

A Means of Connection, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 23041107
Haggai 1:15-2:9 and Luke 6:20-31
Elon Community Church, UCC, 7 November, 2004

The November 2 presidential election revealed deep divisions among the voters in our nation. We read newspaper stories about the stealing of campaign signs from residents' lawns. We saw vicious attack ads produced by campaigners both democrat and republican.

I have been particularly distressed that moral values have been reduced by our president and the Christian right to two issues, abortion and gay marriage. When I think of moral values, I begin with the belief that God has created all people in God's image, loves all people, and calls each person God's own. That means that God does not will poverty. That is a moral issue.

More than abortion, I am concerned about children who are unwanted, abused, and thrown away. That is a moral issue.

More than protecting marriage, I am concerned about husbands who dominate their wives and individuals who use others for their own pleasure. That is a moral issue.

I am as concerned about the killing of criminals and enemies as much as I am about killing the unborn. That is a moral issue.

And as for safety, There is no safety in pointing a gun. Safety is achieved through understanding and communication. There is safety only in the hands of God, our common creator. That is a moral issue.

Moral issues can be summed up in Jesus' teaching in Luke 6:31: ADo to others as you would have them do to you. @

We in the mainstream church tradition, we who are ecumenical, we who have been educated in the historical-critical method of Biblical interpretation are the ones to blame for allowing a whole generation to slip away into the hands of the Pat Robertsons and Jerry Falwells by not evangelizing our beliefs, morals and faith. We have failed to make connections with the masses of people. We have failed to communicate the demands of the Christian faith, the laws of God, and the teachings of Jesus Christ. We must do a better job of connecting. Our calling as followers of Jesus Christ is to connect people with God and connect people with each other.

Art Stanley was my first Regional Minister. Art used to delight in introducing people to each other. With a big grin he'd grab two people by the arms, face them toward each other, and tell a story about one to the other, and then about the other to the one. Then, he'd leave them alone to get to know each other better. Art made connections among people. Under his leadership the African-Americans, Hispanics, and Caucasians of the Northeast Region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) connected with each other.

Now, more than ever, there is the need to reach across the divisions and make connections. It is the role of the Christian to make connections across boundaries.

This church is in the process of studying and praying about why we are here. Why do we exist as a church? Why is our building situated here on the corner of Williamson and Haggard facing East to Elon University? What is God calling us to be and to do? The first calling, which we spoke about two weeks ago is, we are Acalled to be a witness to the love and authority of God through Jesus Christ to the community. @

The second calling is, we are Acalled to be a means of connection between Elon University and the community. @ One hundred fifteen years ago, the Christian Church founded a college in what was then called Mill Point, a lonely stop on the North Carolina railroad. The struggling

college gave birth to a town and a church. Today, each is differentiated from the others. Yet, none can exist without the others. We are a town, church, and university community, but we are a community. Connections among all three must be initiated and nurtured. Elon Community Church is called to foster programs that improve connections between town and University.

We are in the midst of a program called *The Big Questions* that meets on Sunday evenings. Twenty-four students and church members have been exploring important issues of faith such as, what is faith? What is prayer? What is evil? What is being good for? In the process, we are making connections: bridging gaps between town and university, between old and young, between liberal and conservative. Such connections build understanding, and, yes, they stimulate the growth of faith in all participants.

We have a golden opportunity to touch the lives of students, faculty, and administration, and town residents of all ages, in a way that no one else has. We can bring the challenge of discipleship in Christ to old and young. We can provide the comfort of a home-like environment to those who feel far from home. We need to be creative and open to God's leading us.

Our calling here is not to look upon the past, or the way things used to be, but to get to work to build a future. The prophet Haggai stood on a hill overlooking the ruins of the once-beautiful temple in Jerusalem. The Jews, returning from captivity in Babylon, were heartbroken as they gazed at the rubble of a ruined past. Haggai heard God's words and spoke them to the leaders and the people:

Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the LORD; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the LORD; work, for I am with you, says the LORD of hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear.¹

God will not do the work for us, but God will do the work with us. We take the initiative and God's spirit gives us the strength.

We are called to be a connecting church: Republicans with Democrats, conservatives with liberals, university with town, church members with church members and everyone with God.

Jesus Christ is at the center of our life together. It is he who is our connection. Let us come to the table where we celebrate our connections with God and with one another.

¹Haggai 2:4-5