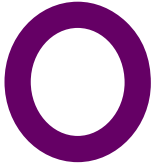


The Power of a Unified Church!

“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come,
they were all with one accord in one place.”

Acts 2:1



One hundred and forty years ago a few worn and weary sons and daughters of God, indelibly kissed by nature's sun, gathered for prayer and praise in the barracks of Quaker soldiers. To be sure, they were uncertain in their gathering. They were not certain of the outcome of the Civil War Between the States. They were uncertain of their future. They were uncertain of life itself. They were certain, however, that the God that had brought them across the swelling waters of the Atlantic, the God that had been with them through the middle passage and sustained them through the sweltering cotton fields of the south would be the God that would keep them, and provide for them, and make a way for them through this new wilderness of hardship and pain. Literally living through “dangers, toils and snares,” residents of a place called “hell's bottom,” they held on to their faith, they held on to hope unborn, they held on to each other.

The 27th Annual State of the Church Address delivered at the Metropolitan Baptist Church, Washington, D. C., on Sunday, January 25, 2004 by Dr. H. Beecher Hicks, Jr., Senior Minister

We are the recipients, we are the beneficiaries of the faith and hope born in that barracks. We are the great-great grandsons and granddaughters of those who wept and prayed that night in the place of their pain. What began there as the Fourth Baptist Church soon became the Metropolitan Baptist Church. We are here today because of their vision. We are here today because of their tenacity and their unfailing trust in the living God. We are here today because they dared to dream of a reality they could not see; they dared to dream of a church they could only envision with a spiritual eye. There in that barracks they had no choir to sing but somehow they heard the harmonies of heaven and they knew that one day you and I would gather in this place toward which they looked and longed. The song they would have sung then is the song we must sing now:

*We've come this far by faith,
leaning on the Lord.
Trusting in His Holy Word,
He never failed me yet.
Oh, oh, can't turn around.
We've come this far by faith!*

To the members of the Council of Servants,
members of the Diaconate and its fearless leader, Deacon Donald
Hines,

the Deaconess Ministry led so gracefully by Mrs. Ann Sloan, the Trustee Ministry under the capable guidance of Minister Brenda Girton Mitchell, the Council of Ministries whose work is guided by the faithful hands of Deacon Charisse Williams, my beloved staff, tirelessly and skillfully managed and inspired by Mrs. Denise Gibson Bailey, that labors with me (and puts up with me day by day!), my co-laborers in this ministry, the Reverend Melvin Maxwell, Dr. Sherrill McMillan and the Reverend Nolan E. Williams, Jr., and to you who are the body of Christ known as Metropolitan, I greet you in that Name that is above every name, even Jesus Christ our Lord. I thank God for each of you and for the ministry that God has placed in our hands and on our hearts.

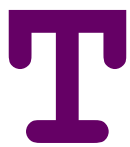
I rise today for one reason and one reason only – to acknowledge that I am here only by the grace of God. I am not here because of any personal skills or because of any intellectual prowess or because of anything I have deserved. I am only here by the unmerited favor of a God who has deliberately chosen to look beyond my faults and see my need. I am here, standing on the shoulders of those who have graced this pulpit before me – the Reverend Henry Bailey, the

Reverend Robert Johnson, the Reverend Moses W. D. Norman and the Reverend Dr. Ernest Clarence Smith. Thanks be to God for those who have gone before us and who have brought us to this high moment of our church life together.

It is my task today, as it has been for the last twenty seven years, to stand before you and to give an account of our ministry and of our stewardship. It is my task to stand in this place and to speak to you of our challenges and our opportunities, our failures and our success. It is my task to make an assessment of whether we have been true to the vision God has for us and whether we have been true to the abiding and governing principles of the Word of God. It is my task to speak a word of encouragement to those who may have fallen along the path as well as a word of assurance to those who do not yet see or share the vision of this ministry. It is my task to speak a word of discipline to those who would be divisive and destructive of our purposes. It is my task to speak directly to Satan and declare that Satan is a liar and to assure you that “no weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn.” (Isaiah 54:17)

So then I have come to declare in your hearing that our congregation is yet alive and well. We are growing spiritually and numerically. Our ministries are being challenged to become more efficient and more effective in their work. We are amazingly effective in our outreach, touching the lives of those who are counted among the least and the left out. Our worship and our praise is being strengthened by a new cadre of commissioned psalmists who take seriously their ministry to lead in worship and not merely to perform. We are financially stable, meeting our budgetary objectives and growing in our commitment to the ministry of the church as well as to the Hope Fund which drives us to the realization of our vision. We are not all that we could or should be; yet, we are becoming the people God would have us to become and we know that we are safe in His hands.

Transition and Transformation



his is a time of transition and transformation for our congregation. All around us are the unmistakable signs of change. That is as it should be. The church must always be mindful of its history but it must never be mired in it. While Christ is the same “yesterday, today, and forever,” He is, at the same time, the

author of change. This Word says, "Behold, I make all things new."

(Revelation 21:5)

Look around you. Metropolitan is a new church. Transition. Look along your pew. There are faces you have never seen before. Transition. Listen to the choir. There are new voices you have never heard before. Transition. When I look upon this congregation I am faced with the reality that this is not the church to which my family and I came twenty seven years ago. There are faces that are missing. There are smiles that are gone. There are ways of doing things then that are not appropriate now. Within the life of this congregation we are in an unmistakable phase of transition.

And that's what scares us. With so much transition around us it appears we are caught in some very unsettling waters which for many signals difficulty and danger ahead. With so much change around us it feels like perhaps we are adrift, not knowing where we are headed, sailors in uncharted waters. Our natural instinct is to fear change. We fear change because it removes from us the security of the known. We fear change because it causes us to release

yesterday and grieve with its passing. That is why we much prefer to do things as we have always done them. If the church has lasted for 140 years maybe it's good for another 140 years.

Yet, the reality is that change cannot be avoided. It's like wanting to stay asleep on a cold winter's morning. No matter how far down you pull in the bed, no matter how high you bring the covers over your head, the sun will rise, the world will be new, in fact it's "new every morning." We must face change head on.

The world is different. The culture is different. Our mores are different. The church cannot afford to approach today's challenges with yesterday's tools.

- Nobody plays a record player anymore. You now have cd's.
That's change.
- You don't have to go to the movies any more you can watch the dvd's in your home. That's change.
- You threw your typewriter out and replaced it with a computer.
That's change.

And if you take a moment and look in the mirror, you have changed. Similarly, churches that refuse to change become ecclesiastical curio shoppes – interesting to look at but no longer relevant to the culture they seek to serve. Remember this: “healthy things grow, growing things change, change challenges us, challenge force us to trust God, trust leads to obedience, obedience makes us healthy and of course, healthy things grow.”¹

It’s not just about a new church. It’s not just about a new building. It’s not just about a new Metropolitan. It’s about a new way of thinking. It’s about a new way of behaving. It’s about a new way of believing. It’s about a new way of understanding what God requires of the Church in this new age.

We *are* in uncharted waters. We are in the uncharted waters of a culture that is so fluid we do not know from one day till the next just what will face us or how we will be able to respond. That is why in the face of transition, in the face of change, many of us would prefer to hug the harbor preferring the safety of the shore over the

¹ Bishop Kenneth Ulmer

adventure of the sea. Unlike the instruction of Psalms we would prefer not to do business in great waters; we prefer to float the church like an ecclesiastical row boat in a bathtub.

And yet, my message to you today is that we are called to be and become more than we have ever been before. There must be – if we are to survive in these waters – a blending of creativity with collaboration and intuition. We must seek new ways of doing things, we must seek each other and celebrate the skills we individually bring, and we must blend it all with an intuition that says ‘I can’t explain it, I just know it.’

The church *is* in danger. It is not in danger, however, because of these new waters. It is in danger because we of the conservative, hide-bound, I-shall-not-be-moved, frozen chosen church spend our time **taking care** rather than **taking risks**. It is in the risk of faith – doing a new thing in a new way for Christ that we become a church that is not only “high tech” it is also “high touch.” It is in Soren Kierkegaard’s “leap of faith” that we break out of the tradition trap, leaping over the high wall of yesterday’s limitations, and begin to see

the new realities of God's wider world. It is in the taking of risk that we are not only engaged in transition but the transition itself becomes transforming.

Metropolitan is a church in transition. Metropolitan church is changing. And, admittedly, there is danger in the change. But you need not fear the danger as long as you know that God has you and the change in His hand. God has some plans for you. God has some plans for you and they cannot fail because they have His name attached. Here's the way Jeremiah says it:

**For I know the thoughts that I think toward you,
saith the Lord, thoughts of peace,
and not of evil, to give you an expected end.**

Jeremiah 29:11

The challenge for us is to do as Leonard Sweet has suggested – that we live in the world of an **“ancient/future.”** In other words,

- I understand the ancient but it merely prepares me for the future.
- I appreciate the old but it is the platform for the new.
- I have a grasp for what was but God is urging me to take hold of what will be.

What is required of the church is to carry the old truths of tradition with us while at the same time casting those truths toward a new future.

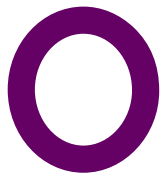
Make no mistake about it, there is risk in the water. That's the Peter paradigm. You remember that night the disciples were adrift in a boat somewhere in the middle of the Sea of Galilee when a storm rose up. Matthew says their little ship was **“tossed with waves for the wind was contrary.”** Matthew 14: 24 (May I tell you parenthetically that every once in a while the church runs upon some contrary winds? You're trying to get from one place to the next but there are some contrary winds. You see where you are and you see where you need to be but you have to get through some contrary winds.)

But in the midst of the storm, along about the fourth watch of the night, Jesus came walking to them on the sea. That's when Peter said, “Lord if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.” In other words, ‘if you're there, if you're in charge of this thing, if I can count on you being there when I get there, if I can get a guarantee

that your power can be my power, even though I know it's risky, let me come to you on the water.'

The challenge for the church, the challenge for this church, is to understand that in the transition is the transformation. In the process of doing the unexpected is the possibility of becoming more than we had ever imagined. In the process of taking risk we must be willing to transition from what we have been in order to gain the benefit of the transformation which is the definition of conversion and a new life in Christ. The challenge for the church, the challenge for this church is to no longer be content to sit on the shore and hug the harbor. Our task is to risk stepping on to the water with the One who invites us to walk with Him.

The Council of Servants



One of the most significant transitions of our church is in the way in which the leaders of our congregation define themselves and their work. The work of this ministry is sustained and supported by this group of men and women before you

whom we called Deacons, Deaconesses and Trustees. Over the last few weeks these men and women have given serious evaluation to their work. They have come to agree with me that it is time we begin to interpret who we are and what we do – not as corporate officers, but as servants of the living Christ.

To be a leader in the church is not a title to be coveted but a responsibility to be borne.

To be a deacon is not to be a member of a “board” but to be a servant on assignment for the King.

Therefore, you will begin to hear new ways of referring to this group of people. Let me explain.

What was the Official Board will retain its same function but will be referred to as the Council of Servants.

What was the Board of Deacons will be known as the Diaconate.

Those who have given consecrated service to this church will become more than Emeritus Deacons or Deaconesses, we will honor them with the title of Elder – they are not bishops or ministers or

overseers – they are those whose labor entitles them to “double honor” and who will serve as trusted counselors and advisors to the pastor.

You will even see a change in my title. I will no longer be simply “senior minister” I will be “senior minister and servant.”

And it is not just about a change in title; it is about a change in attitude, a change in perspective, a change in the way in which we see ourselves and hold ourselves accountable to this congregation. It’s about how we commit ourselves to a level of care for this church and this community that concentrates on what we **do** and not on what we **wear**, what we are **called** or where we **sit**. As leaders of this church we must be determined to serve this congregation and this community.

On this matter, let me share this concluding word. In the nearly twenty seven years of my ministry here I have never felt as supported and sustained by the Diaconate as I do today. They have demonstrated to me not only their affection but their loyalty. They

have come to my aid and, when needed, to my defense. We have learned to cry together, to laugh together, and to be co-laborers in Christ together. I am grateful for these who are not only Deacons, they are friends.

A NEW TABERNACLE FOR CHRIST

Surely, the most challenging work before us is the erection of a new Tabernacle for our Christ. Since December of 1999 our faces have been set toward the place that God would lead us and to the Tabernacle He would have us erect. Let me share with you where we are:

- We have completed the program design phase, examining our needs and determining the uses for the new facility.
- We have purchased 37 acres of prime real estate in Largo, Maryland – a property zoned for churches, complete with infrastructure and land sufficient for parking and future expansion. The land itself represents the miracle work of God. While we have purchased the land the principle payment has been placed in a charitable remainder trust that will return our payments at a future date. God has literally given the land to us.
- We have commissioned our architects, Devroux and Purnell and charged them to erect a temple to house the living God. At our Annual Meeting of 2003 the congregation reviewed and received the schematic drawing for this work. Our architect, Mr. Marshall Purnell, is with us in worship today. Please greet and appreciate Mr. Purnell.

- We have begun a capital gifts campaign under the direction of Cargill Associates, a campaign which promises nearly \$6 million dollars in revenue over the life of the campaign.
- We have completed the preliminary design phase of the project and are now fully engaged in the generation of construction documents. In addition, we have reached the phase when we will begin to request the appropriate permits from Prince George's County in order to begin the work.
- At this point we are immersed in financial negotiations, seeking to bring the most financially advantageous program to complete the project.
- Our ceremonial groundbreaking will be held on Easter, Resurrection Sunday 2004. We expect to begin the actual construction in the early summer of this year.

All of that is just wonderful but you would prefer to see what this is all about first hand. My brothers and my sisters, welcome to your new church home, the new Metropolitan Baptist Church, Tabernacle for the living God!

[Show virtual reality presentation]

Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

Just to recap, let me review for you the major features of your new church home.

- A sanctuary seating 3000 worshippers. The sanctuary itself is designed not only for worship but for theatrical and musical presentations as well.
- Parking for 1,500 cars.
- A chapel, surrounded by water, to accommodate 300 worshippers for small weddings and funerals.
- A multipurpose room that will accommodate 750 for a sit down banquet and more than 1,500 for theatre style seating.
- 25 classrooms and meeting spaces.
- A special area designed to accommodate our senior citizens.
- Nursery and Head Start facilities
- A music rehearsal and performance suite.
- Special facilities for children and youth including outdoor basketball, tennis and picnic facilities.
- An outdoor amphitheatre for concerts and special meetings.
- Individual prayer closets and a family prayer chapel
- Capped off by a lighted spire that will reach into the heavens exalting our Christ.

All of this raises the question of cost. As you can imagine, all of our needs have exceeded our capacity to afford them. The precise cost of the structure has not yet been determined but it will most certainly be above the original projected cost of \$22 million dollars.

We will soon be about the process of bringing our desires in line with our resources in order to make the project achievable. It is at this point that I must share with you some good news and some bad news. The good news is that we have all the money we need to erect this facility. The bad new is that all the money we need is still in your pocket!

Your consecrated, consistent and dependable gifts to the Hope Fund will make all of this possible. Currently, however, we are running behind in our pledge contributions. The pledge is one thing; a completed pledge is something else. As we deal with financial institutions it is critical at this phase of our project that we are able to demonstrate the consistent and faithful resolve of the congregation to financially support this vision.

The vision that we have before us and that you have seen today can only be realized if we do our individual parts and complete the pledges as we have promised. If you are fulfilling your pledge we are deeply grateful. If you have not yet made a commitment, please do so now. You will find a pledge card in the envelope pocket of your

pew. Please fill it out and give it to an usher as you leave the worship today. If you are still uncertain about what God would have you to do please be in fervent, travailing prayer that God will open your spirit to join in this move of God.

CEREMONIAL GROUNDBREAKING AND FORTY DAYS OF POWER

W

e must now move forward in faith. While we do not yet have everything we would like to have, we do not have all of the money we need to have, we do not have the support of everyone as we would like to have, yet we must move forward to claim this victory for God. Here's why:

Caleb and Joshua were standing on the edge of the land of promise. Caleb was an old man and it appeared that the task of leading a conquest of the land was insurmountable. The mountain before him was a mountain that had been promised to him by Moses. No one would have thought harshly of him had he simply decided to throw in the towel and hang his robes on the hooks of hopelessness. Nevertheless it was Caleb who, in the face of overwhelming odds and

advancing enemies who looked at the challenge before him and declared: **“As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me; as my strength was then, even so is my strength now ... Now therefore, give me this mountain!”**

On Easter Sunday we will claim the mountain. On the land God has given to us we shall place the blade of a shovel into the earth and signal our full intention to resurrect from the ground a monument for our God and our Christ.

This is not a spectacle or a spiritual side show. This is serious business. That is why I have proclaimed the season of Lent – from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday – 40 Days of Power. It is my chief desire that during these days the congregation will come together as never before.

We must come together to prepare ourselves spiritually for this great adventure with God.

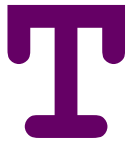
We must come together to fast and to pray.

We must come together in Bible study and in the breaking of bread together.

We must come together in worship and praise and in the lifting of our voices.

For forty consecutive days this church will be alive with activity that will match both the need and interest of every segment of our congregation. I recognize that everyone will not be able to be here for every event. It is my intention, however, that all of the activities will be so compelling that you will deeply regret when you are unable to attend. I only ask that as the calendar of activities is released you will mark off your commitment of time and involvement. If you can't be here every day perhaps two days out of the week. There will be power in this house – a power that will propel us into the future that God has designed for us.

THE POWER OF A UNIFIED CHURCH



here is a word in the second book of Luke's preaching – we call it the Acts of the Apostles – that speaks in clarion detail regarding who we are and what we are to become.

You realize that it was in his first book of preaching that Luke outlined the ministry of Jesus, the miracles he wrought, the healing by his hand and by his hem, and the ways in which he sought to bring into being something He called the Kingdom of God.

This second book of preaching was originally transmitted, as you know, to a man named Theophilus, a man known only to history as a Roman official and a lover of God. Luke says that something of interest happened on the Day of Pentecost. It was a day of festival that occurred on the fiftieth day. Some called it the Feast of Weeks but Luke called it Pentecost. It was a festival, a celebration of the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai. But Luke called it Pentecost.

Something happened that had never happened before. Pentecost. There was a report of some strange goings on. He called it Pentecost.

Something happened in this new organization Jesus called the church.

Something radical, something different, something mind boggling and life changing happened when those disciples showed up.

Something hard to believe, something hard to handle, something they had never seen or heard before when the so-called Saints of God showed up.

Something happened among this band of frustrated, forsaken, fractured and broken believers.

They had been laughed at. They had been ridiculed. They had been scorned. They had been shamed. Their leader had been lynched. Their treasurer had committed suicide. The company of the twelve had become a company of the confused. They were not of one mind. They were not of one spirit. They were not together. They were not in the same place.

I do not mean to be redundant but that is why you must pay attention to what Luke said: **“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.”** By process of logic what Luke is saying is that before the day of Pentecost they were not on one accord and they were not in one place. You mean to tell me that when the church was born they were not on one accord? You mean to tell me that these who had been born again were not on one accord? You mean to tell me that these who were water washed and blood bought could not agree on how to get along? They tell me they had an argument in an upper room. Some said He who had been crucified now lived. Others argued it was nothing but an idle tale told by some women. They were not on one accord. James and John were sharpening their switchblades. They were not on one accord. Thomas said they all were crazy and he wouldn't believe anything until he could put his hand in the holes of His flesh. They were not on one accord; they were not in one place.

But now, as Luke tells this story, a change was taking place. From their transition came transformation and a change was taking place. These were the disciples of Jesus who had gathered in an upper

room on a Thursday night but now they were gathered together in another upper room on a Sunday morning. These disciples were not, as before, twelve men all alone. They had been joined by men from all over the world: Medes and Parthians, Elamites and the dwellers in Mesopotamia and in Judea. They came from as near as Egypt and as far away as Rome. They were not sophisticated, neither were they the intelligentsia of the world. And Luke says that 120 of them had gathered, fifty days following the Passover there for a festival, for celebration and praise.

Listen, the essence of this word is quickly seen. There is no power until the church is on one accord and in one place. In other words, the secret of our power is in direct proportion to our togetherness.

On the day of Pentecost 120 believers went up but one body of believers came down.

On the day of Pentecost some individuals went up, but the church came down.

On the day of Pentecost personalities went up but power came down.

I'm going to try this one more time. The essence of this word is that when the disciples came together on one accord and in one place they were no longer alone. Here's the truth of this text. If you get together somebody else will come to join in the praise. If you get together folk will come from the north, south, east and west. If you get together, there's a whole band of believers that will come to your rescue.

Here's what happened. Not only did 120 others show up on the Day of Pentecost but the wind and the fire showed up as well. It wasn't just wind – wind alone would have caused commotion but it would have had not constructive end. It wasn't just fire – fire alone would have set the place ablaze but without purposeful intent. Here's the point: When God seeks to show up in the life of the church He sends both the wind and the fire.

Wind – the energizing presence of God

Fire – the purifying presence of God

Wind – to stir up the church.

Fire – to warm the church.

Wind – to wake up the church.

Fire – to empower the church.

Wind – to sweep away the old and sweep in the new

Fire – to chase away the darkness of the night

Wind – to blow out the false and blow in the truth.

Fire – replace sadness with joy

Wind – to bring heaven a little closer to the earth

Fire – to send my praise from earth to heaven

Wind – to blow away the cobwebs of contentment within the church

Fire – to burn up the chaff that stifles the church.

Wind – to speed the church along its journey

Fire – to provide the combustion that would set tongues and hearts on fire.

Wind and fire to give the church the power it would need.

| | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| Power to live. | Power to sing |
| Power to heal. | Power to praise |
| Power to work. | Power to pray |
| Power to witness | Power to shout |
| Power to love | |
| Power to lift | |
| Power to care | |
| Power to preach. | |
| Power to prophesy. | |

There is power in a unified church. But tell me, what shall we do with this power?

Power that is unharnessed can be harmful.

Power that has no discipline can be destructive.

Power that is not contained can be catastrophic.

May I tell you what happened? On the day of Pentecost, on the day when they were on one accord in one place, not only did the wind and fire show up they found themselves with a new form of power – power to speak in a language they had never known before. It was power to speak in such a way that even though they spoke in their own tongue by the time it reached the ear of the one to whom they were speaking the Holy Spirit had rearranged the syllables and sentences so that they could hear what the Spirit was trying to say.

And somebody raised the question: what are they saying? Why are they behaving in this strange manner? It looks like these men are filled with new wine. This was the answer: These men are speaking the wonderful works of God. The power of a unified church is simply this: it is empowered to speak the wonderful works of God. Is there anybody here that can speak the wonderful works of God? If you can't tell it, then let me tell it. I know some wonderful works of God.

He woke me up this morning. That's a wonderful work.

He started me on my way – a wonderful work.

He put food on my table – a wonderful work.

He put money in my pocket – a wonderful work.

He put shoes on my feet, clothes on my back – a wonderful work.

I know you've heard this before but I thought I'd tell you anyhow.

He's my doctor in my sick room – He does wonderful work.

He's my lawyer in a court room – He does wonderful work.

He's my company keeper – He does wonderful work

He's my way maker – He does wonderful work.

I'm talking about the power of a unified church. But you don't understand. You're not feeling me. Let me see if I can help you:

The other day I picked up a little book by Leonard Sweet titled "Jesus drives me crazy." That's what He does. He drives me crazy.

When I want to quit He won't let me quit.

Jesus drives me crazy

When I want to give up He won't let me give up.

Jesus drives me crazy.

It's not my fault. He makes me act crazy.

He makes me act funny.

He makes me act strange

He makes me run when nobody's chasing me.

He makes me laugh when I'm not tickled.

He makes me cry when nobody's hurting me.

He makes me shout when nobody wants to shout with me.

He makes me preach when preaching is not in me.

He makes me sing when there is no song in my soul.

He drives me crazy.

Let me tell you how crazy he makes me act.

Nicolo Pagannini, was one of the world's greatest violinist. He was a virtuosi. Those who sought to play the violin wanted to do so with his skill and with his gift. The story is told that one evening when Paganini was in concert, performing his Violin concerto No. 1 in d major, opus 6, when one of the strings on his violin broke but instead of giving up on his instrument he kept on playing. A few moments later the second string on his violin broke but instead of giving up on

his concerto he kept on playing. Not too very much longer and the third string broke and he knew he would have to step away from the orchestra and let them finish the symphony without him. But instead he kept on playing. Now he was standing there with only one string and a bow but he kept on playing until he came to the symphony's end. He kept on playing until he found new sweetness in the heart of the violin. He kept on playing until the rafters echoed with sounds the likes of which his audience had never heard. Then, in that moment, flushed with perspiration, the concert over, the orchestra rose to give him a standing ovation. There stood Paganini raising his cello in the air and exclaiming: "Paganini and one string."

So here I am today, worn and weary. Thinking that perhaps I cannot go on. Thinking that my dreams of a unified church are beyond realization. But Jesus drives me crazy and he has me here doing what I never thought I could.

So I'll keep on playing even if I'm down to one string.

I'll keep on playing even if I can only find one person to pray with me.

I'll keep on playing even if it looks as if all the resources are gone.

I'll keep on playing even if it seems there is nothing left to play with.

He drives me crazy.

Come on Holy Spirit! Fall down on me!