

Invitation to Appreciative Inquiry

By Neil Ward

February 17, 2008

Good morning, my name is Neil ... I am here to urge your participation in next Saturday's Appreciative Inquiry process. My wife, Barbara, and I have been attending Church of the Beatitudes for over 30 years. Barbara was a longtime member of the Church's Wedding Guild and our three children were married here. Barbara's 102 year-old mother resides at the Beatitudes Campus of Care, my father's funeral was held in this sanctuary, and ten years ago this church honored me by electing me president of the congregation. *As my oldest granddaughter might say: "That is sooo last century!"*

Our congregation has experienced significant change in the past decade; but Barbara and I continue to return to this church for our own personal and spiritual reasons. We have a columbarium niche reserved in the church's memorial garden. We know the church was here before us and are confident it will be here after us with just a little effort on our part. *I believe most of us are pilgrims on a path of learning how to do good deeds while doing well in our larger society.* We can all use the help of friends along that path. The word *religion* derives from the Latin meaning "*to link or to bind together.*". The sociologist, Emile Durkheim, defined religion as follows:

"A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church."

Please note that he did **not** say "a unified set of personal opinions!" Again, we represent a "moral community called a church" – but a congregation composed of intelligent individuals with personalized histories and unique experiences.

Our moral community is very diverse. In our congregation we have liberals and conservatives. Liberals are experts in thinking about issues of victimization, equality, rights of individuals – particularly those of minorities and nonconformists. Conservatives are experts in thinking about tradition, loyalty to the group, respect for authority, and sacredness. When one side overwhelms the other, the results are likely to be ugly. A society without liberals would be harsh and oppressive to many individuals. A society without conservatives would lose many valuable social structures, traditions, and comforting rituals. **A good place to look for balanced wisdom, therefore, is where we might least expect to find it: in the minds of our opposites.** I'm fond of the poet William Blake's observation in 1790 that "*without contraries, there is no progression.*"

The Reverend Doctor Larry Peers of the Alban Institute will be here next Sat, Feb 23rd, and again in April. He will help us identify what is important from our personal experiences and our church history – lessons we might want to carry forward into our future as a congregation and moral community. Please come and participate in this Appreciative Inquiry – listen to others and share your side of the story, whatever it may be. We have the opportunity to shape our church's future. Linked together we can draw on wisdom that is balanced and choose a direction for the Church of the Beatitudes that will lead us to understanding, a sense of direction and purpose – perhaps even to happiness as a moral community. Thank you.