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Freedom

"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."
—Galatians 5:1

The Newsletter of the Metropolitan Community Churches in Lancaster and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Vol. 1, No. 10

January, 1983

SPIRITUAL BLACKMAIL

by Arthur C. Runyan, II

This letter has been sent to you for good luck. The original is from the Netherlands, it has been around the world 9 times. The luck has now been brought to you. You will receive good luck in 6 days of receiving this letter, provided, you in turn, send it back out. This is no joke. You will receive it in the mail.

So begins a letter that a customer brought into my shop for me to copy the other day. She looked like such a nice lady that I didn't have the heart to tell her that she was being blackmailed, and to do so would probably have endangered my job anyway. We are not paid to editorialize on the work that customers bring in to us. It has something to do with freedom of speech, I guess.

Anyway, everybody has their pet peeves, and chain letters are high on my list. Especially "religious" chain letters like this one that quote a Bible verse across the top of the page: "All things whatever ye shall ask in prayer, believing ye shall receive." (Matt. 21:22) What never occurs to those who get caught up in these schemes, is the fact that if we truly take to heart the words of Jesus so quoted, we don't need chain letters for good luck!

Please send 20 copies of the letter and see what happens to you on the 6th day. This chain came from Venezuela, and was written by Paul Anthony Bedvoid, a missionary from South America. This is how this letter continues. Now I ask you, where exactly did this letter come from? Was it the Netherlands as mentioned in the opening, or was it Venezuela as was stated later? And what about that opening comment

about having been around the world 9 times? That claim was made in a copy of the letter I received over 10 years ago. Surely it has been around the world several times since then. Who keeps count?

Then there is the proof: *Joe Elliot received this letter and \$450,000 but lost it because he broke the chain.* Who is Joe Elliot? I guess we'll never know. At least he fared better than General Welch, whoever he was: *While in the Phillipines, General Welch lost his life 6 days after he received this letter. He failed to circulate the quote. However, before his death, he received \$775,000.00.* With that kind of money I bet he had a real nice funeral! What the writer fails to mention is that we neither lose our life nor gain it because of chain letters. Life comes from faith in Jesus as the Son of God. Fulfillment comes from following Jesus, not from mailing out 20 copies of a poorly written chain letter.

Canstartin Kas received the chain in 1959. He asked his secretary to make 20 copies and send them out. After a few days, he won \$2,000,000.00 in a lottery in his country. How much did his secretary win? She did all the work.

Clair Daditt, an office employee, received the chain and forgot about it, and a few days later, he lost his job. He found the chain letter and sent 20 copies the next day. Five days later he got an even better job. Perhaps we should go down to the unemployment office and hand out copies of this chain letter to those in line. As long as it takes to get waited on down there they have time to write out 20 copies by hand. Maybe

this is Ronnie Ray-Gun's answer to the unemployment problem in this country. It makes about as much sense as most of the things the government has been doing lately. (Excuse me, this is a church paper; we're not supposed to talk about politics, are we? Oh well. . .)

Please do not ignore this, it does work. For no reason should this chain be broken. Remember, send no money. Sincerely, A FRIEND. is how the epistle ends. What kind of friend would invite this curse upon you? A friend named Satan, perhaps. No other would lie so boldly.

What is going on here? People are desperate, even church people, because it is hard to preach the gospel in the face of unemployment, inflation, and general economic malaise. Where is God? Why is God allowing us to suffer like this? These are not easy questions. It is all well and good to say that God never promised us a rose garden, and that rather than keeping us from calamity, our faith gives us the strength to face calamity. But true as those statements are, they don't always make us feel better.

People are grasping at straws. Lottery ticket sales are higher than ever. Burglary and robbery are way up. Drug abuse is rampant. In short, times are tough. And what can we do about it? Not a whole lot.

But there is good news here. God is still in charge, and we are still God's people. We are still saved by the grace of God through our faith in Jesus. And our faith *does* give us courage, and it *does* give us hope.

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MCC-Lancaster Participates In Food Bank

You may have noticed that there are a lot of people out of work these days. Recession, unemployment, and inflation are raging. The state is trying to drop people from the welfare rolls if they are able-bodied, mindless of the fact that there are no jobs. People are going hungry.

In order to meet that need, the Lancaster County Council of Churches has set up a food bank where needy people can obtain food for their families. The Unitarian Church, though not a member of the LCC, participates in this program by operating a food bank on Fridays. That explains the piles of food you may have seen occupying the corners of the church the past few weeks.

Rev. Payson informs me that those supplies may well be exhausted by the middle of January. I feel that it is altogether fitting and proper that MCC respond to this need in some way, and I have proposed to the congregation that we respond both individually and corporately.

Beginning with the first Sunday in January, and continuing for as long as there is a need, I am requesting that all people attending MCC services please bring a can (or some other non-perishable item) of food. If you are poor yourself, try at least to bring a can of green beans. (They cost about 31¢ down at the Jewel T.) If you can afford to bring more, please feel free to do so. Our average attendance has been around 15 lately. If every person brought an average of 2 cans of food, that would be 30 cans a week – enough to supply a small family. *Please* consider giving of your abundance to help others in this way.

On the corporate level, I have suggested to the budget committee that we, as a congregation, give \$25 each month to the food bank for the purchase of perishable items or any other operating expenses they may have. This budget will be voted on at the January 30 congregational meeting, immediately following the worship service in Lancaster.

Jesus said that the poor would always be with us. This means that we are constantly challenged to minister to those around us. I pray that we rise to meet that challenge. Thank you.

— Arthur

MCC-Lancaster Needs Another Piano Player!

Due to increasing commitments in his schedule, our piano man, Tom, is not able to be with us every single Sunday any more. The Lancaster church, therefore, needs another piano player to alternate dates with him. If you are interested please call Arthur at 392-2729. Thank you.

MCC-LANCASTER TO ADOPT FIRST FORMAL BUDGET

At the congregational meeting scheduled for Sunday, January 30, 1983, following the worship service, MCC-Lancaster will take yet another giant step forward by adopting its very first budget. Members and friends are invited to attend and give input to this important task.

What makes a budget important is that it reflects the beliefs and goals of a congregation. The amounts allocated and the order in which bills are paid tell the truth about what our priorities really are.

If you feel strongly about our church, as many of you do, you will want to stay and have some say about how we choose to spend what little money we have. See you there!

— Arthur

(Continued from pg. 1)

This is the good news we must spread. And we must do more. As James so aptly says, 'Faith without works is dead.'

MCC-Lancaster is entering into the Food Bank program. But that is just a beginning. There is so much more to be done. Look around you and see what you can do. Paul calls for us to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice. That means we must live, not for ourselves, but for the Kingdom of God.

That might mean many things, but one thing is for sure. It means we do not submit to spiritual blackmail. God does not need chain letters to bring us blessings. Rather than send out 20 letters, tell 20 people that you love them; for that matter, tell 20 people that God loves them. I guarantee you that you will be far more richly blessed.

And you can throw the chain letter away. It has no power. All power comes from God and God alone. Anyone who tells you any different is a liar.

Enjoy your Freedom!

NOTE: I agonized some time over whether or not I should use the word "Blackmail." Given my previously announced stance on sensitivity to language, it may be seen by some as a racist term. After due consideration, however, I chose to go ahead with it mainly because its history is not rooted in racial prejudice. The word comes from Scotland and refers to a duty paid to certain war lords as protection money (from those same war lords.) True, it does seem to reflect the pervasive notion that all things black are bad and all things white are good. However, this is not the original meaning of the word nor is it my intent. If one wishes to read that sort of interpretation into it, that is one's perfect right. However, please do not hold me accountable for your interpretations! Still, I am not altogether comfortable. How do you feel?

— Arthur

LICHTY ACCEPTS CALL

Rev. Patricia Lichty has accepted a call to MCC Harrisburg. Rev. Lichty is presently on the staff of MCC New York City. Formerly of the Harrisburg area she is returning after many years away from the area. She and her family will be moving to the area on or before March 1st. Her family includes her spouse Laurie and adopted sons Benjamin and Bernard.

Pat and Laurie will be spending as many weekends as possible in Harrisburg during Jan. & Feb., looking for housing, getting to know the area and their new MCC family.

Rev. Lichty was licensed in the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches.

Besides serving on staff in New York she has worked in Mcc

Rev. Lichty was licensed in the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches.

Besides serving on staff in New York she has worked in MCC-Albany, and on various political issues in New York.

We are all looking forward to the opportunity to increase and expand our own ministry, individually and as a family, under her leadership.

JANUARY ...

Crush darkness
Oh, wintry snow
Bring songs
Trace whispers in portraits
on snow
Kiss lift us from cold
And bedraggled heart
Tingle and tickle
Laughter in heart
A kindness forgotten
Save those of your children
That burnt in the breast
Of your happiest kindred
January, my January
Snowflakes and moonbeams
Crisp open spaces
Mufflers and ice skates
Cocoa and raisins
Blankets and dreamland
And anticipation
Of evenings and quiet
In snug January.

Colin Kreitzer

GAY RAP LANCASTER

A Gay Rap Group for Lancaster is still in the works. Those already making plans hope to get the film "Word is Out" for a first session sometime in February.

Anyone interested in helping should contact Al at 392-2729.

CONGRATULATIONS

The congregation of MCC Harrisburg is happy to announce their three new members--Phil, Tim and Diane.

The ceremony took place during the December 12 service in Harrisburg.

Congratulations!

CAROLS AND CANDLES

On Sunday, January 19, a joint Christmas service was held by MCC's Lancaster and Harrisburg, Dignity of Central PA, Evangelicals Concerned, and Friends and Parents of Gays. The service began at 6:00 pm at the First United Methodist Church in Harrisburg. About 50 people attended.

The major portion of the service was composed of readings and hymns representing four phases of the Christmas message--the Child is promised, awaited, given and worshipped. Members of all participating groups assisted in the reading.

Arthur Runyan continued the service with a brief Christmas sermon. This was followed by a moving candle lighting ceremony.

After the service, many attended a "hot chocolate" get-together and later went caroling.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- SUNDAY, JANUARY 2--Art Runyan will preach in Lancaster (last time before he leaves)
- THURSDAY, JANUARY 6--Arthar leaves for three weeks in Puerto Rico--Pray for him.
- SUNDAY, JANUARY 9--1:00 pm--Williamsport Parish Extension service at Jack and Lee's. For information call 323-7099 in Williamsport or the Harrisburg church at 238-3746.
- WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 12--7:00 pm--The first in a three week series on "Gifts of the Spirit"--1622 1/2 North Second Street, Hbg. Leaders, Diane N. and Gary. (The series continues on January 19 and 26.)
- SUNDAY, JANUARY 16-- Gary Norton will be the ovest preacher at the regular Lancaster service.
- THURSDAY, JANUARY 20--7:00 to 9:30 pm--Gay Skate at the Gold Skate in Middletown--sponsored by MCC Harrisburo--tickets \$2.00 in advance, \$3.00 at the door.
- SUNDAY, JANUARY 23--monthly Love Feast following the communion service in Lancaster.
- MONDAY, JANUARY 24--FREEDOM DEADLINE.
- SUNDAY, JANUARY 30--Art Runyan returns from Puerto Rico to preach in Lancaster--congregational meeting follows

THROUGHOUT THE MONTH

- MONDAYS--7:00 pm--Men's Rap/Support Group--Freinds Meeting House, Harrisburg.
- TUESDAYS--7:30 pm--Evangelicals Concerned Bible Study--1318 Pennr Street, Harrisburg.

NOTICE--Tuesday night volleyball sponsored by Dignity/Central PA has been changed to Friday nights, 7:00 pm at the Salvation Army, Green and Cumberland Streets in Harrisburg.

WORSHIP SCHEDULES

Harrisburg:

Sunday Evenings
Friends Meeting House
6th & Herr Streets
Harrisburg, Pa.
7:00 p.m.

Lancaster:

Sunday Evenings
Unitarian Center of Lancaster
538 W. Chestnut Street
Lancaster, Pa.
5:00 p.m.

GAY SWITCHBOARD OF HARRISBURG

234-0328

6:00 to 10:00 pm
Monday - Friday
*Your gay connection
in Harrisburg!*

LANCASTER GAY/LESBIAN HELP LINE

397-0691

Tuesday, Wednesday,
Thursday, and Sunday
6:30 to 9:30 pm

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The views expressed in the articles are those of the writers and not necessarily those of MCC-Lancaster, MCC-Harrisburg, or the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. Publication of the name of any person, business, or organization should not be construed as indicative of the sexual orientation or ideological stance of that person, business, or organization.

The Metropolitan Community Church is an ecumenical, Christian church for all people with a special ministry to the lesbian and gay community.