

REFLECTIONS ON OPEN FONT BAPTISMS

Fred Garry

I have a top three in ministry. Three moments of great achievement. My victories.

The first is a check for \$1000. We developed a youth mission trip to Mexico many years ago. Lots of kids from the community went on this trip. Many of the kids were Roman Catholic. To recognize our work and ministry, one of the local priests gave a \$1,000 to support the effort. When the check arrived, I told the bookkeeper, "frame it!" Just the idea of a Catholic Church giving a Protestant church money floored me. Needless to say, this has only happened once.

The second achievement was the installation of high-end coffee makers. Really nice coffee makers, the kind making gallons of good coffee in a matter of minutes. Think Dunkin' Donut, Starbucks level of machines. It was a long hard fight. Churches love their "battleship perks". Why, I will never know. Large percolators cook down coffee until it is part sludge and part oil slick. How could they ever live without them? The terrible coffee was good enough for the last fifty years, it will be good enough for another fifty. But then, one day, an anonymous donor gave the funds for the new coffee makers. This was quite a production. But in short order I heard the good news of the kingdom of God, "hey, this coffee is really good; it's fast; and it's easy to make." Yes. Yes it is.

The third jewel happened last year on Palm Sunday. We had an "open font" baptism. We spread the word, "if you would like to have your child baptized come on this date between 8:30-9:30am. No membership, no applications, no classes. No restrictions." I was really nervous. I knew of three people who were going to come and be baptized, an infant and two youth, but I didn't know if the "word" would get out and if people would come. Last Palm Sunday they came. Eleven people were baptized, young and old. Many folks who were here to witness expressed awe and wonder. This was remarkable moment.

I must confess I didn't believe it would happen. This was something I dreamed of for thirty years. Part of my disbelief was how much this needed to be the church's idea. This could not be my

plan or my offering. I administer the baptismal water, but it is the church that baptizes. This is a core belief in the Presbyterian Church and I respect this. Pastors come and pastors go, but the church remains. You don't join a pastor; you join a church. When the session read the policy Lori Kellner proposed to open the font, I struggled to keep it together. Lot of emotions. Could this be happening?

Palm Sunday is quickly approaching. And we are opening the font again. We will post the event on Facebook and hopefully it will be shared by many. I hope you will share it too. Do you have a family member or family friend who would like to be baptized or have a child baptized? Invite them, encourage them: this is open to all.

Of the three, the open font is the most important to me. Money from the Roman Catholic Church is not to be dismissed. We have been protesting them for 500 years; this has not led to great relations. And the coffee makers, well, that too is amazing. Churches love the massive percolators. Forging a new path in caffeine creation was an arduous task. But opening the font was a whole different kind of change. We took away the "fence." By opening the baptismal font to all without restrictions we were offering the sacrament the same way we offer the Lord's Supper, "this is for you; this is God's mercy for you. All you need to do is open your heart to receive it."

Last Palm Sunday was a glorious moment. I pray it is again. Get the word out. This is a great message to offer: you are welcome here; this mercy is a gift to you.



Open Font Baptisms at FPC

Palm Sunday, March 29

8:30-9:30 AM

ALL ARE WELCOME