

December 3, 2004

Dear Hearts,

Well, they don't train you for these types of weeks in seminary!

Let me dispel a couple of myths, or at least attempt to be historically accurate. I, and therefore, we, were on the front page of the *Des Moines Register* on Thursday, December 2. I did a live interview on 98.3 FM. I took one caller, and then the rest called after I was off the line. You can be the judge as to whether they were kind or not. I, and again, we, were the lead story on the 6:00 news on Channel 8 and the lead on the 10:00 Channel 5 news. We were a topic discussed at length on 1040 AM, but I did not take the bait and call in to that program.

I have been called a few names. I am mostly unaffected by that behavior tactic. I did, however, call both my father and grandfather, both of whom bear the same last name as me and live in a city with a very vocal opponent who frequently makes the news. Those were difficult phone calls, but everyone is prepared and proud.

I am not particularly interested in being an "activist pastor." While there may be times, such as the last three days, when I may be called upon to be a powerful and dramatic witness for the Gospel, I do not understand this to be my primary call as your pastor. While I will do my best to faithfully proclaim God's extravagant love, hospitality, and welcome, I am mostly interested in being a spiritual companion and resource to you. This is where the news media turned their focus *off* the issue.

The commercial is *not* an issue ad about or in favor of gay marriage. The commercial is an attempt, in 30 very powerful seconds, to dramatize the overt and/or subtle exclusion that a variety of different people groups have felt in some faith communities. To this pain, the commercial attempts to proclaim a message of hope found in the countercultural Jesus message of inclusion. We are trying to help people restore their belief in believing. For decades, this has been the faithful vision and witness of Urbandale United Church of Christ. Let us not compromise our message!

I have no idea what the results of our actions might be on this or future Sundays. The extra attention paid to our faith community these last three days might result in more people at our services. Some of them, conceivably, but not probably, could be protesting our witness and welcome. Accordingly, I have asked the Buildings and Grounds Team to be available to aid in crowd control. What I mostly mean is for them to help us be prepared to direct the extra people who might be coming to hear God's good news. I ask for your help in these endeavors. I suggest you arrive at church earlier than normal. If you are able, I invite you to consider parking a little further away and walking a bit. This will leave some of our parking spaces available for our extra guests. We want them to feel *very* welcomed, especially this Sunday. If there are protestors outside, I would simply ignore them.

If the volume and types of email that I that I have received in the last three days is any indication, our message has in fact been received by the public. Many of our new friends and current members are hurting and need to be reminded, or told for the first time, that they are beloved children of God and they are FULLY welcomed into our faith community. It is hard for some of us to imagine, but there are many who have never been told this good news. I have heard from many of them in the last few days.

I am proud to be your pastor and have never been prouder to be a clergy person. It is Advent. We are a pregnant people on a spiritual journey. And I, with you, will attempt to be a midwife to help birth God's extravagant love into the world.

In hopes of wholeness,

The Rev. S. Michael Pater  
Senior Pastor