

FROM THE PULPIT

Church can help guide election day decisions

By Brad Bryant
FOR THE PANTAGRAPH

We're days from Election 2008. As U.S. citizens, we have a right and responsibility to help choose leaders and policies, moving our nation and world in a direction that helps foster peace and justice for all people.

That's God's plan! As followers of Jesus Christ, we even pray for that coming world situation, using the "model prayer" that Jesus taught his disciples (Matthew 6:10 NIV): "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

So what's the role of "the church" in helping us to decide how to vote, important issues, and how to serve our community? Unfortunately the answer varies, because there are several "types" of churches...

Some churches are merely a "road sign," pointing beyond this mortal life, to blessings after we leave this world through death. While there is some truth to that teaching, it removes us from responsibility or action in helping to transform this world into one that reflects God's will on earth. So, that sort of church typically would not offer much

help in making election decisions.

Some look to the church as the great "source of all answers." Those who choose to be in that "flock" often rely on the leader(s) to tell them how to think/vote. Our only responsibility then is to follow blindly, and do what we're told by our leaders. This type of church offers "answers," but they're answers determined by one or a few other humans, and may not reflect God's actual desires for your choices.

Some churches point beyond themselves, toward the Bible, which they teach to be the complete record of everything that God wants us to know about events past, present and future. A church that points beyond itself and toward God is a good thing! However, the God that I follow cannot be "boxed in" between the covers of a book, even if we call it a Bible. God and his plans for your life and our world are always much greater than could ever be reduced to a book or even a human language.

While there is some great counsel and guidance in the Scriptures, using only a book to determine our voting and service decisions limits God's ability to

speak through our life and ministry. In fact, one Bible author tells us it's incomplete: "Jesus did many other miraculous signs... which are not recorded in this book." (John 20:30 NIV) There was just too much of Jesus' ministry (then and now) to write down!

A healthy church should consist of a community of diverse people, each choosing to be part of God's family, who gather in mutual support, learning together, serving their neighbors, seeking truth and wisdom from God's Spirit, and growing in their individual and collective discipleship. The leaders should be constantly pointing beyond themselves, beyond the church organization, and even beyond the written word, toward the living God, who calls us into service. The Scriptures are one source of understanding, but

linked with prayer, openness to God's spirit and using our God-given intelligence.

This latter form of "church" has the best ability to enlighten us about how to vote and serve those around us in this broken world.

So, how should you approach Tuesday's voting booth? Use your God-given intelli-

gence!

Seek God's answers to the tough questions facing society. Explore the issues with trusted, Jesus-centered people around you.

Seek guidance from the Scriptures.

Pray to God and ask about your role in the elections. Expect the living God to answer your prayer of faith with a "message of truth!"

Listen to the response. Compare it with the truths recorded by earlier witnesses in the Scriptures, and your experience with God.

If you don't have a relationship yet with the living God, consider this election time to be your opportunity to begin that spiritual journey with him. Remember: God loves you unconditionally, and wants you to find him and hear him. Search until you find a church family that helps you meet the "living, loving God," who knows you personally and wants to be involved in your life everyday! And be sure to vote!

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175th anniversary

HUDSON — On Nov. 9, United Methodist Church Hudson will celebrate 175 years of ministry. The celebration begins at 9 a.m. with a worship service with the district superintendent, Rev. Keith Zimmerman, officiating, and past church members taking part. Specific music is planned. A celebratory meal is planned for 11 a.m.

During the worship se

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Today — Church Women United celebrates World Community Day at 6:30 p.m. at Lake Union Church, 2101 Washington St., Bloomington, with covered dish supper and worship service.

Sunday — Lincoln Zoi Lutheran Laymen's League Fall Rally registration at p.m. and banquet at 6 p.m. St. Luke's Lutheran Church, rural San Jose, hosted by Men's Club of the church. Cost: \$10. Speaker: the Rev. Gerald Renken, pastor, adviser of the Central Illinois District Lutheran Laymen