

CONNECTING

Healthy Information from the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center  September/October 2004

The Face of God

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, a blessing used through the ages in corporate worship includes the phrase, “the Lord make his face to shine upon you.” While this particular blessing comes from what is called the Aaronic Benediction recorded in the Bible in Numbers 6:24-26, there are many other places in the Bible where God’s favor or disfavor is described in terms of God’s face shining on or God’s face hiding from or turning away from the individual. In the Book of Psalms alone, there are over two dozen references to the disposition of God’s face in relation to the writer(s). How do we understand the many references to God’s face in the Bible? What is it about “the face” that calls forth so much concern?

We could explain this emphasis on the face of God as simply a manner of expression, a way of describing whether one is or is not feeling favored and cared about by God. Or we could look to recent studies in developmental psychology and neurobiology to shed a different light on the significance of the disposition of God’s “face” toward us.

Studies in developmental psychology document that infants are drawn to the human face. In experiments, infants choose viewing the human face over viewing inanimate objects.¹ The propensity to be preoccupied with the human face is part of our genetic make-up, part of our inborn capacity. Or, another way of understanding it might be to say, it is the way God made us.

Daniel Siegel, in his book, *The Developing Mind*, explains that humans are “hard-wired” to convey meaning and emotions through eye contact and facial expression. He points out that primates are the only group of animals with muscle endings on the skin of the face. This unique characteristic gives us the capacity for facial expression controlled by our nervous systems. In addition, he explains, “To match this expressive ability, primates have neuronal groups in the brain that are specialized to respond to faces, and also to particular facial expressions!”²

Non-verbal expressions - especially those of the face - can transfer emotional information more fully than words alone. Anyone who has ever watched young children interacting with caretakers can see how easily the child’s mood is influenced by the caretaker’s responsiveness or lack of responsiveness. The child watches the caretaker’s face for signs of interest or lack of interest, signs of approval or disapproval. Repeated interactions of appropriate responsiveness foster development of self-esteem in

the child while continual interactions of rejection and/or non-responsiveness hinder such development. Whether parents look on their children favorably or unfavorably influences how children feel about themselves. Mom and dad and other significant people in children’s lives provide a mirror in which children see themselves and come to know who they are.

Other recent studies in neurobiology assert that expressing emotions verbally and non-verbally and having others respond to these expressions in an appropriate manner is critical for development of the brain. “Such sharing of primary emotions does not merely allow the child to feel ‘good;’ it allows the child to develop normally.”³

We are designed to seek our reflection in our parents’ faces. We need their responsiveness to develop as human beings. Since we are designed this way, it is not surprising that we might also seek to know how we are reflected in our Divine Parent’s face, to wonder about our Divine Parent’s disposition toward us, and to hope and pray, as in the Aaronic Benediction, that that face is shining on us.

We tend to experience our Heavenly Caretaker in the same way we experienced our earthly caretakers, i.e., we expect God to regard and respond to us the way our significant caretakers did. This is because we internalized the repeated interactions with our primary caretakers, and these remembered patterns of relationship formed models that guide us in future interactions with others. So, if our caretakers were loving and accepting and just, it is much easier to experience God the same way. If our caretakers were abusive or unresponsive, the child (and then the adult that child becomes) might expect God to be similarly punishing and unfair or absent. Even if we adhere to a theological belief that God is a loving God, on an emotional level we may feel and experience God very differently.

It seems that a loving relationship with our parents makes it easier for us to connect with a loving God. It is hard to feel loved by God if we have never felt loved by others. In situations where there may not have been loving, reflective faces in infancy and childhood, the person often needs the responsiveness of a caring significant other (e.g., minister, counselor, partner, friend) in order to begin to experience himself or herself, and, ultimately God, in a more positive way.

Through the facial reflections of caring others, we begin to experience ourselves as significant and worthy of

... continued on page 2

continued from page 1 . . .

care. We also begin to realize that expressions of our thoughts, feelings, and intentions matter—to others, to ourselves, and even to God. Through a combination of nature and nurture, we become the unique individuals God created us to be.

~ Susan Pierce, M.S., M.S.W.

Susan is a licensed mental health counselor and a licensed independent social worker. She holds the MS degree in family life ministry from Concordia University and the MSW degree from the University of Iowa. She provides counseling to individuals and couples.

¹ Karen, Robert, *Becoming Attached: First Relationships and How They Shape Our Capacity to Love* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 346.

² Siegel, Daniel J., *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2001), p. 150.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

C.O.O.L. Corner

Children Overcoming the Obstacles of Life

How some of the children at C.O.O.L. envision the Face of God:

- ▶ “God’s face is a little bit of everybody’s face that He makes.”
- ▶ “God is a giant, as big as the whole galaxy.”
- ▶ “God may not be a He or a She; nobody knows for sure.”
- ▶ “God is powerful and nice. I believe God loves me and will never divorce me.”
- ▶ “God wears a long white gown.”
- ▶ “God is copper-colored (a white and black mix)—the color of everybody.”
- ▶ “When I go to heaven, I’ll be able to see what God’s face looks like. I’ll be really old then. God will say, ‘Hi! Welcome to heaven. Your hourglass is up!’”
- ▶ “God has feelings like everybody else: happy, sad, mad. The weather shows us God’s feelings. When it rains, God is sad. When it’s lightening, God is mad. When it’s sunny, God is happy.”

Autism ~ Hope and Healing

Integrative Therapies for Autism Spectrum Disorders
Tuesday, September 21, 2004, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

Plymouth Congregational UCC Church, Waveland Hall
4106 Ingersoll Avenue, Des Moines
Fee: \$10

Pre-registration requested: 274-4006, info@dmpcc.org

For both **parents** and **professionals** dealing with autism, Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center is bringing James F. Murphy, Jr., D.O., of Cornerstone Progressive Health, Omaha, NE, to Des Moines to discuss the latest developments in treating autism and related neurological disorders. Dr. Murphy has 14 years of clinical experience with advanced skills in the areas of cranial osteopathy, homeopathy, and nutrition. This presentation will cover environmental, biochemical, and genetic factors contributing to autism spectrum disorders. Discussion will cover integrative therapies used in Dr. Murphy’s clinic to restore normal function.

Samaritan Institute Annual Conference

With the assistance of an Organizational Effectiveness grant from the Greater Des Moines Community Foundation, representatives of the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center were able to attend the annual educational conference sponsored by the Samaritan Institute, a national membership network of pastoral counseling centers. Attending from the Center were Ellery Duke, executive director; Kathleen Murrin, director of development and marketing; and Jackie Goettsch, secretary, board of directors. Highlights included “Consultation Skills Workshop,” “Extending the Ministry of Local Congregations,” and a “Best Practices Panel.”

There was also an extended two-day study group for executive directors. Ellery and nine other executive directors of large counseling centers consolidated their years of experience to tackle real-life issues: center growth in a managed care environment, succession planning, and marketing/fund development strategies, among others. “The resources and expertise available to us over the course of several days were extensive and generous. We came away feeling affirmation for the things we’re experiencing and accomplishing at the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center, as well as some fresh approaches to enhance our effectiveness in the future,” commented Ellery.



Ellery Duke; Pam Holliman, executive director, Samaritan Counseling Center outside Philadelphia, PA; Kathleen Murrin; Jackie Goettsch; R.J. Ross, president, Samaritan Institute

Educational Events for the Community

The Center is once again sponsoring free community education events this fall to explore the variety of complementary therapies available in the Des Moines community. The fall series is focusing on *Health, Healing, and Other Mysteries*. The October and November events will take place in the Burling Room at Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ, 4126 Ingersoll Avenue, in Des Moines.

The events are free, but please call or e-mail the Center to let us know you will be attending or to obtain further information (274-4006 or info@dmpcc.org). These events are made possible through a grant from the Community Innovation Fund of the Greater Des Moines Community Foundation.

Tuesday, October 5, 2004, 5:30 – 6:30 p.m.

Kathy Reardon, R.N., M.S., C.H.T.P.

Spirituality and Healing: A Quantum Perspective

Health is more than freedom from illness and disease; healing is more than curing a physical ailment. Today, energy therapy and modern science are converging. Science is verifying what healing facilitators have long known: that our bodies are extensions of our spirits. During this program, Kathy Reardon will address the paradigm shifts taking place in healthcare today, introduce basic concepts of energy medicine, and demonstrate the dynamic and sacred interplay of mind, body, spirit.

Kathy Reardon is a holistic nurse, spiritual director, and Certified Healing Touch Practitioner. She holds a bachelor of nursing degree from the College of St. Scholastica and a Master of Arts degree in counseling from Drake University. She is an experienced retreat director and commissioned teacher of Centering Prayer. Kathy is on staff at the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center and an adjunct faculty member of St. Joseph Educational Center, presenting programs in prayer, spirituality, and adult faith formation.

Tuesday, November 9, 5:30 – 6:30 p.m.

Kathy Adams, A.R.N.P.

Integrative Imagery: Opening to Inner Wisdom

Integrative Imagery is a potent vehicle for opening to our inner wisdom and realizing our innate healing potential. Through guided therapeutic intervention, a person can access and interact with individualized mental images, enabling realization of one's innate healing potential. During this session, Kathy Adams will explore several applications of imagery for health promotion and spiritual growth and will give participants an opportunity to personally experience imagery.

Kathy Adams has more than 25 years of professional nursing experience. She is currently a psychiatric nurse practitioner at Broadlawns Medical Center. She has master's degrees in adult education and nursing from Drake University. She received her post-master's certificate in psychiatric mental health advance practice nursing from the University of Nebraska Medical Center in 2001. Kathy is certified as a holistic nurse (HNC) by the American Holistic Nurses Association (AHNA). She is also certified in integrative imagery through the Beyond Ordinary Nursing program sponsored by the AHNA.

Tuesday, December 7, 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.

Cindy Chicoine, A.C.S.W., L.I.S.W., L.M.T.

Labyrinth Walks: Journeying into the Sacred Center

During this session, Cindy Chicoine will share information about the labyrinth and how it can support our health, well-being, and spiritual search. An opportunity to walk a canvas labyrinth path will be provided at the end of the session. Check our website or the next issue of *Connections* for more information.



MANifest is a program for men facilitated by male counselors, built around weekend retreats and Saturday workshops. MANifest is for men of all ages and from every walk of life. Lowell Houts, D.Min., and Mike Sears, Ed.D., facilitate all MANifest programs.

MANifest Weekend ~

September 10 – 12, 2004

5:00 p.m. Friday – Noon Sunday

Men may talk easily about work, sports, and politics, but there are few opportunities for men to talk about their journey as a man. MANifest weekends provide opportunity for this discussion. MANifest weekends offer new approaches and explore the latest findings regarding male role changes, masculine nature/nurture needs, and how these impact men growing up and maturing in American society. Retreats are held in a rustic outdoor setting. Retreats are limited to 12 participants to provide optimal interaction. The cost for the entire weekend is \$175 (includes lodging and 5 meals). Call the Center to pre-register (274-4006).

MANifest Workshops

Men and Their Fathers ~

October 16, 2004

Saturday, 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Whether a man did or did not have a relationship with his father is a powerful influence on the developing male personality. Men continue to deal with their dad's physical and emotional presence or absence within their relationships throughout their adult lives. When sons grow up with little or no expression of a father's affirmation and blessing, they often carry a sense of failure, or shame, or anger that seems unrelated to life events. "Men and Their Fathers" workshop will provide participants the opportunity to explore these issues within their particular growing-up situations. The cost of this workshop is \$50 (includes lunch). Please call the Center to pre-register.

Men and Sex ~ November 6, 2004

Saturday, 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Henry David Thoreau once said, "I lose my respect for the man who will make a coarse jest about sex, but when asked to speak seriously on the subject remains silent." Gym classes, locker rooms, and maybe an extremely awkward "birds and the bees" talk with a parent are the sum of most male experience with sexual discourse growing up. No wonder most men find it very difficult to know where to begin to have a serious discussion about sex. It has been the observation of the facilitators that the more men can have serious discussions, the more confidence they'll feel in their sexuality. The "Men and Sex" workshop will provide an opportunity for men to explore the sexual/emotional connection and enhance their understanding of themselves as sexual human beings. The cost of the workshop is \$50 (includes lunch). Please call the Center to pre-register.

Male/Female Communication ~

January 15, 2005

Saturday, 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Look for more information about this workshop or the facilitators on our website, www.dmpcc.org/support/support.html.

Pastoral Care Specialist Program - 2004-05

The Pastoral Care Specialist Program is designed for pastors, chaplains, and other persons involved in ministries of pastoral care, as a two-year program of professional development and renewal. Participants meet monthly to learn about areas critical to effective pastoral care, and for support, encouragement, and consultation regarding their work. Participants can solidify what they already do well and integrate new knowledge and skills into their ministries.



“The classes were an opportunity for me to discuss ministry challenges with colleagues outside my regular circle.”

~testimonial of a previous graduate



The program begins the second Tuesday of September (September 14, 2004) and runs through the second Tuesday of June (June 14, 2005). Participants meet from 8:45 am to noon. Tuition for the program is \$500 for each of the two years. For additional information, contact J. Jeffrey Means, Ph.D., Director of Professional Education, at (515) 274-4006, or check our website, www.dmpcc.org/classes/classes.html.

Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Foundation

Leaving a legacy is more than passing money to the next generation. It is also an opportunity to send a message, a message that reflects your values and continues your commitments. If you or someone you know has benefited from or been comforted by the services of the Center's fine staff, won't you consider a gift that will make that same benefit and comfort available to those who come after you? We encourage you to consider a planned gift to the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Foundation. Contact Kathleen Murrin at the Center for further information.

Autumn Bounty

As we admire the bounty of nature at summer's end, it is a good time to express gratitude for the bounty of our own lives. As nature gives of itself, so could we. A financial gift to the Center makes a real difference in the lives of Center clients struggling with the challenges of life on limited resources. Our generosity can mirror the bounty of nature. Send your tax-deductible gift to the Center or contact Kathleen Murrin at 274-4006.

Another consideration is that although the Center is not a United Way funded agency and does not receive any funding from United Way, we **are** an option for "Donor Choice" dollars. If you participate in a United Way workplace campaign, you have the opportunity to designate that your donation go to a nonprofit of your choice. By **writing in Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center**, you could direct all or a portion of your United Way contribution to the Center.

CONNECTING

is a publication of the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center, an independent, interfaith, not-for-profit organization. For over 30 years, the Center has been providing counseling and educational services to adults, families, adolescents, and children for the purpose of enhancing emotional, spiritual, and relationship health. The Center has satellite offices in West Des Moines, Altoona, Ankeny, and Urbandale.
Editor: Kathleen Murrin

Inside this issue: The Face of God

The Face of God	page 1
C.O.O.L. Corner	page 2
Samaritan Institute Annual Conference	page 2
Defeat Autism Now	page 2
Educational Events for the Community	page 3
MANifest	page 3
Autumn Bounty	page 4



Des Moines Pastoral

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