Over the years, I have been associated with many churches. One served great food. Really, great food. Another church was so full of legalists, that you always felt that the church had one of those menacing lights over your head, that were always present in detective movies, when the good cop would interrogate a guy sitting under the harsh glare of that light.

Another church was so quiet, that it felt more like a funeral home, than a place with "happy people." No laughter was ever allowed, for they had the idea, that laughter was terrible. As a matter of fact, now that I think of it, I have experienced more laughter in a funeral home, than I did at that church. Yet another church I pastored, was in my opinion a great entertainment center, full of wonderful music and it had a lot in common
with a singles bar, especially if you were a good looking person, where people could hook-up, but it was housed in a church. Funny how a church can become a singles bar, or a place just for "members."

One thing I have come to realize when I read the stories concerning Jesus Christ and his relationship with the religious power brokers of his day, he was never at home in their "clubs."

I am not sure what kind of church or group or faith community you are a part of, but I want to share a page or two from a book I read a year or so ago, called "Basic Types of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Resources For The Ministry of Healing & Growth" Written by Howard Clinebell.

The short essay or parable, was written by Theodore Wedel, an Episcopal priest in 1953. 1953 was a long time ago, but I think this parable is something I always try to keep in my mind, as I seek to make church a place for all people, and I mean, all people. Even the ones, “the church” says need to change their behavior, before they become a "member." I'll leave it at that before I really get into trouble.

When I first read this parable, it hit me right between my good and glass eye. It woke me up and if you are sleep walking in your church, it may help you to wake up also.

Oh, by the way, we are having communion tomorrow at a church i pastor here in New York City, and you are welcome to join us as we focus on Jesus Christ, his ministry, and seek to be inspired out of our pew and into the streets to help others. Our service will begin at 11:30 a.m. with great music and a communion service, based on the way Jesus Christ once shared it with his disciples in the upper room. It even includes a service of humility, where we wash one another's feet. You know it is good to bend down and be a servant every once and a while. Getting on our knees give us a good perspective on what ministry is all about.

We are meeting at Historic Manhattan Seventh-day Adventist Church, 232 West 11th Street, NYC, just 1.5 blocks west of SEventh Ave. South, in the West Village. Come as you are. Tonight we are having a great guest speaker at Cafe Reach, a ministry sponsored by REACH-NYC. You can scroll down to learn more about that gathering.

God bless you with peace and a calm spirit.

Best regards - Tony Romeo

Here is the parable: A Crude Lifesaving Station by Theodore Wedel

On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur there was once a crude lifesaving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea, and with no thought for themselves went out day and night tirelessly searching for the lost. Many lives were saved by this wonderful little station, so that it became famous. Some of those who were saved, and various others in the surrounding area, wanted to become associated with the station and give of their time and their money and their effort for the support of its work. New boats were bought and new crews were trained. The little lifesaving station grew.

Now some of the members of the lifesaving station became unhappy, in time, however, because the building was so crude and so poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable, suitable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea. And so they replaced the emergency cots with beds, and they put better furniture in the now enlarged building, so that now the lifesaving station actually became a popular gathering place for its members. They took great care in decorating it beautifully and furnishing it exquisitely, for they found new uses for it in the context of a sort of club. But fewer members were now interested in going to sea on lifesaving missions, and so they hired lifesaving crews to do this work on their behalf, and in
their stead. Now, don't misunderstand, the lifesaving motif still prevailed in the club's decoration and symbols - there was a liturgical lifeboat (symbolic rather than fully functional) in the room where the club initiations were held, for example - so the changes did not necessarily mean that the original purposes were totally lost.

About this time a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boatloads of cold and wet, half-drowned people. They were dirty people and they were sick people, some of them with black skin, some with yellow skin. The beautiful new club, as you might imagine, was thrown into chaos, so that the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside the club where these recent victims of shipwreck could be cleaned up before coming inside the main clubhouse.

At the very next meeting, there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's lifesaving activities for being so unpleasant, as well as for being a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Some members insisted upon lifesaving as their primary purpose, pointing out that, indeed, they were still called a lifesaving station. But these few were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save the lives of all the various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own lifesaving station down the coast. And so, they did just that. Now as the years passed, the new station down the coast came to experience the very same changes that had occurred in the older, initial station. It evolved into a club, and yet another lifesaving station had to be founded to restore the original purpose.

Well, history continued to repeat itself, so that if you visit that seacoast today, you will find a great number of exclusive clubs along that shore. Shipwrecks are frequent in those waters, but most of the people drown!

Howard Clinebell continues:

In this striking parable Theodore Wedel depicts the perennial danger confronting the church - irrelevance. The peril is especially acute in periods when the church is outwardly successful. The parable highlights the fact that the only relevance that really matters is relevance to the deep needs of persons - relevance to the places in their lives where they hurt and hope, curse and pray, hunger for meaning and thirst for significant relationships. Pastoral care and counseling are valuable instruments by which the church stays relevant to human need. They are ways of translating the good news into the "language of relationships," as Reuel Howe expresses it - a language which allows the minister to communicate a healing message to persons struggling in alienation and despair. Pastoral counseling is an essential means by which the church is helped to be a lifesaving station and not a club, a hospital and a garden of spiritual life - not a museum.

Caring...can transform the interpersonal climate of a congregation, making a church a place where wholeness is nurtured in persons throughout the life cycle.

...a renewal of a church's vitality by providing instruments for the renewal of person's, relationships, and group. By reducing the crippledness of our ability to give and receive love...

...help us to be the church - the community in which God's love becomes an experienced reality in relationships.

...an instrument of continuing renewal through reconciliation, helping to heal our estrangement from ourselves and our families, from other church members, form those outside the church, and from an enlivening, growing relationship with God. It can create windows of new awareness, restoring sight to eyes previously blinded by our anxious, guilt-ridden self-concern - to the beauty, tragedy, wonder, and pain all about us.

p. 14 / Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling
Dear Wendy,

TONIGHT,
October 18 / 7:30 PM
Special Guest Speaker at
Cafe Reach:
Timothy R. Jennings, M.D.
A Dynamic Seminar on
"The Aging Brain."

Join us this, Friday, October 18, 2013 to hear our special guest, Timothy R. Jennings, M.D.*, share new insights on his topic "The Aging Brain." What happens to the brain as we age? Are we doomed to lose our memories and become senile? Are there choices we can make to protect our brain from the ravages of time? Come discover science based interventions which will protect your brain and diminish your risk of dementia. The younger you are, the more you need to listen to these findings. The older you are, the more you want to preserve your brain function.

Objectives:

1. Identify risk factors that accelerate the aging process.
2. Differentiate normal aging from pathological aging (dementia).
3. Identify Biblical principles that slow the aging process and promote healthy brain function.

Arrive at Cafe Reach, at 7:00 p.m., and enjoy some simple food, and delicious thinking.
We are meeting in an intimate space at Historic Manhattan Seventh-day Adventist Church, 232 West 11th Street, NYC. Just 1.5 blocks west of 7th Ave. South in the West Village.

You will not want to miss this outstanding speaker and presentation.

Here is more information about our guest speaker, Timothy R. Jennings, M.D.:

Timothy R. Jennings, M.D. has been in private practice since 1997 as a Christian psychiatrist and certified master psychopharmacologist. Dr. Jennings is board
certified in psychiatry by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology. He is a specialist in Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation, a drug-free treatment for depression.

He is a lecturer, international speaker, and author of the widely respected books The God Shaped Brain and Could It Be This Simple? A Biblical Model for Healing the Mind. Dr. Jennings' dynamic, engaging presentations are filled with moving real life stories, practical Biblical wisdom, and powerful life-changing insights.

Dr. Jennings obtained his M.D. degree in 1990 from the University Of Tennessee College Of Medicine in Memphis, Tennessee, completed psychiatric residency at D.D. Eisenhower Army Medical Center in Augusta, Georgia, and has served as the Division Psychiatrist for the 24th and 3rd Infantry Divisions. He has also served as the USA Surgeon General's delegate to the American Medical Association's Resident section and as the Chief of Psychiatry at Winn Army Community Hospital at Fort Stewart, GA. Dr. Jennings is board certified in psychiatry by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology, was named one of America’s Top Psychiatrists in 2008, 2010 and 2011 by the Consumer Research Institute of America in Washington, D.C., and is licensed to practice medicine in Tennessee, Georgia, and Washington.

He is also an international speaker and conducts seminars on a wide range of spiritual, medical, and psychiatric topics, teaches a weekly Bible study class, and lives in Tennessee with his wife, Christie.

Invite your friends and join us for a dynamic discussion. We are all set to start at 7:00 p.m., with the seminar starting at 7:30 p.m. Cafe Reach is located in the fabulous West Village, so bring a friend or a bunch of friends and start thinking out of the box and out of the pew.

Cafe Reach is sponsored by REACH-NYC.

May God bless you with peace and a calm spirit, and a mind that thinks!

Best regards -- Tony Romeo / REACH-NYC
Donations to REACH-NYC help us in our efforts to reach out to the people of New York City. REACH-NYC is recognized by the IRS as a tax-exempt corporation, and all contributions are fully tax-deductible.*

Contributions can also be made by check payable to:
"REACH-NYC"
and mailed to:
REACH-NYC, P.O. Box 651, North Salem, NY 10560

Thank you for helping the REACH-NYC ministry!

*A receipt will be sent recognizing all contributions for tax purposes.
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