a tall green hat with floppy black ears. “As



you all know, this meeting is necessary to gather all the requests for building space by the various groups within the congregation. I believe we should hear from the Trustees first.”

“All right,” said Ted, the Hardware Man and chairman of the Board of Trustees. “The Trustees don’t really have any space needs in the new building, as we will gain space in the old building when construction is complete. However, we do request the right to address any technical issues that the architect brings to the table. Regarding the space we will gain in the old building, I would like to propose that we upgrade our power system to a 3-phase power grid with a megawatt turbo booster. Add high decibel woofers and tweeters to the sound system and we should be able to out blast any church in the county.”

“Uh, we will certainly give consideration to that, Ted,” said Elmo. “Yes, Rocky, did you have a question?”

“Yeah, man. I move that we prevent the Trustees from installing any of this equipment themselves.”

“I second that,” said Calamity, Outreach chairwoman.

“Uh, all in favor, say aye.”

“Aye,” they said in unison, except for one.

“Uh, Elders, do you have any space request for the new building?”

“Yes, Mr. President,” answered Vinnie. “Speaking for my ... ah, associates and fellow elders, Sal, Bruno, and Vito, we would like to request a small room in which we could conduct, ah ... counseling sessions, so to speak. We don’t need much. Maybe a chair or two, some padding on the walls, and maybe some soundproofing. Yeah, soundproofing would be good.”

“Thank you, Vinnie,” said Elmo. “Your request has been noted. Uh, Rocky, the council received the request from the Board of Education that you so graciously submitted in writing. There have

been a few, uh, questions raised about the need for an air compressor and lube pit in the new Sunday School room.”

“Man, what kind of regressive thinking is that?” complained Rocky, current motorcyclist and Board of Education chairman. “How am I supposed to make certain that these kids get a proper theological education if we don’t have the tools to foster that hands-on approach to all the physical laws that our Creator gave to us?”

“Uh, let’s see, Altar Guild, did you have any request for additional space in the new building?” asked the President.

“Yes, Mr. President,” answered Phyllis Roberts, a demure librarian in the public sector. Handing Elmo an immaculately typed page, the spinster quietly sat back down.

After reading the Altar Guild’s requests, Elmo said, “Uh, okay, Miss Roberts, uh, I need to clarify your request here. Does the Altar Guild really feel that a wet bar and pizza oven are essential for preparing everything for the altar on Sundays?”

“Yes, we do, Mr. President,” she answered in a quiet voice.

“I see that you also have a need for a disco-strobe light system. Have you cleared the feasibility of that with the trustees?”

Ted, the chairman of the Board of Trustees, stood up and gave a big two thumbs up to the project. Then he went over to Miss Roberts and gave her a high five.

“Uh, okay, moving right along,” said Elmo. “Calamity, does Outreach have any requests?”

“Yee ... hah, you betcha, Mr. President,” answered Calamity, reigning female trick rider and lassoing champion, as well as chairwoman of the Outreach Committee. “Outreach would like some space for a holding pen, I mean an orientation room, to introduce our captives, I mean our prospective new members, to the principles of our denomination. And we could also use a tack room, I mean a supply room where we could store extra rope, I mean extra evangelistic materials.”

“Is there anything else, Calamity?” asked the President.

“Well, we just ordered a cool branding iron with our denomination’s official insignia on it. We could use a room where we could brand new prospects so they would have a more difficult time joining other denominations or something, ah ... no, never mind. That would be asking too much. No, Outreach has no more requests.”

“Uh, thank you, Calamity. Uh, Fellowship, do you have any request for space in the new building?”

“Hey, genius, wake up,” yelled Rocky. “You’re up for any requests for space.”

“Make mine on the rocks,” said Randolph P. Farnsworth, chairman of the Fellowship Committee. “Oh ... I digress. The Fellowship Committee would like additional space for a stage where the band we hire can play on the night of our annual Fellowship dance.”

“Let me try to understand,” said Elmo. “You want a stage so the larger band you hire has someplace to set up their equipment?”

“Absolutely.”

“Uh, the only way I can see that happening is if we reduce the size of the area where people can dance,” said Elmo.

“Not a problem,” said Randolph. “We aren’t worried about that. Nobody ever comes to the Fellowship dance, anyway. We just want to hire a larger band to increase our attendance.”

“Uh, I see. Okay, uh ... Stewardship. How is the Capital Drive coming along, Lenny? What is the fund balance?”

“Right now, we’re on a bit of a losing streak,” answered Lenny, bookie extraordinaire. “But I got a sure-fire tip on a horse in the seventh at Belmont. If we put down ten thousand on Luther’s Revenge at a hundred to one odds, we could clear a cool million.”

“Sounds reasonable,” said Elmo, the President.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the President led the group in the Lord’s Prayer. Some said they heard a faint quacking along about “Forgive us our debtors”, but that cannot be confirmed.

Pastor Anderson sat up with a jolt. His sweat-soaked pajamas stuck to his clammy skin. He thought about calling Father Riley over at St. Ann’s to see if they would lend out their bingo set for a fundraiser, but he decided that would only show a sense of panic. Reaching for his notepad on the nightstand, he scratched off the entry for a new office in the new building. He would encourage the Building Committee to stay within budget, including an ample contingent reserve. That’s all that he could do ... that’s all that he could do. Except perhaps, to think of a tactful way to pass on the duck next time they eat out.

## ANGEL 0024

*As I turned the last page of my latest spy novel acquisition, I was struck with a thought. I should consider writing a spy story with an angel as the assigned operative. Perhaps it's been done before, but I've never encountered such a work. So -o, I gave it a go. When finished, I let my wife read it. Her comment fell somewhere in the area of 'Don't quit my day job'. I'm giving you an excerpt anyway.*

*Pastor Arnold Schmidt*

My assignment took me to Elmersville, Illinois. What danger could lurk in an innocuous little farm town surrounded by seemingly endless fields of corn? Of course, even if I knew, I could not tell you until it had passed through 14 layers of bureaucracy. Nevertheless, I invite you to accompany me on the trip.



My contact is a man by the name of Horace Martin. I have committed his real name and description to memory, so no record can fall into the wrong hands. We arranged to meet in the third booth on the left inside the Country Café on Main Street. I opened the door to the sound of a quaint little bell that hung from the inside handle of the door. Walking to the third booth, I made a visual on the man fitting Martin's description.

"Angels seldom wear wings," I said.

"Squirrels have fluffy tails in the winter," replied the man sitting in the booth.

"You have information for me?" I asked.

"Yes ... yes," replied M., nervously. "I belong to Riverview Baptist Church and ..."

"Relax, Mr. Martin. No one knows that I am here. My life depends on not being followed."

"Okay ... okay. I guess I'm just a little nervous. Last Sunday, I was sitting in the fourth row from the back of the church, and I saw him."

"Saw who?"

“He looked ordinary, kind of like he would fit in anywhere. Maybe he was a farmer. I don’t know. But he also had a sinister look about him. We don’t get too many strangers in our little church, you know.”

“And you felt you had to tell someone?”

“Yes ... yes. I wouldn’t want to risk something happening and I not do something about it.”

“Did the man do anything suspicious?” I asked.

“Yes. When Pastor Brock announced that Lilah Thompson had passed away, the man ... he crossed himself.”

“Do you mean like this?” I asked, as I made the sign of the cross.

“Yes, do you think he could be a foreign spy or something?” asked Horace.

“I don’t know.”

“Or ... oh, no. Do you think he could be a Lutheran or Catholic?”

“It’s possible,” I said. “Did anybody talk to him?”

“No, sir. Not that I know of, him being a stranger and all.”

“So, nobody in the church talked to him?”

“No, but John Watters said he saw him writing stuff down during the service. Do you think that means anything?”

“Hard to say. Anything else?”

“Yeah,” said Horace. “Fred Collins said he saw him get into his car and leave. As he was pulling away, he looked at the church, waved to us, and smiled. Fred got the license plate number if that helps.”

“Yes, that is very helpful. We appreciate your diligence and your patriotism.”

I contacted my handler at headquarters.

“Scramble 341. 777, Nemesis 2 viable in ZN 684-555. Need ID on L.P. HLL 666. 0024.”

About thirty minutes later, I received a reply.

“Scramble 879. 0024, read Nemesis 2 viable. L.P. Shadow Enterprises, Inc. Proceed to ZN 831-1049. Recon 1000. 777.”

A light mist veiled the city. I gave the cabbie my destination, St. Peter’s Catholic Church on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. With relatively light traffic on a Sunday morning, we arrived at 0930, which gave me time to get oriented. It was a big church. Filled to capacity, I would say it probably held 700 to 800. They reserved the last two rows for parents with small children, so I took a seat in the third row from the rear. My intel said the subject would be tall, wearing a bright red tie and a black suit. He would be carrying a small, black leather notebook. I went back outside and waited on the front steps. I did not have to handle any questions as no one sought any answers. I finally got a visual on the subject. He entered the church and sat down in the tenth row from the back of the church. I, too, sat on that row, but at the other end. When the service began, the subject opened his notebook and began writing. When the service ended, he closed his notebook

and headed for the door. He walked down the steps and hailed a taxi. At no time did anyone make contact with the subject. When he got into the cab, I saw him turn towards the church and smile. Oddly, the license plate of the taxi was FIRE 666.

Once again, I contacted my handler at headquarters.

“Scramble 659. 777, subject live—no contact. Need ID on L.P. FIRE 666. 0024.”

Ten minutes went by when I received a reply.

“Scramble 234. 0024, read subject no contact. L.P. Shadow Enterprises, Inc. Proceed to ZN 816-285. Code 99. Contact R. Smith. 777.”

Louisville was always beautiful in the fall, and today it lived up to its reputation. I pulled into Resurrection Lutheran Church’s parking lot with my rental car at 1300. I walked into the church office and asked the secretary if I could speak with R. Smith.

“Oh, you mean Pastor Ronald Smith,” said the lady. “Who should I say is calling?”

“Ed Himmel,” I replied. “He’s expecting me.”

The secretary led me back to Pastor Smith’s office.

“Welcome, Mr. Himmel,” said Pastor Smith. “I talked with your boss this morning, so he told me to be expecting you.”

“I need to ask you a few questions about a recent visitor to your congregation.”

“Yes, your boss said you would be making some inquiries,” said Pastor Smith. “How can I be of help?”

“This man visited here last Sunday. He’s tall, probably wearing a bright red tie and black suit. He also carried a small, black leather notebook.”

“Yes, I remember him. He seemed to be in a hurry, and he got caught in a crowd of people that wanted to get out the door. By the time he got to me, he seemed quite agitated. He said nothing. Just

shook my hand and made a beeline to his car. It was odd, though. When I shook his hand, it was very warm, almost hot. He never said where he was from to anyone, and a few others near him in the pew said they had the same sensation as I did when they shook his hand.”

“That’s very interesting, Pastor. Did anyone notice anything else?”

Opening a desk drawer, Pastor Smith handed me a card.

“This is an attendance card we put in the pews for visitors if they would like to leave their name and where they’re from. As you can see, it is quite odd. I can only assume it is from the man in question.”

“The word contact is circled and a line leading from it down to the number 77. Then we have a vertical line with a cross line leading down from the 77 to the bottom where the number 666 is crossed out. Very interesting.”

“As I’m sure you know, according to Hebrew numerology, the 666 is a sign of Satan,” said Pastor

Smith. "I'm not sure what the number 77 represents in this brief appearance at our church. The number 77 also had a whole list of meanings in the Bible, many referencing the Glory of God."

"May I have this card, Pastor?" I asked. "I'd like to have it further analyzed."

"Certainly," answered Pastor Smith.

"Thank you, Pastor. You have been a big help."

I contacted my handler.

"Scramble 456. 777, contact made, intel gathered, await instructions. 0024."

Five minutes later, I received my instructions.

"Scramble 123. 0024, abort, return. debrief. 777."

When I returned, I turned in all the intel I had gathered and after thorough questioning, they sent me home to await my next assignment. They deemed the resulting analysis classified. Ten years



later, they declassified the file. I can now share with you what it all meant.

Apparently, it took ten committees and divisions to completely analyze everything in my intel report. The final report concluded that the subject remained at large, conducting a complex surveillance operation. Subsequent data showed increased negative activity in all areas where he had been. One analyst noted how the subject seemed to avoid the general masses (most likely because his influences were already firmly entrenched there) and concentrate his efforts on religious institutions. A communique was eventually issued to religious leaders in those areas, but the bureau never received any feedback.

*I felt I should give my friend and colleague, Pastor Fred Anderson, an opportunity to review and comment on my literary endeavor. He wrote thus:*

*Arnie,*

*It does raise some interesting questions. Do angels and Satan ever take on a physical form and mingle with humans? There was a time when Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men." Peter, the Rock of the Church, undoubtedly, was not Satan, but Jesus saw Satan using Peter as a tool, so to speak. I must confess, sometimes I wonder about some of my flock sitting in the pews, whether Satan is using them as a tool. Sometimes, I wonder about myself, but then I know that Jesus was strong enough to command Satan and if we faithfully follow our Lord, Satan will not prevail over us and continue using us as a tool against the Lord.*

*On the flip side concerning good angels, Billy Graham once wrote about a missionary who had hostile natives bent on destroying the mission and killing his wife and him. They surrounded the mission, intent on burning it down, but then during the night the would-be killers left. About a year later, the chief of the hostile tribe converted to Christianity. The missionary later asked him why they*

*suddenly left that night and didn't continue the attack. The chief answered him and said they feared the hundreds of men with mighty swords who were guarding the mission. It had to be angels in physical form because the missionary had no armed guards at the mission.*

*Hard to grasp or explain sometimes, I believe God allows the spiritual beings to take on physical form when he needs them to. Of course, I doubt He gives them clandestine names like Angel 0024, but then who can be sure.*

*Fred*

## STRANGER THAN ...

Morgan Field has had a long and storied life. The oldest stadium in the majors, it is targeted every year by those baseball neophytes who care more about the financial end of matters than they do about the spiritual side of the game. I say spiritual because Morgan Field has taken on the aura of hallowed ground. Every year it puts up a valiant resistance to modernization.

As an example of the shortsightedness of these money gurus, let me cite attendance records. Since the last nail was set, this historic stadium has been sold out for every game ever played there. When asked to name any modern stadium to match that record, they offer lame excuses that are best left to the boardroom. Just because it only has a capacity of 10,000 fans, they feel like that's some kind of relevant argument.

Baseball history books are filled with stories about Morgan Field. Many of them are strange.

There is perhaps none stranger than the one we are going to visit today.

The Crows and the Blues often met with fireworks. Both teams obliterated their opponents with powerhouse hitting. The league lead in homers, runs, extra base hits, and team batting average vacillated back and forth between those two rivals. Fans frequently enjoyed games that totaled thirty runs or more when the two teams played each other.

The weather for the game we posthumously, so to speak, attended was hot and steamy. While the umpires suffered in that kind of temperature with their traditional all-black attire, the vendors in the stands easily dwarfed other stadiums' sales volume of hot dogs and ice-cold beer for a single game.

It is with complete astonishment that we re-tell the account of this game. Our tale begins in the tenth inning. After nine innings of regulation play, the score between the two titans stood at 0 to 0. Even more unbelievable remained the fact that neither team had garnished a single hit through those

first nine innings. Yes, it is true. Both starting pitchers went the full nine innings throwing no-hitters against the two top hitting teams in the league.

Leading off the tenth for the Blues was their big gun, Ingmar Johansenn. The Crows chose to let their starter, Jack Crawford, pitch another inning. As is often the case with power hitters such as Johansenn, they were free swingers and tended to strike out a lot. Crawford's combination of a blistering fastball, a deceptive changeup, and a wicked curve made Johansenn's walk back to the dugout a quick one.

Next up was Jake Shuster, no less a free swinger than Johansenn. Unfortunately for the Blues, Shuster's fate followed that of his predecessor in the lineup. I gotta tell you, Crawford still looked very strong out there. The next hitter tried something totally foreign to the slugging legacy of the Blues – a bunt. It may have been a case of sign stealing, we can't say for sure, but the Crows' third baseman, Eddie McCumber, was standing ten feet in on the grass. He threw out the attempted bunter easily.

The Crows then had a chance to end the affair with their big bats in the bottom of the tenth. The Blues also decided to let their starting pitcher, Max Smith, go another inning. The first Blues batter, Greg Accord, stretched the count to three balls and two strikes. Smith was determined not to let Accord get on base with a walk so he fired a heater that looked to be right over the heart of the plate. But the umpire called it a ball. As could be expected, the Blues manager and half the dugout engaged in a dramatic argument with the umpire that lasted for over ten minutes. The end result of the fiasco landed Accord on first base with a walk and the manager and half the dugout in the locker room.

The next batter for the Crows drilled a sharp grounder to the shortstop. A tailor-made double play opportunity went through the shortstop's legs into center field for an error and the runners advanced to second and third. The pitching coach for the Blues called the bullpen and slowly walked out to the mound. The conference on the hill lasted for as long as the home plate umpire would allow it. The coach then walked slowly back to the dugout.

They made the decision to intentionally walk the next slugger to set up a force play at home if necessary. Of course, the pitcher took as much time as possible between the four pitches needed to walk the batter.

With the base loaded, the pitching coach came back out to the mound and signaled for his ace reliever to take over.

John Bannister had the highest strikeout ratio per nine innings the league had ever known. He did not disappoint, for the first two batters he faced fell victim to that strikeout ratio.

The Crows manager then came out to speak to the home plate umpire. It was announced that Billy Hathaway would be a pinch hitter. Normally, it was not usually done in that manner, but it was later determined to be a psychological maneuver. Billy Hathaway had the lowest batting average of any player in the league, including pitchers. Why would the Crows manager decide to make such a move?



While Billy Hathaway occupied the bottom of the list in hits, he did lead the league in getting hit by pitches. He had more broken bones than all other teams combined.

Before Billy could step into the batter's box the umpire motioned for the field crew to come over. He instructed them to dress up the lines of the batter's box that Billy would be using. He wasn't going to give Billy an inch.

Billy stepped into the batter's box and nudged the new lime that marked how close he could stand to the plate. He had the incredible ability to lean way over the plate without losing his balance and falling down. Bannister wound up and threw a blazing fastball right at Billy's head. Well, not even Billy was so stupid as to let himself get hit in the head by one of Bannister's fastballs. Billy bailed out and went into all kinds of theatrics. The umpire finally told him to just get back into the batter's box.

Before Billy stepped back in, he knelt down and began to pray. The umpire wasn't quite sure

what to do. He knew Billy's reputation, but it just seemed disrespectful to interrupt a man while he was praying. Finally, Billy got back into the box, but he still leaned over as far as he could.

Bannister looked in to get the sign, but he kept shaking it off. The catcher called time and went out to the mound. Bannister felt he had another pitch to waste so he wanted to throw it at Billy's head again even though it would clearly be a ball. Billy leaned over so far that his head was in the opposite batter's box. The catcher just wanted him to throw a strike. They worked it out and the catcher headed back, but when he got back to his position Billy had moved to the other side to bat left-handed. The catcher went back out to the mound. After a lengthy discussion, the catcher headed back to home plate, but Billy had moved back to hit right-handed.

By this time Bannister was getting mad, so the catcher let him have his way. The pitcher wound up and fired a fastball right towards Billy's head again. But he made a slight miscalculation in his target. This time the ball was so far outside that

the catcher couldn't get to it. The runner on third dashed home and the game ended.

The Crows won the game 1 to 0 and nobody got a hit. Strange ... indeed.

Just another cog in the odd and storied history of Morgan Field. The sports editor of the local newspaper interviewed a lifetime season ticket holder coming out of the stadium and the fan said, "Modernization ... umph ... And lose all this?"

## BUFORD ON MAKING A CALL

*It's very difficult to get any volunteers to make personal calls to the home. I'm not totally sure why. Perhaps nobody wants to feel like they are invading another's privacy (although privacy from God is a little limited). Perhaps there is a lack of confidence in facing a certain unknown when that person answers the door. I don't know. I thought Buford might shed some insight on how to make a call.*

*Pastor Arnie*

For those of you fortunate to serve on a board that makes personal calls to the home, I offer a few points that I've experienced in my own service. These points can apply to many situations, including Stewardship calls, Elder calls, or Outreach calls. These selections also merit some consideration in the secular world.

Wisdom behooves you to make this call at another time, if ...

... the man who answers the door fills up so much of the doorway that you cannot see anything behind him, and he utters the words, “Bubba no talk today”.

... when you enter the house, you feel a certain strangeness about the 200 lb. German Shepherd that is meowing like a cat and the fuzzy little cat that is barking like a German Shepherd.

... upon entering the doorway, you hear someone yell “duck” and you don’t detect any audible quacking.

... when you enter the living room you notice an odd odor and one of the two little old ladies present says, “Oh, look, Martha, here comes another one. Why don’t you go get some more elderberry wine?”.

... a rather hastily clad gentleman answers the door and gives you \$100.00 to go away.

... there are two well-dressed people who answer the door and before you can say anything, they hand you a Watchtower pamphlet and call you by name.

## A TELLTALE GOAT

*Professor Jonathan Sperry, who also contributed a story about prayer life in the first volume, has provided this story he says has been around for a long time in university circles. Jonathan is a member here at St. Peter in Jack Valley/Profitville and our link to much of what goes on in the college sphere.*

*Pastor Fred Anderson*

Several hundred yards down a narrow path into Johnson's Woods sat a ramshackle house fit for neither man nor beast. Yet, that very house did provide cover to Wilbur Franklin and his only friend. Wilbur had spent a lifetime trying to find himself. Where he lost himself, no one seemed to know. While we could consider his continued search admirable in a sort of way, it never yielded any gainful employment. His only friend, Terence, offered no enlightenment toward his quest either. Of

course, that was understandable and readily explainable, with Terence being a goat and all.

One day Wilbur and Terence finally took a long-awaited trip into the city. Wilbur had never seen so many buildings that didn't leak. Taking it all in, Wilbur didn't notice when Terence did a little sightseeing on his own. Eventually realizing that his companion wasn't with him, he cast a worried look to the east and then to the west. About a block down the main street, Wilbur just caught sight of Terence's wiry tail slipping into the local bank.

Upon entering the bank, Wilbur stood in awe of the shiny marble floor and well-dressed bank employees. He observed that people approached the tellers with simple slips of paper and came away with cold, hard cash. Eventually he got up enough nerve to try it himself. He walked up to a teller and handed her a scrawled note saying that he wanted \$100.00 cash.

"Do you have an account here, sir?" asked the teller.

"No," answered Wilbur.



“I’m sorry, sir. I can’t give you any money if you don’t have an account here.”

Pondering his response, Wilbur finally came up with, “Does the goat have an account here?”

The teller gave him a disdainful look and said to the man standing behind Wilbur, “May I help you, sir?”

Wilbur’s long quest to find himself had taught him one thing—if at first you don’t succeed, try a different approach. After several hours of careful thought and observation, he decided they would have to rob the bank.

Two weeks later, the duo returned to the city to carry out their unscrupulous deed. Wilbur planned to throw a couple of sticks of dynamite down a vacant alley as a diversion. When the people would come out of the bank to see what was going on, he and his accomplice would discreetly slip into the bank and rob the tellers. Of course, he figured they must adequately disguise themselves so no one would take notice of them or be able to identify them. Wilbur strapped a pair of deer antlers

onto Terence's head and put a red ball on his nose. Wilbur dressed himself in a red suit with black boots. A huge pillow stuffed into his coat made him look rather fat and jolly. He completed his disguise by wearing a thick white beard.

Amazingly, Wilbur and Terence got away with several thousand dollars. The investigating lawmen had a hard time holding back their laughter as they took down the descriptions given by the tellers.

It took about two months for the story to filter down to Raddetz County. Sheriff Culhane happened to be talking with a state trooper out on Highway 31 when he heard the tale. A hunch led him several hundred yards down a narrow path into Johnson's Woods.

Sheriff Culhane spent about fifteen minutes shooting the breeze with old Wilbur, sort of feeling him out.

Then he flat out asked, "Wilbur, did you rob that bank in the city?"

“No, Sheriff,” answered Wilbur. “What bank?”

“Marston National Bank,” said the sheriff.

“No, Sheriff. Me and Terence don’t know nothin bout that bank and them thousands of dollars.”

“Okay, Wilbur. Now who’s Terence?”

“Terence is the only friend I got in this world. He’s my goat.”

About that time, Terence came out of the barn munching away on something, so Sheriff Culhane asked, “That goat?”

“Yes sir, that’s my goat,” replied Wilbur.

The sheriff continued to watch the goat as he went back into the barn. He asked Wilbur a few more questions and then noticed the goat come back out of the barn chewing on something green. Walking over to the goat, Sheriff Culhane took note of the fact that Terence’s meal looked an awful lot like a twenty-dollar bill. When the goat once again went back into the barn, the sheriff followed him.

Not surprisingly, the sheriff found Terence happily pulling twenty-dollar bills out of a Marston National Bank bag hidden behind some bales of hay. The lawman brought Wilbur into the barn and presented him with the evidence. When Wilbur saw that Terence had found the hidden bag, he couldn't help but start bawling.

The local news media considered the crime story front-page worthy, and it eventually made national headlines. The famous goat lawyer, J.W. Morse, heard about the case and offered his expertise as defense counsel for Terence. He determined that Terence's role in the caper could easily be defended. Wilbur, on the other hand, presented a challenge, but he ultimately convinced the court that he could represent both clients.

Morse weaved a brilliant strategy. He claimed that Terence the goat had been victimized by his human owner and thus could not have adequately avoided the affair. He also claimed that Wilbur had been victimized by Terence because of the goat's appetite for eating anything. Furthermore, lawyer Morse claimed that the Marston

National Bank and capitalistic society had victimized both Wilbur and Terence. The famous attorney used the words ‘whereas’, ‘hereby’, and ‘therefore’ so many times in his fiery orations that it frequently left the judge and the jury scratching their heads. Unfortunately for the two defendants, the jury found them guilty on all charges. The judge sentenced Wilbur to twenty years in prison and Terence to a petting zoo for life.

As fate would have it, the story does not end there, though. The famous goat lawyer, J.W. Morse, wrote a book about the trial and made a million dollars. He retired from the active practice of law and embarked on a teaching career at an institution of higher learning.

During his time at the unnamed university, Mr. Morse became instrumental in the formation of “GOATS.” (Graduates Organized Against Theological Sense). No protest demonstrations occurred on campus at the announcement of Moe the goat as group mascot. Except for the usual societal benefits associated with such an organization, GOATS’s singular purpose consisted of proving that God had

created the goat in his own image rather than man. They claimed that capitalists have victimized humans and thus have had their minds clouded to the truth. Only through membership in GOATS could they gain proper enlightenment.

After ten years of research, the members of GOATS felt prepared to present clearly documented evidence that would overwhelmingly prove their claim. On the eve of the extension of their federal research grant, the group decided that their predicted victory over the conventional religious “thought-police” merited a night out on the town in celebration. Filled with exhilaration and bluster, the group eventually wore out the night and returned to their research facility for a few hours of sleep before their big day. Upon entering the building, many of the group felt a heavy weight of an ominous nature, though they couldn’t sense anything specific. When they opened the doors of the laboratory, Moe the goat stood before them as a beacon of tragedy. Nature can deal cold hard blows to the enlightened mind as well as the lesser developed. The elevated symbol for their entire

existence had merely exercised a trait that nature bestowed on him. Moe liked to eat. Moe liked to eat anything within reach. In their rush to celebrate that evening, someone had forgotten to secure the latch to Moe's home. For the span of time that the group spent out on the town, Moe celebrated his freedom from the confines of his home by eating ten years' worth of paperwork—ten years of clearly documented evidence.

GOATS failed to meet even the minimum of criteria (though some say the decision to deny was very close) for extension of their federal research grant. Subsequently, the group made several attempts at trying to get relief money reserved for natural disasters, but were, in the end, unsuccessful. GOATS, the victims of the hand of nature, disbanded shortly thereafter when the membership decided that without taxpayer support, the theological point was simply not worth pursuing. Of course, at no point did it ever enter their enlightened minds that the Creator of nature was also the issuer of divine justice. The truth had come to light through the natural appetite of a telltale goat.

## THE GREETERS

*Responsible members of the church should always secure substitutes if they cannot perform their duties at a worship service. Occasionally, there arises an exception to that standard of etiquette.*

*Pastor Fred Anderson*

“Pastor, it’s for you,” said Alice Bonn, the church’s veteran secretary. “It’s Dominic Rastrelli.”

Taking the telephone from her, Pastor Anderson said, “Hello, Dominic. How are you?”

“Fine, Pastor,” answered Dominic. “I heard that the church needed additional greeters for the Sunday services. I would like to volunteer, and I wasn’t sure who I needed to talk to.”



“Actually, Russ Deaver is managing that, but I will certainly tell him you’d like to volunteer,” said Pastor Anderson. “Are you sure you’re up for it?”

“Yes, Pastor. I believe I can do it.”

“Well, I’m sure he’ll be glad to get you on the schedule.”

“Thanks, Pastor. I’ll see you Sunday. Goodbye.”

“Goodbye, Dominic.”

Pastor Anderson called Russ Deaver with the news of Dominic’s desire to serve in the capacity of a greeter. Russ called Dominic, thanked him, and scheduled him for the late service on the last Sunday of the upcoming month. When the sun rose on that particular Sunday, Dominic got ready by putting an extra spit-shine on his shoes. At 6:00 AM, he ate breakfast and went back to the bathroom. He took great pains to do everything quietly because he had weekend visitors and he didn’t want to disturb them. When he reached the bathroom, he felt very queasy. Within minutes, he could definitely

qualify as sick. A very conscientious man, Dominic immediately tried calling Russ Deaver, but no one answered the phone. He then tried Pastor Anderson's house, but the reverend had already left for the church. He told his wife, Angela, to get his nephew, Vincent, up out of bed and see if he would mind substituting for him, even though he had never been to St. Peter. Vincent, being a very conscientious man himself, agreed to his uncle's request.

Although St. Peter leaned to the cosmopolitan side, being in a larger city and all, most of the congregants outside the church that Sunday could not recall a big, black stretch limo with darkened windows ever pulling up to the overhang at the end of the sidewalk before. In a scene that some later referred to as a reenactment of Moses and the parting of the Red Sea, the crowd of people from the early service seemed to unnaturally make way for the three gentlemen dressed in dark suits and wearing dark sunglasses approaching the doors to the church. Following the brief instructions given by

Dominic at home, the trio positioned themselves just inside the doors.

The first victim, or rather attendee, to enter the door was Mary Anne Cole, a petite middle-aged divorcee.

“Good morning,” said Vincent. “I apologize for not knowing your name, but we’re just substituting for my uncle this morning. And who might you be?”

“Mary Anne,” said the woman.

“Well, Mary Anne, I’m Vinnie and these are my, uh ... associates, Sal and Bruno. We’re glad to have you today. Go right on in and kindly fill up the front pew first.”

As Mary Anne walked into the sanctuary, Sal followed her at a discreet distance. After Mary Anne seated herself in the back pew, Sal returned to the greeter’s position and whispered something into Vincent’s ear.

“She did?” said Vincent. “And I even said kindly, did I not?”

Sal and Bruno nodded in the affirmative.

Putting his arm out in a direction back towards the sanctuary, Vincent said succinctly, “Gentlemen.”

Sal and Bruno walked calmly into the sanctuary over to the pew where Mary Anne sat. They bodily picked her up and carried her up to the front pew, depositing her midway down the pew. They then returned to the greeter’s station. Vincent looked at them and they nodded in the affirmative.

The next individual to enter the narthex carried a clipboard and had a stopwatch hanging around his neck.

Firmly shaking the gentleman’s hand, Vincent said, “Good morning. I’m Vinnie, and this is Sal and Bruno. And you would be who ... or shall I say whom?” Vincent looked to Sal and Bruno for affirmation of his grammatical correction. They nodded in a positive direction.

“Mortimer Jones,” the man replied.

“Well, let me guess, Mort. May I call you Mort?” Mort nodded affirmatively. “Mort, I’ll lay odds on the fact that you be Chairman of the Board of Elders. Correct?” Mort nodded affirmatively. “Timing the reverend’s sermon, I bet.” Mort nodded affirmatively. “Mort, the clipboard and stopwatch are giveaways, but I still like it. Keep up the good work.” Mort left with a smile on his face.

Veronica Lovejoy walked into the narthex next. Vincent took note of the fact that four men seemed to grapple with each other over who would hold the door for her. To describe Veronica, one would have to say that the Lord must have spent a little extra time aligning her chromosomes. In a spontaneous act of Christian love, Vincent embraced Miss Lovejoy in a hug. Vincent’s educational background never covered the etiquette of hugging, so he was unaware of how long such an act of love should last. After a while, the gentleman felt rather warm; perhaps a response to the emotional power of expressing such Christian love; or perhaps a reflection of the fact that there were fifteen people backed up in line and with the door

being held open for all those people, the heat from the brutal summer sun was blowing in like a furnace on high. At any rate, Vincent finally relinquished his grip, or rather hug, on Miss Lovejoy.

“Oh, by the way, I’m Vinnie. And you are?”

“Veronica Lovejoy.”

“Yes, you are ... and these are my ... uh ... associates ... uh ... uh.” After Bruno leaned over and whispered something in his ear, Vincent said, “Oh, yeah. Sal and Bruno ... Sal and Bruno. Well, we’re very ... very glad you’re here today. Just have a seat anywhere your little heart desires.” Turning back to the people waiting in line, Vincent said, “It’s a tough job, but I’m willing to make the sacrifice.”

Before Vincent could begin greeting those in line again, a man approached him from the sanctuary hall. That man wore a clerical collar.

“Pastor Fred Anderson,” said the man.

“How’s it going, Reverend? My uncle Dominic fell ill this morning and he couldn’t make it. He

tried to get a hold of yous at home, but yous had already left for the church. So's not being able to reach anybody, he pressed us into service."

"Is Dominic going to be alright?" inquired Pastor Anderson.

"Yeah, yeah. Old Unc's gonna be alright. Meanwhile, we got things covered here. No worries, Reverend. By the way, my name is Vinnie, and these are my ... uh ... associates, Sal and Bruno."

But Sal and Bruno had abandoned their post next to Vincent. Apparently, something else had drawn their attention, maybe something of recent interest in the hall leading to the sanctuary.

"Sal, Bruno, get over here and greet the reverend properly."

"Uh, Vinnie, let me know if you need anything," said Pastor Anderson.

"Will do, Rev. Will do."

For the fourteen people remaining in line behind the reverend, Vinnie just gave a wholesale

greeting of, “Yeah, yeah. Welcome. We’s glad to have yous. Just have a seat.”

Shortly after that group entered the sanctuary, a paper airplane came flying over Vincent’s head. A young lad stepped out from the narthex hall and asked if anyone had seen an airplane flying around. Sal picked up the airplane and handed it to Vincent.

“What are yous doing, kid?” asked Vincent. “Don’t yous know not to do that inside the church? I’m gonna hold on to this, so’s just get on back into church.”

With there being a slight break in people coming in the door, Vincent took time to unfold the paper airplane. Noticing that the paper contained a great deal of writing, he began to read the words in front of him. Suddenly, he exclaimed, “Hey, this is the reverend’s sermon ... kids today. Where do they learn this stuff?”

Out of respect for the reverend, Vincent folded the paper back into the shape in which he found it—an airplane. After carefully studying the aerodynamic features of the item, he reached into



his pocket and pulled out a one-dollar bill. He held up the dollar bill in his left hand and his associates responded by pulling out one-dollar bills from their own pockets. Sal and Bruno then pulled out paper airplanes from their coat pockets and the three gentlemen engaged in a little aerodynamic contest. Since Sal's airplane maintained the longest flight, he collected the dollar bills from his two fellow contestants. Their scientific experiment came to an end when the next man entered the narthex.

“Good morning to yous,” said Vincent. “My name is Vinnie, and these are my ... uh ... associates, Sal and Bruno. And what name do yous go by?”

“I'm Bob,” the gentleman replied. “I'm just visiting today from Minnesota.”

“Well, Bob from Minnesota,” said Vincent. “We's glad yous took it upon youself to cross the threshold of spiritual enlightenment here at St. Paul's.” After Bruno leaned over and whispered something into his ear, Vincent said, “I stand corrected. I previously meant to say, St. Pe-ter ... at

any rate, Bob from Minnesota, what they usually do when new folks grace the halls of this fine establishment is, they give them these little yellow crosses to wear so's the rest of the good folks that are members here can give them the proper welcome that they deserve. My benevolent uncle informed me that lately the fine folks seem to be having a hard time seeing those little yellow crosses, so's today we're gonna do something a little different ... gentlemen."

Sal then reached behind a table and pulled out a large poster board. He handed it to Bruno, who hung it about the visitor's neck. Bob appeared to be exceedingly moved by the large target painted on the poster board now hanging about his neck, as he began visibly shaking.

"That's good, Bruno," said Vincent. "Yous got the bullseye right about belly button level."

Bob remained so visibly moved that he required Sal and Bruno's assistance in seating in the sanctuary.

With only two minutes to go before the service started, Pastor Anderson felt a need to check on the greeters in the narthex.

“Hi yous, Reverend,” said Vincent. “It appears as though we’ve done about as much damage as we can do today. Before we depart, I would like to put in a good word for my colleagues, Sal and Bruno. If the church ever has a need for assistance in the area of personal calls, don’t hesitate to give them a jingle. They can handle any type of call from evangelism to elders to stewardship. And their rates are reasonable. Only ten bucks a head ...” As he proudly looked back at his colleagues, Vincent continued, “Twenty bucks a leg, and five bucks an arm ... just kidding about that last part, Reverend. In my business, it never hurts to have a little levity. I have also found in my business that advice is worth its weight in gold. And I’m gonna give yous a little advice right now. To succeed in this evangelism business, yous gotta get through to the people in the pews. And it’s really very simple. There’s only two things to do. First, get them to read and follow the Manual that the Big Guy gave

them. Second, get them to ... care about their fellow human beings. It has been most fortuitous that my uncle could not get a hold of yous this morning. Arrivederci, Reverend.”

As he walked back into the sanctuary to get the service started, Pastor Anderson said to himself, “Perhaps I would have worded it differently, but who can argue with that?” He then pulled out his little memo pad and made a note to give Dominic Rastrelli his cell phone number.

## DOGVILLE II

With his pickup truck down for some repairs, Pastor Schmidt took his car out for a visit with a new family that had visited church last Sunday. He only had a moment to talk to them after the service, so he called them and arranged for the visit. The family had just purchased the old farm of Nellie Peterson, who finally had to move to a nursing home. Nellie owned and lived on the farm for 94 years, but her children had all moved away, and they had no interest in the farm. Pastor Schmidt figured if the new family could get Nellie's approval, then they must be alright.

As he drove down the driveway, he noted a new sign that read 'Dogville II'. Undoubtedly, they had a sense of humor, but the name did intrigue Pastor Schmidt. The car made that unmistakable sound of tires on a pea rock surface as he approached the home. Jason and Barbara Hewitt stood on the front porch waiting for Pastor Schmidt.

“Good morning, Pastor,” said Jason. “Did you have any trouble finding us?”

“No. When I heard that you had bought Nellie’s farm, I knew right where you were ... Good morning, Jason and Barbara.”

“Good morning, Pastor,” replied Barbara. “Come on into the house.”

“I have to ask,” said Pastor Schmidt. “Dogville II?”

“As opposed to Dogville I?” asked Jason.

“Either one,” answered Pastor Schmidt.

“Have you ever heard of ‘Puppy Gospel’?” asked Barbara.

“Puppy Gospel ... um, that sounds so familiar ... Oh, yeah, that’s from the family that raised guide and aid dogs. They named all their puppies after religious figures ... Wait, don’t tell me, you are ‘Puppy Gospel’.”

“Guilty as charged,” said Jason. “Dogville II is our new home now, where Dogville I was the original place that we just kind of outgrew.”

Trotting into the living room with the tail bashing everything remotely close to its path, a Golden Retriever promptly greeted Pastor Schmidt.

“Pastor Schmidt, meet Martin Luther,” said Jason.

Pastor Schmidt put his hand down and Martin Luther quickly put his paw into it.

“Well, it’s certainly good to meet you. I must confess, though, that you don’t look anything like what I expected.”

Not too far behind came a female Golden Retriever with the same friendly greeting as Martin Luther.

“Mother Teresa,” said Barbara. “These two pretty much get the run of the house.”

“Tell me, Pastor,” said James. “Are you offended by us naming dogs after religious figures?”

“I’m not, because I understand the reason, Jason. I’ve read about your work, and I commend it. I’m sorry I didn’t make the connection at first. I

imagine, though, that you have probably taken some flak.”

“That we have, Pastor,” said Jason. “When we first decided to do it, I wasn’t sure what to expect. With the response we’ve received, I don’t regret it at all, despite some who object. I have found it to be the best icebreaker I’ve ever experienced. People are always asking us about the names, and that is always an opening to talk about the Gospel. That’s how we eventually came up with ‘Puppy Gospel’. The combination of providing the dogs for assistance, people’s appreciation for what the dogs can do for them, and the ability to explain what we do and why we name the dogs as we do, has been a unique and rewarding mission.”

“How many dogs do you have?” asked Pastor Schmidt.

“Right now, we have, besides these two members of the family, eight that we’re training, two Golden Retrievers and six Labradors.”

“That reminds me of something my wife and I saw at a big mall upstate,” said Pastor Schmidt.



“We were sitting on a bench when we saw this family with aid dogs walking the mall. There were three dogs, one older one and two young puppy trainees. The older dog was being handled by the young daughter, and the two trainees were leading mom and dad. When the family stopped to talk to some people, the older dog, the veteran, as we called him, calmly laid down at the girl’s feet. The two young trainees literally collapsed onto the floor with panting tongues and heaving sides. The veteran knew how to pace himself, and the others hadn’t yet mastered that. We just thought it was one of those funny camera moments.”

“Yeah, we’ve seen a lot of that over the years,” said Barbara. “It has been interesting and fun to watch the development and different personalities of the dogs.”

After an hour of conversation, Pastor Schmidt said goodbye to the Hewitts, thanked them for allowing him to visit, and said he hoped to see them on Sunday.

Two days later, Pastor Schmidt had three emergencies come up with his flock. He had not slept in seventy-two hours, and eventually he crashed for a nap on the couch at home. At some point during his deep sleep, he had the following mishmash of spiritually dubious thoughts:

The town of Dog Haven was governed, of course, by dogs. Dogs also pastored the churches of Dog Haven. A German Shepherd led the Lutheran Church; an English Sheepdog the Episcopalians; a St. Bernard the Catholics, and so on.

Pastor Schmidt found himself sitting in a town council meeting being held in a saloon named ‘The Doghouse’. The town council voted unanimously to increase the line in the budget for fire hydrants.

Cats, of course, could not vote in Dog Haven, which did not sit well with the felines. They were planning a protest rally in the alley behind Tom’s Fish Sales. It simply wasn’t fair that the council always passed laws favoring dogs. In addition, since

cats could only hold jobs in the sanitation department, they planned a garbage strike. They came up with the slogan, ‘Let them clean up after themselves’.

The council also approved a statute that would speed up the permit process for bone vendors in the city. They also imposed a supplemental tax on kitty litter. The cats appointed Pastor Fred Anderson as their spokesperson. The Chamber of Commerce elected Pastor Schmidt as Dog Haven Visitor of the Year, and they suggested he contribute to the council’s pizza fund.

When Pastor Schmidt woke up from his nap, he felt relieved to have survived his visit to Dog Haven.

*What my thoughts about Dog Haven have to do with anything, I don’t know, but they just seemed appropriate to add to the story. Despite the mention of various dog breeds as leaders of the various denominations, I’ve yet to find any spiritual significance to it. Perhaps what we can glean from the*

*real 'Dogville II' is that we can be a messenger of the Gospel in whatever we do in life.*

*Pastor Arnold Schmidt*

# BASKETBALL'S NOT FAIR

*The St. Peter Lutheran High School basketball team recently competed in the state championship final game. Here is the account of that unusual match.*

Skip: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Skip Wallace reporting from the State High School Basketball Championships. Our broadcast this afternoon covers a match in Division 1A between the St. Peter Rams and the Dogleg Corners Hounds. Both teams have played their hearts out to get here, Bob.

Bob: Yes, they have, Skip. It should be an interesting game, because St. Peter and Dogleg Corners have radically different styles of play. At 6'5", Tommie Willis, the Rams center, is the tallest kid on the floor. So, I'm sure they'll be looking to feed

him a lot. The Hounds, though, rely predominantly on speed and the fast break.

Skip: Hang on, Bob. I'm getting word on something in my ear. What was that, Maggie?

Maggie: There has been a development regarding the Dogleg Corners team. A washed-out bridge has stranded the team and, apparently, they will not make it.

Skip: Have the officials said what they're going to do, Maggie?

Maggie: The Dogleg Corners team has invoked Rule 12, Paragraph 15.

Skip: Maggie, did you check the rulebook on that?

Maggie: Yeah, Skip. It's a never-used option in the high school rules that allows them to elect a proxy team to play for them in a case like this.

Skip: Okay. Bob, what do you think?

Bob: Well, Skip, it's a new one on me. But if that's what the rules say, then I guess it's a matter of deciding who they're going to pick as their proxy team. If I had to make a guess, I'd say the Hootville Owls. They're from the same conference and have a long history between them.

Skip: You could be right on that, Bob. Let's go down to Zach, who has the captain of the St. Peter team with him.

Zach: Thank you, Skip. Jimbo Walker, as captain of the Rams, how do you feel about this afternoon's game? Are you a little nervous?

Jimbo: Yes, sir, maybe a little.

Zach: Jimbo, are you aware of the situation with the Dogleg Corners team?

Jimbo: Yes, sir. They just told us.

Zach: How do you feel about it?

Jimbo: Well, sir, if it's in the rule books, then we just have to go along with it. We'll be playing our hardest, whoever we face on the court.

Zach: Well said, Jimbo. There is some speculation they might elect Hootville to replace them. How do you think you would match up against them?



Jimbo: I know they are like Dogleg Corners in size and style.

Zach: Okay ... I'm getting word that the team Dogleg Corners has chosen is coming into the building now. Bob and Skip, back up to you.

Skip: Thanks, Zach. Buddy, can you get a camera on them coming in the door?

Bob: Skip, isn't that ...?

Skip: Yes, it is, Bob. It's unusual to have someone of his stature at a Division 1 High School Championship game. Maybe he has a relative playing in another division or something.

Bob: Look, Skip. It looks like there are a bunch more NBA players coming in.

Skip: Yeah, Bob. There must be something going on that we don't know about. Buddy, I know it's fun to show the celebrities and that it is certainly unusual for all those NBA stars to be here for this small school game, but if you could give us a camera on the substitute team that will play St. Peter ... what?

Buddy: That is the substitute team.

Skip: Are you serious, Buddy?

Buddy: Yes, sir.

Bob: Can they do that, Skip?

Skip: Well, Bob, I see the referees huddled down on the court, I would say they have the same

question. Maggie, can you help us on this? What exactly does the rule say?

Maggie: It doesn't seem to put any restriction on whom they can elect.

Bob: I don't believe I've ever heard of anything like this.

Skip: Zach, are you still there?

Zach: Yeah, Skip. Can you believe this?

Skip: Zach, do you still have the captain of the Rams with you?

Zach: Just one second, Skip. I'll grab him ... Jimbo, have you gotten the word on who your opponent will be? Jimbo. Jimbo.

Jimbo: Yeah, uh ... uh ... they just told us.

Zach: How do you feel about playing against some of the best players in the NBA, Jimbo? Jimbo?

Jimbo: It's not fair. It's not fair.

Zach: Well, Skip, I would say that about sums it up. Back up to you.

Skip: Ladies and gentlemen, we are about to make broadcast history here this afternoon. It's only two minutes till tipoff. This match between St. Peter and ... who do we even call them? I guess since they are surrogate players and not from any specific team, we will have to call them the Dogleg Corners Hounds. Bob, what do you think?

Bob: My guess is this will either set a precedent for other states or this will cause the State Athletic Association to change the rules. I'd bet on the latter. Either way, it will certainly go down in the record books as a "Believe it or not".

Skip: Okay, sports fans, we're ready to go. There's the tip, and a Ram player has slipped around the larger Hounds player to come up with the ball. They're on a fast break and, wow, Bob, did you see that? They blew right by the Hounds defender for an easy layup. Wasn't that a shocker?

Bob: Actually, Skip, I think the Hounds player had just bent down to tie his shoelace when they went by.

Skip: Never-the-less, Bob, the Rams of St. Peter have put up the first score against the highly favored Dogleg Corners team.

Bob: Yes, ... ip ... th ... was a ... play.

Skip: Okay, t ... Ho ... have t ... pla ...

Rod: Bob? Skip? Can you hear me? ... We're sorry for the inconvenience, ladies and gentlemen, but we've apparently lost the signal from the basketball game. We will return to the game as soon as we restore the satellite connection ... While we work on those technical difficulties ... I believe ... we have alternate programming for you to enjoy ... Yes, please stay with us for this presentation of "Heidi".

(An hour later)

Rod: Rod Nance here with an update for you on the St. Peter and Dogleg Corners basketball championship game. I believe we have a visual. Yes, Skip, can you hear me?

Skip: Yes, I hear you, Rod.

Rod: I see it's halftime, Skip, and by the look of the scoreboard, it appears to be an unusually close game. The Hounds, highly favored, are only leading by four points in a low scoring contest, 12 to 8.

Skip: Actually, Rod, the scoreboard only has two digits for each team's score. The Hounds are ahead by a score of 112 to 8 at this halfway point.

Rod: I see. Well. What can you tell us about the game?

Skip: Rod, I'm going to give you to Zach, down on the court. Go ahead, Zach.

Zach: Yeah, guys, I have Jimbo Walker, the captain of the St. Peter Rams here with me. Jimbo, what

can you tell us about this first half from a player's perspective?

Jimbo: It's not fair. It's not fair.

Zach: Jimbo, what do you think the coach will tell you to do differently in the second half?

Jimbo: It's not fair. It's not fair.

Zach: Well, Skip, that about sums it up down here.  
B ... k ... o yo ...

Rod: Ladies and gentlemen, I apologize once again for the loss of our signal. Please continue enjoying our special broadcast of "Heidi" while we work on the problem.

(An hour later)



Rod: Skip, can you hear us?

Skip: Yeah, Rod, I hear you.

Rod: I see the game's over. What was the final score?

Skip: The final today was Dogleg Corners Hounds 325 and St. Peter Rams 8.

Rod: A tough loss for the Rams, Skip.

Skip: Yes, it was, Rod ... Zach, are you there?

Zach: Yeah, Skip. I have Jimbo Walker, captain of the Rams, here. Jimbo, any closing thoughts on the effort today?

Jimbo: It's not fair. It's not fair.

Zach: Back to you, Skip.

Skip: Buddy, did we get an audio on the Rams coach when they huddled up before heading off the court?

Buddy: Yeah, we got it, Skip, but I don't have access to it right now.

Skip: Okay, can you at least summarize it for us quickly?

Buddy: "But many that are first will be last, and the last first."

Skip: Kind of sounds like something Biblical, doesn't it, Bob? ... What was that, Maggie?

Maggie: It is something Biblical.

Skip: That about wraps it up. Back to you, Rod.

## STRIKE THREE

*The Fellowship Group at St. Peter invited the Fellowship Group at St. John to join them in a trip upstate to take in a professional baseball game. Those in attendance at the game were witnesses to one of the most unusual moments in the vast garden of baseball lore. A hot, humid afternoon in the middle of the season; a game between the two cellar dwellers of their respective divisions; a meager crowd of five hundred dedicated fans; a pitcher known for doctoring the ball in the most creative ways; a batter known for frequent wild excuses to explain his lackluster hitting; an umpire that actually wore glasses—all of these elements form the background for this tale.*

Our window into this unusual moment begins with the introduction of the first batter in the top of the sixth inning.

Bob: Stepping up to the plate for the Redbirds here in the top of the sixth is Andre Smith. He grounded out in the third. So, how do you think Johanson will pitch him now, Skip?

Skip: Bob, I think he'll probably stay with the hard stuff, but you never know with Johanson. He always seems to come up with something controversial, and there has been a little colorful individual rivalry between Johanson and Smith.

Bob: Let's ask Doug in the control room if we still have the catcher, Mott, miked up. What about it, Doug?

Doug: It's a go, Bob.

Bob: Good. We should be able to hear any comments made at the plate then. Okay, Johanson winds, and here's the first pitch. Strike one.

Skip: Bob, Smith looked a little bewildered at that first pitch. He's stepping out of the box and appears to be asking something. Can we get the audio on that, Doug?

Smith: Man, I didn't even see that pitch. What kind of pitch was it?

Mott: Curveball.

Smith: Curveball?

Ump: Yes, curveball ... you know, life's a lot like a curveball. Things seem to go along straightforward and easy, and then life throws you something you weren't expecting. If you want to succeed, you really have to learn how to hit those curves.

Bob: Okay, here's Johanson's second pitch.

Ump: Ball one.

Smith: Well, at least it wasn't another strike, but I didn't see that one either. What was it?

Mott: Forkball.

Smith: Forkball?

Ump: Yes, forkball ... you know, life's a lot like a forkball, too. You think you're in a groove and then you find yourself at a fork just like the ball that's wedged between two fingers. If the wrong finger or path dominates the spin, you could lose control.

Bob: Johanson winds and fires his third pitch.

Ump: Ball two.

Smith: Okay ... what kind of pitch was that?

Mott: Slider.

Smith: Slider?

Ump: Yes, slider ... you know, life's a lot like a slider, as well. Sometimes there are things that we want so badly that always seem to slide just out of reach. Perhaps those are the times that you need to rethink just what it is you're going after.

Bob: Okay, Johanson's ready to deliver his next pitch, Skip.

Skip: Look at the catcher, Bob. He doesn't even have his glove on yet. This is incredible. Mott is cleaning his nails, and the pitch is on the way.

The batter, seeing the pitcher wind up, swung blindly, hoping to hit something. Coming up empty, he noticed the catcher was still cleaning his nails. He swung again, hoping to hit something. Seeing the catcher still working on his nails, Smith swung ten more times. Tired, he looked back at the

catcher, who after pausing for a few more seconds, finally put on his glove.

Ump: Strike two.

The batter stood with his mouth open and looked at the catcher.

Mott: Changeup.

Smith: Changeup?

Ump: Yes, changeup ... you know, my friend, life's a lot like a changeup. We so often get wrapped up in the fast lane that when things don't move as fast as we want, we get anxious about our time. Can't say enough about that word 'patience', can we?

Bob: Johanson's winding up for his next pitch.

Smith stood with his bat on his shoulder and turned to watch the catcher dancing all around, flitting from one side of the plate to the other, finally smothering the ball on the ground.

Ump: Ball three.

Smith: What?

Mott: Knuckleball.



The batter held out his arm and pointed toward the umpire.

Ump: Yes, knuckleball ... you know, now that I think about it, life's a lot like a knuckleball. Sometimes we just seem to float around out there, never committing to any path in the journey.

Bob: The count on Smith is full. I wonder what Johanson has in store. I know he doesn't want to give him a free pass. There's the windup and the pitch.

Ump: Steee ... erike three.

Bob: He blew that fastball right by Smith, Skip.

Skip: Yeah, Bob, he still had plenty left on that heater.

Mott: I knew you'd never catch up to the heater.

Smith: Heater?

Ump: Yes, fastball.

Smith: Wait a minute. How could I be out? I mean, I never saw any of those pitches. I don't understand.

Ump: Didn't you get a manual explaining the rules of the game when you came into this league?

Smith: Yes.

Ump: Did you read it?

Smith: Well, not all of it. I mean, I thought I knew how to play the game.

Ump: You should have read the book.

At that very moment the skies opened up with a deluge, forcing the umpires to call the game. As the rest of the players scrambled for the dugouts, Smith remained at home plate with a lost look in his eyes.

Smith: Wait. Don't leave me, guys. Don't I get another chance? Somebody should have told me what all was in the book. I don't want to be ... alone.

Were the drops coming off Smith's cheeks tears or merely the rain? No one really asked that question. Smith never played another game after that day. The season went on with the Redbirds finishing last. There are a few fans who claim they can hear the word 'alone' coming from the dugout at

the start of spring training every year. Of course, it's probably just the wind. And yet ... we can't really see the wind. Yeah, maybe life's a lot like baseball.

# THE UNFLAPPABLE MAYOR JAY BLUE

For a politician, the mayor would have lengthy periods where he spoke little. His assistant, Rudy Casper, and his political advisor, T.D. Hansen, often felt a creepy ambiance in the office when the mayor went into those quiet spells.

Suddenly, Mayor Blue stood up, slipped his hands into his gray vest, and began to give a lengthy speech on the conditions of his fair city. One might think it would contain ninety per cent blarney and ten percent facts, but it was quite serious. In fact, when the mayor got up to speak, most of his speeches were quite rational and filled with good common sense. He never put down an opponent, and he welcomed the citizenry into his office at any time. Sometimes, though, when his staff looked at him when he spoke, they had to rein in a smile. With his hair slicked back into a little ridge, a long nose that almost looked more like a beak, his gray vest, and his favorite blue coat, Mayor Jay

Blue looked more like a Blue Jay talking on a stump.

But for all his politeness, courtesy, and dapper dress, there were times those in the room thought him a little mad. In the middle of his rational speeches, he would begin moving his arms as if he were a bird getting ready to fly. In today's speech, he began with ten common sense ideas to improve the city and then posed a seemingly nonsensical question that was incongruous with the rest of what he was saying. "How do you win without winning?"

His staff looked at each other in bewilderment trying to figure out how that question came up.

"What do you mean, Mr. Mayor?" said Rudy, his assistant.

"It is quite simple," said the mayor. "How do you win without winning?"

"I suppose you could cheat," posed T.D.

“No. no, no,” said the mayor. “It must always be on the up and up.”

Before anyone could say anything else, the mayor was back to his logical observations about the city and its governance.

Six months later, the city held a town hall debate between Mayor Blue and his challenger for mayor, Terrance McGraw. Both men were decent, and well-behaved debaters. They kept on subject, did not disparage their opponent, and, though they had opposing views on most everything, never interrupted each other. There was one moment, though, when the group gathered in the hall fell completely silent. Right in the middle of a discussion on traffic safety, the unflappable Mayor Jay Blue, moved his arms at his side like he was getting ready to fly. He boldly posed a question, “How do you win without winning?” Not waiting for an answer from the silent crowd, he continued with his suggestions for improving traffic safety.

Election day finally came around and the local newspaper and television station both predicted

a very close race. As the day neared end, Terrance McGraw led in nine of the ten precincts by a slim margin of one hundred votes total. The tenth precinct was Mayor Blue's home precinct and where the large, extended Blue family lived. So, all the experts had no doubt that the mayor would carry that precinct.

Henry Wallace, the chairman of the tenth precinct electoral board, delivered the morning's ballot to election headquarters as usual. Delivering the afternoon ballots would be his last official function as chairman for he was moving away the next day. He said his goodbyes and headed out the door.

The scene at election headquarters was chaotic. When they made the final ballot tally, it showed Mayor Jay Blue to be the winner by two hundred votes due to his three hundred-vote margin from the tenth precinct. Terrance McGraw conceded graciously, and Mayor Blue went on to serve another two years.

Angie Watkins got off work as a waitress from the Bluebird Roadhouse on Friday night at

nine o'clock. A dark, stormy evening made her trip home treacherous, but she was determined. At midnight, her parents called the police department and reported that their daughter had not made it home and they were worried something might have happened. A unit was dispatched along the route that Angie would have taken, but the driving rain made it difficult to see anything other than the road ahead. The police promised to send more cars out when the weather cleared.

The morning revealed nothing on the highway, but one volunteer noticed a torn-up section of grass heading right for the lake. They brought divers out to search the water. Sadly, they found Angie's car submerged with her inside.

But they also found something else a short distance from Angie's car in the lake. Another car and driver had suffered the same fate as Angie. When they pulled it from the water, they traced the license plate and found the owner to be Henry Wallace. The man inside had all the identification belonging to Henry Wallace. On the seat next to Henry, the police found a water-tight ammunition



box. Inside the box, they discovered a sealed plastic bag containing the afternoon ballots from Precinct 10.

Apparently, during the chaos at election headquarters on election night, nobody noticed that they didn't have the afternoon ballots from Precinct 10. After unsealing the bag, they began counting the ballots. When they were done, they announced that Terrance McGraw had four hundred more votes than Mayor Jay Blue. Terrance McGraw had won the election. But that was two years ago, and Mayor Blue had served the two years he won. The question Mayor Blue had posed no longer seemed nonsensical – “How do you win without winning?”

## BUFORD ON AUTO REPAIR

*The Men's Group at St. John came to me a few months ago asking for ideas for topics for their monthly meeting. Several in the group felt things were getting a little stale. I suggested they get together with the Men's Group of St. Peter and invite a notable speaker on a subject of interest to men.*

*By now, most of you know of Buford Douglas and his ability to light a fire to the intellect. I include the highlights of his address below. While his speech was noteworthy, I'm not sure the presentation was overly spiritual; however, it reinforces the point that we are a full-service church.*

*Pastor Schmidt*

You'll know you're in trouble if ...

... the service check-in attendant at the repair shop consistently refers to your vehicle as the “patient”.

... the mechanic working on your car has permanently stitched anywhere on his uniform the words “Mr. Bad Wrench”.

... you only want a simple oil change and the mechanic suggests you save the oil and change your car.

... when the mechanic opens the hood of your vehicle, he hollers out, “Holy Smoke” and all seventeen members of the staff run over to have a look.

... as you’re explaining what is wrong with your car, the person to whom you’re talking stands with his mouth open for over thirty seconds.

... the service manager tells you the whisk broom in your wheel cover is old.

... when you first drive into the service area, everyone stops what they’re doing, and they start laughing uncontrollably.

... the cashier asks you for three credit cards and your credit limit on each one.

... when you call to see if your car is ready, they ask you to fax them a copy of your last will and testament.

... the service advisor asks if you have a preferred religion and what your pastor's name is.