

**The Methodist Federation for Social Action, Iowa Chapter
Seeking Global Justice through the United Methodist Church**

Eloise Cranke, Coordinator • www.mfsaiowa.org • Spring 2011

**2011 MFSA Spring Statewide Gathering
Saturday, April 2 - 10:00 am
Trinity United Methodist Church**

1548 8th St - Des Moines, IA 50314-2811

Lunch will be served, followed by a brief business meeting

Dr. Tyler Roberts, Professor of Religious Studies

Grinnell College The featured speaker at our Spring Statewide gathering will be Dr. Tyler Roberts, who has taught at Grinnell College since 1994. He earned his THD at Harvard in 1993, his Master of Theological Studies at Harvard in 1987 and his Bachelors degree at Brown in 1982. He has published one book entitled *Contesting Spirit: Nietzsche, Religion, Affirmation*, Princeton University Press, 1998. Dr. Roberts teaches courses on Philosophy of Religion including "Modern Religious Thought", "Major Western Religions", "Religion in U. S. Public Life", "Religious Identity on the Margins", "Mysticism", "Theory and Method in the Study of Religion", "Religion and Nature in American Culture" and "Nietzsche". Read a brief article by Dr. Roberts on page 2 of the SQB.



C.R.O.S.S. Ministries by Hugh Stone

C.R.O.S.S. Ministries is short for **Christian Relief of Supplies and Service**. It is a non-profit ministry centered in Osceola, Iowa. The mission of C.R.O.S.S. is to help those oppressed by poverty in southern Iowa and throughout the world.

Initially C.R.O.S.S. began as an effort to distribute used medical equipment in third world countries. The equipment is picked up at area hospitals and brought to Osceola where it is stored until it can be sent overseas. The mission of C.R.O.S.S. has expanded to include a thrift store that was opened three years ago in an old lumber yard.

In 2010 C.R.O.S.S. was able to provide used clothing, household items and furniture to people referred by 75

different churches and agencies. In addition C.R.O.S.S., working with U.M.C.O.R., has sent a used anesthesiology machine to Dr. Mefore at Old Mutarwie Hospital in Zimbabwe, sent medical supplies to Kenya, Guatemala, Mexico, Rumania and other third world countries. C.R.O.S.S. also sent two people on a V.I.M. trip to Haiti in August and three more will be going back to Haiti in March. Donations of goods are received and sold at the store. Items that cannot be sold locally are sent to Mexico and other places where they can be used.

C.R.O.S.S. is currently in the process of purchasing the lumber yard in Osceola from its previous owners who are United Methodists. Future plans include adding a homeless shelter and another storage building to the site.



WHO CARES ABOUT THE BIBLE? PART 2

by Tyler Schwaller

In my first article, I expressed suspicion that the Bible is most often deployed in church debates as a rhetorical tool meant to give authority to one's own arguments. Otherwise, it simply does not make sense, for example, when scripture is quoted to define what is "good sexuality," while immigration is "too political" for ancient texts to have any contemporary relevance.

The problem, of course, is that the Bible debates itself. Are women valuable leaders in the church or supposed to be silent? Is slavery a fact of life, or are Christians compelled to end exploitative practices? We can actually make Bible-based arguments on all sides of issues.

How, then, can the Bible be "the primary source and criterion for Christian doctrine" as we United Methodists say in our *Discipline*? If we are going to take scripture seriously, the question becomes *how* we take it seriously.

John Wesley is quite helpful. The Bible might have been *the* primary source for determining Christian Truth; however, if we pay attention to how Wesley read our sacred texts, we find that scripture is not a kind of rulebook for our lives.

Living biblically, according to Wesley, is having faith in God's promises, which are revealed in the Bible, and thereupon experiencing the transformative power of grace.

First and foremost, the Bible serves to show us that when we step into God's covenant through Jesus, God will work through us, not necessarily conforming to a singular script but in various ways that bring good news to the world. Then, how we live is "biblical" insofar as the ideals within scripture become defining characteristics of our own selves.

In this way, the Bible is a measuring stick more than a judgment rod. That is, as Wesley believed, we can measure authentic faith when we see good fruits—which are biblical values like *mercy, truth, justice, righteousness, joy, and love*—spring forth in and around believers.

In the next issue, we will delve more deeply into the complexity of diverse responses to and experiences of the Bible. For now, though, imagine if our standards for ordination and measures of effective ministry did not *predetermine* right and wrong ways of being but waited to see what God might be doing—even unexpectedly—in others.

May we look for and value the good and biblical works that God inspires through our faith.

Editor's Note: Tyler is a doctoral student in New Testament and Early Christian Studies at Harvard University and is a certified candidate for ministry in the Iowa Conference.

Understanding Our Muslim Brothers and Sisters

will be the topic of our Spring Regional Gatherings, which will be held in Council Bluffs, Cedar Rapids, Des Moines and Waterloo. This will be an opportunity to learn from a Muslim about the Islamic faith, and to have fellowship and dialogue with some of our Muslim brothers and sisters. Planning has just begun, so watch for dates and details in next month's memo and online.



Good Sports by the Rev. Josh Steward Pastor, Truro UMC



Sports are a treasured part of many childhoods. Playing with family and friends. Learning valuable lessons like dedication, teamwork, and good sportsmanship. I still remember a tee-ball game where I hit three homers, drove in eight runs, and led my team to victory. It is no wonder we idolize athletes while cringing over steroid scandals and obscene paychecks. Too often our love of sports is used as a distraction from worthier pursuits while big business and tabloids reap the benefits. The cost of children participating in sports or going to a game is another point of constant consternation. How might our love of sports be renewed as a spirituality of fun and fitness?

Consider the Green Bay Packers of the National Football league. They are the only publicly owned, not-for-profit, professional sports team in the US. Nearing bankruptcy in the 1920's, the community stepped in and took control. Today, local charities run the concession stands with 60% of the concessions going to charity. None of the stockholders gets a dividend. The board of directors is unpaid. Their articles of incorporation prevent any person from owning more than 200,000 shares so no individual can take control of the team. This means Green Bay can never be extorted with threats of the team moving if an owner does not get public funding or increased amusement taxes from the city.

Green Bay is a model of how our sports might reflect our Christian commitment to shared prosperity as detailed in Acts 2:42-47, where the Apostles owned and shared everything in common so nobody had need. To learn more about the Packers and the underside of sports as big business, read *Bad Sports: How Owners Are Ruining The Games We Love* by Dave Zirin.

Join MFSA or Renew Your Membership

Contact **Mike Biklen** to renew, join, or check your membership. Call Mike at 563-263-1439 or mail: 515 East Eleventh St., Muscatine, IA 52761 or e-mail: wmbiklen@juno.com. Membership forms can also be found on our website on the Officers-Contacts & Membership page.

Monthly MFSA E-Mail Memos are full of information about events of interest to MFSA folk. If you'd like to receive these memos, please send your address to Eloise at: ecranke@mchsi.com.

Want Gun Control? Speak Up by the Rev. Carlos Jayne

The renewed Republican hold on the Iowa governor's office and the Iowa House carries a radical agenda, possibly moving Iowa further right and obviously seeking to repeal all vestiges of any progressive agenda.....

...It will take a widespread uproar by the average citizenry demanding action to reverse the influence of advocates of gun proliferation. **Read the entire article on mfsaiowa.org**

Religion and the Public Sphere

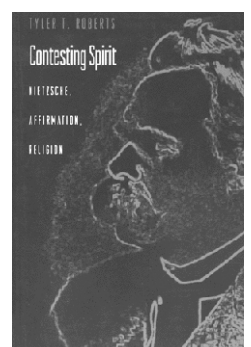
by Dr. Tyler Roberts

Professor of Religious Studies, Grinnell College

Many shook their heads in amazement last October when Christine O'Donnell, candidate for one of Delaware's seats in the US Senate, claimed that the Constitution does not mandate the separation of Church and State. How could someone running for such an important office, the nominee of her party, not know what is in the Constitution? But, as some commentators noted, O'Donnell was, quite literally, correct: the words "separation of Church and State" do not appear in the Constitution. What the Constitution, more precisely the First Amendment to the Constitution, does contain are two "religion clauses." The first says that Congress shall "make no law respecting the establishment of religion" and the second that it shall make no law "prohibiting the free exercise" of religion.

One might think that something like "separation of Church and State" is the obvious meaning of the establishment clause. But it isn't; to read the establishment clause as mandating this separation requires interpretation and so a set of assumptions and arguments. True, it is a respected and powerful interpretation and one that exerted great influence on the Supreme Court rulings for much of the 20th century. But as legal scholar Noah Feldman points out, it is an interpretation—he calls it "legal secularism"—that for some very good reasons then came under increasing question in the last decades of the century.

"Secularism" is a crucial term here. For a long time, activists and commentators on the right have decried "secular humanism." But the kinds of questions Feldman raises about legal secularism increasingly are being echoed today about other forms of secularism by scholars associated with the center and the left. These include some of the world's most respected philosophers and political theorists, such as Jürgen Habermas, Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, Charles Taylor and Judith Butler. Among other things, they question whether secular politics is really a neutral politics and whether it can really allow the freedom of religion that the Constitution demands. This work has significant implications far beyond the academic sphere, particularly for those engaged in political and social activism grounded in religious communities, for it promises to reshape received (secularist) wisdom on the proper role of religious claims and arguments in the public sphere.



Above: Dr. Tyler Roberts's Book on Nietzsche