



# *The Methodist Messenger*

MAY 2017

Whiteville United Methodist Church

Sunday School - 9:00 a.m.

Sunday Worship Service - 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday Communion Service - 6:30 p.m.



## RABBI JONATHAN SACKS AT DUKE

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks is a name to remember. When Rabbi Sacks speaks, people listen. Or we should.

Rabbi Sacks was the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth from 1991 until 2013. He has written more than twenty-five books. His book Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence (Schocken Books, 2015) continues to draw much attention -- because of its urgent, continuing relevance. He was awarded the Templeton Prize in religion last year (which includes a prize of more than one million dollars), and presently he is a member of the British House of Lords. It is truthful, not presumptuous, to report that Rabbi Sacks is a religious leader on the world's stage.

At the end of March, Rabbi Sacks was hosted by Duke University through the generosity of The Morris B. Abram Distinguished Residency program. While at Duke, he spoke at two public gatherings. Marsha and I enjoyed attending both events.

What follows are some disorganized notes and opinionated observations on the events we attended.

1. The first event took place late in the afternoon of March 30th in the Penn Pavilion. Entitled "Civility and Difference: An Interreligious Dialogue," it was a conversation between Rabbi Sacks and Imam Abdullah Antepli, who is Duke University's first Muslim chaplain. Dr. Ellen F. Davis, the Amos Ragan Kearns Professor of Bible and Practical Theology at Duke Divinity School, was the moderator of this dialogue. As a lay Episcopalian, Dr. Davis played the traditional role of a "mainline" Protestant in the American public square: she was genteel, used plenty of humor, and yet seemed in control. With wisdom, she nudged the wide-ranging conversation forward.
2. During the introduction of Rabbi Sacks, the phrase "true pluralism" was used. It was suggested that Rabbi Sacks advances "true pluralism" -- as opposed to the other kind. That is, the rabbi wants religious communities in the United States to preserve the integrity of their faith when they enter the public arena and when they are in dialogue with each other. Furthermore, the rabbi claims there is a "dignity of difference." Admitting and engaging those differences is a difficult, but essential task. Rabbi Sacks does not think that all religions fundamentally believe the same things, nor does he assume that the details and particularities of the various religions are just ornaments that do not really make distinctive claims. He is intellectually honest.
3. Rabbi Sacks always practiced respect toward those he addressed. A world-class theologian who is always the smartest guy in the room, he was respectful of all people -- even when he made strong and subtle arguments against what others claim.
4. He noted that "the word of God of all time [is] for this time," and that honestly proposing that word is risky business.
5. He wrote Not in God's Name as "a religious protest against religious violence." After all, in the wake of Islamist terrorism around the world, many books had already been written as "secular protests against religious violence."
6. The rabbi's humor was on full display. He reported that God had chosen Muslims, because he needed a people to obey him. And God had chosen Jews, because he needed a people to argue with him. The heavily Jewish audience laughed heartily in appreciation.  
Rabbi Sacks went on to make a striking point. He stated that Christianity had touched more people than any other movement in history -- in large part because the Church often reached out to the poor and the forgotten.
7. Rabbi Sacks believes that genuine faith in God overrides fear, gives hope, and can transform people into agents of hope. The Hebrew Bible, he explained, even commands help for the enemy. Why? Because the enemy is created in the image of God (Genesis 1).
8. The next afternoon, at the Sanford School of Public Policy, across the street from Duke Law School, Rabbi Sacks outlined the main themes of his book Not in God's Name. He stood on a platform on the main floor of the Fleishman Commons, which opens

upward (like an atrium) to several, exposed floors where couches and chairs were arranged. From the top floor, from what could be called balcony seating, looking down on the speaker, Marsha and I heard the rabbi's presentation.

9. Dr. Richard Brodhead, the current President of Duke University, introduced Rabbi Sacks. Observing that some people are conflict averse and some are conflict seeking, and recalling that the rabbi had last visited Duke in 2007 during the Duke lacrosse scandal, Dr. Brodhead went on to declare that Rabbi Sacks always calls people to their highest. True.

10. The rabbi spoke of the "metanarratives" -- or stories of the world that attempt to explain why things happen in history -- that are now collapsing.

One such story was the alleged secularization of society -- or taking religion out of public life. This story has often been proposed as a way to make the modern world a better place. However, societal secularization has often led to societal disaster.

Religious communities were supposed to get in line with secularization, and all would be well. But religion in public is not going away.

With the implosion of the Soviet Union and communism, "the end of history" (Francis Fukuyama, 1992) was upon us. But historical disruptions, such as terrorism, have brought back history with a vengeance.

Then globalization -- with all of its supposed technological, administrative, economic, and political advantages -- was going to promote the progress of mankind. But along came BREXIT and other such protests.

While these grand stories are stumbling, Rabbi Sacks pointed hopefully to the main Jewish story of the Exodus, of journey, which moves forward at times and backward at other times, all under God's leading and providence. This journey depends upon its travelers having hope.

11. Rabbi Sacks spoke of two challenges of a covenant divinely established: God's covenant with a particular people to form a traditional, faithful community; and God's covenant with a particular people to have them serve all in the world. Lacking any sense of covenant, the modern consumer society has allowed people to acquire many things, but it has left many without strong purpose and without enduring happiness.

12. How should Israel and the Palestinians move forward? According to the rabbi, Jews need to understand deeply the suffering of the Palestinians, and Palestinians need to understand deeply the suffering of the Jews. And religion must always participate at the negotiating table of the politicians.

13. Whenever various groups gather, for a common purpose, hope and joy are experienced by all involved.

14. Rabbi Sacks was asked about political correctness

today. In a vigorous, heartfelt response, he lamented that political correctness has turned sensitivity about language into censorship of viewpoints. He recalled that as a young man he, a very religious Jew, had studied philosophy with "the brightest man in England," who was a convinced (believing?) atheist. His challenge, as a student, was great. The arguments, with his professor, were tough. But over time, the future rabbi learned to give reasons, for what the Jewish faith knows to be true, to his atheistic philosophical teacher. That "safe space," which was actually a very difficult space for young Jonathan, taught the man who would become a rabbi that he could indeed face any intellectual challenge. The rigors of that "safe space" made Rabbi Sacks confident enough to take on, well, the world. Authentic political correctness is about politeness and engagement -- not a politeness that aggressively puts a stop to engagement and silences others.

15. It is interesting and disturbing to note that Raleigh's News & Observer and Durban's Herald-Sun did not cover Rabbi Sachs' presentations. Only Duke's spunky Chronicle did. Do you need more evidence of the media neglecting religion?

All in all, these evenings at Duke University were memorable in the extreme. They are even more significant when one considers that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who was an itinerant rabbi among the Jews east of the Mediterranean Sea so many years ago. He, too, spoke of the kingdoms of this world and of a kingdom, not of this world, that is to come.

In Christ,  
Pastor Paul

#### FIRST THINGS ARTICLE

"A Disunited Methodist Church" is an article by the pastor that appears in the May 2017 issue of First Things, a monthly journal that concerns religion and public life. The article is about the current challenges facing The United Methodist Church, and how the Council of Bishops and the resident bishops are perhaps aggravating those challenges. If you would like to read the article, please go to [www.firstthings.com/article/2017/05/a-disunited-methodist-church](http://www.firstthings.com/article/2017/05/a-disunited-methodist-church), or request a paper copy from the pastor.

#### SOUTHEASTERN ORATORIO SOCIETY

The Southeastern Oratorio Society will perform its spring concert on Monday, May 1, at First Presbyterian Church in Whiteville. The concert will begin at 7:30 p.m. and is in memory of Carol and Mickey Greer. All are invited and encouraged to attend.

### UNITED METHODIST WOMEN

Whiteville United Methodist Women will attend the Harbor District "Spiritual Day Apart" at Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church in Wilmington on Saturday, May 6<sup>th</sup>. If you are planning to attend, please meet in the church parking lot and be ready to leave at 8:30 a.m. We have ladies who have pre-registered and plan to attend this meeting.

Our next monthly meeting will be held on June 5<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 p.m. in the Parlor. Please plan to join this wonderful group of ladies as we seek to carry out our Lord's work.

### MISSION AND MINISTRY WITH OUR RETURNING VETS

Chaplain David Smith (retired U.S. Army), of Soul Care Initiative and the Harbor District's Military Community Outreach Advisory Team (MCOAT), will present a workshop for church leaders (clergy and laity) and veterans at Harbor United Methodist Church in Wilmington, NC. The workshop, held on Saturday, May 6, from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. It will explain the needs of veterans and their families and explore how churches can be in ministry with them. To register, go to the "Soul Care Event" post on [www.harbordistrictnc.org](http://www.harbordistrictnc.org). (Registration is required.)

### SUNSHINE CIRCLE

The Sunshine Circle will meet on Monday, May 15, at 11:00 a.m. in the Fellowship Hall. Ruth Walsh will give the devotion; the program will be on Health Kits and Florence Marlowe will be the hostess. Please bring your lunch; dessert and beverage will be provided. Visitors and new members are always welcome! This will be the last meeting until September.

### REV. LABRECHT TO SPEAK ON UNITED METHODISM TODAY/TOMORROW

Rev. Tom Lambrecht will speak at North Carolina Wesleyan College (Rocky Mount) on May 18, Thursday, at 7:00 p.m. Rev. Lambrecht has served as an ordained United Methodist elder in Wisconsin since 1982, after being a music teacher. A graduate of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Tom has served various-sized congregations and fulfilled leadership roles on many different councils, boards, committees, and task forces within the Wisconsin Annual Conference. He is the vice president of Good News and a thoughtful commentator on all things United Methodist. In 2016, he was selected by the Council of Bishops to serve as one of 32 members of the very important Bishop's Commission on a Way Forward.

If you would like to attend, please speak to the pastor. We will leave our church's parking lot at 3:00 p.m. and return late that night.

### REACHING OUT

Reaching Out will meet on May 23, a Tuesday, at Dale's Seafood in Whiteville at 6:00 p.m. Rev. Paul Stallworth will be the guest speaker. All widowers and widows are encouraged to attend for an evening of food and fellowship.

### NURTURE COMMITTEE

Our church had a beautiful Lenten and Easter season this year! The Lenten services were excellent and well-attended as were the Lenten lunches. Many thanks to all those that helped to prepare and serve the lunches each week. We had around 50 people each of the 6 weeks who enjoyed the delicious food and the fellowship.

The Nurture Committee has a fairly large responsibility in the life and ministry of the church. The umbrella of the committee's budget covers the Adult, Youth, and Children's ministries (Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, nursery supplies, etc.) It also covers kitchen supplies, most of the meals served at the church (bereavement meals, Homecoming meal, Lenten lunches, refreshments for district church meetings, etc.).

A very special thanks to the members of the Nurture Committee: Marsha Stallworth, Linda Overcash, Beth Bullard, Alma Deans, Ann Williamson, and Sue Wells. These ladies make a great team! - Debbie Conway, Chair

### ACOLYTES

Summer finds our acolytes and their families vacationing and traveling more often. If you would like to help fill in the gaps, please call Elizabeth High at 910-770-1106 to volunteer to participate in Worship Service as an acolyte.

### GORE SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS

Applications for 2017 Sam T. and Thelma G. Gore Memorial Scholarship are now being accepted. This scholarship is given annually to a student who is a member of Whiteville United Methodist Church. The criteria consists of the recipient's academic achievement (having earned a 2.0 GPA in previous educational work), life goals, church involvement, character, and financial situation. Funds may be used for tuition, fees, books, supplies and other educational expenses at the college of his/her choice. Applications are available at the Church Office.



Whiteville United  
Methodist Church  
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Whiteville, NC 28472

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Mission Statement of Whiteville United Methodist Church

As people of the body of Christ, we will gather for and be strengthened by Word and Sacraments, participate in loving fellowship, grow in discipleship, and serve our community and the world in Christ's name.

The Whiteville United Methodist Church Service of Worship is broadcast on WTXY 1540 AM from 10:00 a.m. until 11:00 a.m. on Sundays. Also it is available online at [www.wtxy1540.com](http://www.wtxy1540.com): **on the homepage, click on "Click to Listen Live" under "United Methodist Church of Whiteville"** at 10:00 a.m. to hear the complete audio of the service.

Mrs. Kathy Graham, Administrative Assistant

Mr. Layton Dowless, Custodian

Office Hours:

Monday-Thursday

9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

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Rev. Paul T. Stallworth, Pastor