

Wedgewood Baptist Church  
50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary – October 22, 2006  
Rev. Dr. Emil Mialik, Wedgewood's 4th Pastor

The first minister of this Church deserves much credit for what this Church is today. A person of enormous integrity, Glenn Plott started this church on the right track, for it was he who led it away from any complacency of theological thought. There was no compromise on his part in regard to the unfolding of truth. For that I am grateful.

When the Search Committee of Wedgewood Baptist Church first met with me in May of 1971, I was informed clearly that the church was open relative to its theological and social stance and that the committee was well aware that of me as they did their preliminary research, stressing strongly that I was the person whom they needed to come and lead them. They informed me that the finances were here and that although the Church had recently undergone a stressful situation that all was well. The stressful situation is a story in and of itself. So be it!

The result was that an exodus followed during the first six months of my ministry here. I remember about a dozen families left to become a part of a very conservative setting – churches that taught what they wanted to hear and would confirm their pre-determined belief system rather than to be a part of a Church that would challenge them to venture into new venues of Christian thought, a challenge well initiated by Glenn Plott and continued by Chris Ayers. I don't know whether I was excited or saddened at the time because of their departure. Perhaps I was more saddened, for I felt then as I do today that much of our theology and ethical behavior stands to be remedied and delivered from a state of corruption - - a theology in dire need of revamping and restructuring. What was good enough for Paul and Silas stands to be questioned, for as I see it there is always a dynamic call for newness in theological venture, a demand for novelty of thought, reaching out to a beckoning horizon of unfolding truth. The fact that I was able to serve here seventeen years and that at my retirement departure from Wedgwood, this Church could not have gifted me in a much better and more gracious way for my doing the best I could in terms of leadership. A further testimony to this Church, as a recall, is that more than 100 pastors were considered as a possible replacement. To the scene came Chris Ayers who already has past the years of my tenure. Continued blessing on you Chris, and so with Vickie and Will who are very much in Chris's ministry.

Now, for this wonderful occasion, there are two thoughts I want to leave with you as we celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of WBC. The first is that we as humans are an itzy bitzy part of this vast cosmos, which is not complete and I believe will never be complete, from the smallest microscopic living iota to the animal in human form that stands upright with some degree of mental development. I believe Charles Darwin was right in describing the process of evolution as such. This universe is a composite of every living organism – a universe that cannot exist otherwise. It is a family of cohesion utterly dependent and related to every individual entity and element. Nothing in existence is a part from but a part of. There is no such thing as a rugged individualism that can snub the total picture of reality. We are in this cosmos together –clearly interrelated, positively integrated and thoroughly dependent on relationships. Every individual and every thing counts. Therefore, we have no right to be insensitive to the need of understanding that all of us are important to the vastness of reality. Should we not recognize

this significant relationship, we should consider ourselves as contributors to the ineffectiveness of what this cosmos, not to overlook this very small planet, can do and will experience. We are in reality an important and significant part of the whole. We should never consider ourselves less than that.

Having stated what I have just dwelt on, I want to narrow the gap considerably by zeroing in on the church, what I consider to be an important entity, as a community faith, of persons who represent a family of togetherness, a family of cohesion, and an acceptance of who we are and nothing less. The past, with whatever its setting was as a Church, is still a significant, important part today. This Church's fifty years of existence must be kept in focus, with all of its errors, its idiosyncrasies and inadequacies as well as its good.

This fiftieth anniversary, therefore, as I see it, brings all of Wedgewood Baptist Church's past to this meaningful occasion. The gathering of today is only part of what this Church has been throughout its existence. It must continue to give life; it must continue to give meaning; it must continue to deal with a challenge to move ahead into greater venues of newness and novelty. It must continue to change as it continues to be part of the whole.

We were family in the past; we are family now, and we shall be family throughout the oncoming years, years loaded with dynamic possibilities and experiences of creativity. All of us here today, as it is so of all who have ever been members of this family of faith, whether it is understood or not, all, including those who left this Church for whatever reason and certainly those who have already passed on into the eternal love of God, will always, and I stress always, be a part of this family of faith.

We all have been and still are a continuation of an unfolding story. We may not be present personally in time to come but we shall always be part of this significant church. Yes we shall, somewhere recorded in the annals of Wedgewood Baptist Church. I say this to remind us that the church has never been a compilation of wood and nails, brick and mortar. It has always been people, and it will always be people — an ongoing family reaching out to years ahead, acknowledging its calling into more and more creative action.

For this reason, I am grateful for memory because memory enables us to reflect upon and to recall vividly many wonderful years of service starting back in 1956, exactly one half century ago. So I say with pride: this church is, as it is with me, indelibly imprinted upon our minds. I feel certain this can be said of each pastor who through the years preached from this pulpit and served with many gracious people.

We shall always be a part of each other — a force of transformation within a needy world — moving deliberately and meaningfully from one year, one decade, one generation, and, from one century into another. So, our presence here this hour continues what was started back in 1956. And I say without equivocation that Wedgewood Baptist has always been a spiritual force throughout its 50 years of lively existence addressing the variety and many needs it confronted. It will be so 50 years from now as long as it is faithful to its calling.

Let's remember, also, not only are we part of each other, even more, we are structured within the world family, however the idea of Creator is expressed or defined – whether it be through the church, synagogue, mosque or temple in its seeking to make sense of life within this integrated society. We do not exist in isolation from each other but must be fully aware we exist within the context of wholeness and togetherness. That I believe is what Jesus wanted his followers to be about, a universal family of faith, to understand, to express, and to exude. Surely we do realize, don't we, that Wedgewood is constantly challenged to proclaim a message of truth with enthusiasm, zest and earnestness, realizing that the task is unfinished. It's an ongoing process.

I have read about the beautiful cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, of its golden glowing old walls, its ancient stones so strong, yet so soft, of its windows of splendor telling the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem. Its windows are enhanced with all kinds of precious jewels. One can only imagine what the deep tone of the organ does for the human soul as its alarming, beautiful harmony fills the cathedral. But there is something else that must be told about this cathedral. There is a strange incompleteness, for not all of the windows participate in the telling of the story. Some windows merely have faint outlines of color, which reveal a soft translucent green, windows waiting to be transformed when they, too, shall spring into vibrant hues telling the story that is yet to be told.

This is where we are today in the church's journey, attempting to do our part in echoing a profound note of the gospel. And it is this church, along with the many others religious bodies, scattered about, persuaded by God to fill in the picture, to bring about completion and necessary transformation in a world that unfortunately reflects chaos. Just look at these windows here in this beautiful sanctuary with their translucent hue. They, too, surely reflect the gospel story, a story that is rich with truth and interestingly simple. It is the story that informs us that the Creator is for us and all, accepts us and all and more so persistently calls us and all to carry on the work of love, grace, mercy, and justice as it was so clearly defined and so magnificently and beautifully portrayed in the life of Jesus.

I suggest that we, too, need to be gripped by that challenging, awesome message, so that we, too, shall desire to be no less than living testimonies and a dynamic reflection, mirroring that same love, that same grace, that same mercy, and that same justice in a world that is so tightly knitted together. So be it! Amen and Amen!