



Woodside World

CHURCHNEWS of CONGREGATION and COMMUNITY

Rev. Dr. Deborah DeMars Conrad, Pastor

FROM THE PASTOR...

Earlier this week, I shared on facebook an article I thought was really helpful in putting our water issue in a larger context. It was called [Democracy, Disposability, and the Flint Water Crisis](#), and I recommend it. It got shared by one of my former high school teachers, and immediately drew the comment of some folks, one in particular who thinks he knows more and who expressed a certain disdain for the people of Flint. Among other things, he said we should have used our property taxes to keep the infrastructure in good repair, and asked why people hadn't just followed GM to wherever the jobs went. (Worth noting it's a common theme in hard times: why didn't they just move? People asked it a lot after Hurricane Katrina, as well.)

I've only been here two years, but I got a little defensive. Plus, I wasn't in a mood to let such ignorance go unchallenged. So I responded, based on observations, conversations, and the many things I've been reading, including Karen Piper's book on the global water crisis, *The Price of Thirst*, and Andrew Highsmith's recent book about Flint, *Demolition Means Progress*. Highsmith and Piper are both university professors (Stanford and Missouri) and their works are based on solid research.

I wrote this:

Short answer, as a start: the problems in flint now are the result of a century of racism, corporate self-absorption and political misdealing, private control of public assets, social engineering and exploitation by wealthy individuals, poor tax policy and unjust revenue sharing. When flint (and detroit and the other auto cities) were feeding the state quite well, the state loved them. When they couldn't do that anymore, the state quit loving them and refused

to return the favor.

Folks couldn't just move when jobs left, because their homes suddenly had no resale value, though they had mortgages to pay. This also decimated the property tax base. In many, many cases, folks did follow the jobs, simply abandoning houses they couldn't sell, creating blight that further damaged property values, and adding more work for law enforcement, while decreasing yet again the property tax base. GM and associated industry also left behind more than 1000 acres of industrial brownfield inside the city limits, and a polluted river, neither of which is really helpful for redeveloping/reinventing a city. Then came the housing crisis. State law restricts what flint can assess from folks around us who work, play or do business in the city. Add "austerity" as the foundation of a misguided, unfounded and discredited political agenda, and the whole thing goes to hell. There is a bind here, which is in large part not the fault of the people of flint... None of this, of course, can possibly be considered apart from the political cancer metastasizing in the american psyche that has convinced us that all taxes are bad, all privatization is good, and anything resembling the "common good" is just damned socialism, and probably the fault of black people.

You can see I was in a mood.

Flint has made the international news. And if you've been reading the reports, you know how much nuance matters, and how often the story is getting told in the "80-90 percent correct" range. It matters to tell the whole story. And I'm telling you this, because I don't like my own ignorance to go unchallenged either. Earlier, I got an email from Leah in Washington DC, with

the Alliance of Baptists. She said she'd listened to my [sermon from Sunday](#), and wanted to know how the Alliance could pray with and for Flint. Here's what I wrote her in part, after a minor rant about how the news is giving me a headache (and you'll hear some overlap, no doubt):

So my prayer is for national and state leaders who value people, who are willing to embrace solutions that cost money and enrich the vast rest of us for a while — and for taxpayers who embrace taxes as a good thing, a way of being community and providing things like roads and water and lights and health. Programs like the WPA — whereby we could employ people and rebuild infrastructure at the same time. My other prayers are that the governor who did this to us will have time in prison to ponder how to be a better neighbor. That democracy will be restored. That the political party of trickle-down, voter suppression, and income inequality will finally change its platform or be unelected. That water will be guaranteed as a human right and no one will be shut off from the means of life. That the church will shift charity to second place, and justice to first priority. That it will realize that generosity is rarely a long-term solution to anything, and begin to cry out for something more systemic and substantive. Meanwhile, it would be nice to see water arriving here in something other than 16 oz bottles, surely to end up in landfills, and generating massive profits for the bottled water industry — itself a pox on society. That probably isn't what you wanted or expected to hear, but it's where I am at this moment. thanks for asking.

The thing is, as Woodside has always known, charity doesn't solve anything. Woodside has devoted its entire history of mission to changing minds, changing approaches, changing perspective, changing systems. In the

name of God. In the Spirit of Jesus. In the interest of a vision of a shared and just world. People need to have fresh clean water now, but we also need to confront a system that let this happen.

I just thought you'd like to know what I'm telling people.

But people need clean water, and well-meaning people across the country, Baptists and UCC congregations and others, are calling and emailing Woodside, asking what they can do, how they can help.

So, here's what's happening.

Annie and I, the Executive Committee, and the Building and Grounds folks are working on plan to install a point-of-entry filter on our building and to replace our ancient drinking fountains with water bottle fill stations. The idea is to invite anyone with a need to come in and fill bottles to take home at no charge. We can provide water and at the same time minimize the volume of plastic we're disposing. (Someone told me yesterday that by 2050, it is projected there will be as much plastic by volume in the ocean as fish; this is not an inconsequential concern.)

While we don't know the total cost yet, we've received about \$5,000 so far and others are telling us gifts are on the way. If you know folks who want to send gifts, please invite them to make checks payable to Woodside Church, with "water" on the memo line. You can tell them that we promise to be faithful, to them and to the people of Flint.

Lack of water can be the death of our bodies. Ignorance can just as surely be the death of our society.

With you on a confounding journey,

-pastor deb

IN THE CONGREGATION

FAITH EXPLORATION CLASSES FOR ADULTS THIS WEEK

- ◆ *Living Our Faith in the World* class led by Jay Cummings.
- ◆ Linda Angus leads a discussion of the weekly lectionary (the readings we'll hear in worship)
- ◆ Carol Higgins' group is starting a new book to discuss. They are reading *God Not One*: eight religions that run the world by Stephen Prothero. Check in the office if you need a copy.

CALL TO MEETING—On Jan 31, we convene a special meeting at 12:50 pm to vote on the proposed changes to our By-Laws. Proposed revisions reflecting our conversations last week will be available Sunday, Jan 24.

WINTER NOTE: Please be aware: if Mott College is closed, so is our office. For evening events' status, check Facebook or call the office.

WATER UPDATE—If you need a filter, or if it is time to replace the cartridge, (because the water is running slowly) call the church office. We have had offers of water bottles and water filter donations from out of state people who have found us online. More people around the country want to help, so we have a separate water fund started to help people with the water situation, so we can respond to needs as they arise. See pastor deb's article on the front page for more things we plan on doing.

IN OTHER NEWS: Leslie and Karen are heading off to Charlotte for a planning meeting about our next group of interns. They'll no doubt come back with great ideas and lots of ways for us all to be involved. If you'd like to work with a stellar bunch of young people — or help plan for their arrival — talk to Karen.

FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK Do you ever think, Gee, I wish I would've saved my Woodside World, I can't remember when the next *Day-break* service is? Or something similar. Just get out your laptop, tablet, or smart phone and go to Facebook and look up Woodside Church of Flint. The latest info is there. We try to put something on once a day—or you can comment on our page. Everyone likes to be liked...



P.S. Our website is really good too.

WE HAVE A BUS STOP! Our Marketing Committee has been working with MTA to get a bus stop in front of Woodside. We're excited this will make us more accessible to people without vehicles. Next step is to convert the end of the overhang canopy (at the end of the breezeway) into a shelter. We have ideas. Do you have skills to share? Then, we'll ask for more volunteers, willing to serve hot chocolate or coffee, so folks can experience a Woodside Welcome as they wait for the bus. More about this later, but call the office or pastor deb if you can help with the shelter.

IN THE COMMUNITY

BLOOD LEAD TESTING: This Sat, Jan 23, 10 am to 1 pm, at the Flint Masonic Temple, there is free testing for children and adults. There will also be information on *Battling the Flint Water Crisis*.

POW (POETRY OF WITNESS) begins a 3-part series from 6—10 pm at the UU Congregation on Ballenger Hwy. This month, the topic is *Racism*. Donation is \$5 and Dinner is \$5. Feb 26 is on *Water*, Mar 18 is *Incarceration/School to Prison Pipeline*.

MORE NEW MEMBERS

Fresh from the glow of January baptism, we are planning for new members again at Easter!

If you're interested in joining Woodside Church, you are welcome to sit in on informational classes with Pastor Deb. We'll gather Sundays at 9:30 am, for 5 weeks of Lent (beginning Feb 14). See you then!

URBANSPIRIT INTRO AND VISIT

Interested in knowing more about UrbanSpirit and Pastor Deb's "other" work in poverty education?

The weekend retreat and info session we planned for Louisville has been rescheduled for April 1-3.

Pastor Deb and Campbell Lovett, our conference minister, will lead this fact-finding time, including worship with a UCC congregation in Louisville.



Cost is \$50 (includes all lodging and meals; transportation to Louisville is your own responsibility, but

carpooling is possible) and registration is required.

Look for brochures on the table, or ask deb.

Want more info about UrbanSpirit? Check the website: www.urbanspirit.org.

We are informed... Jack Byers died on Sunday. Funeral will be on Tue, Jan 26 at First Congregational Church in Grand Blanc... Earl Logan's grandfather died today (Thursday).

A MILESTONE BIRTHDAY is on Jan 24. Dr. Ernestine Smith will be celebrating. There will be a cake for her this Sunday after worship. Come wish her well.

THIS WEEK AT WOODSIDE 1/24 - 1/30

SUNDAY:

1/24 9:30 am **Adult Classes**

11 am Worship

Coffee and Conversation hosted by

the

Church and Ministry Committee

MONDAY:

1/25 Office Closed

7 pm Chime Choir

WEDNESDAY:

1/27 4:30 pm Voices Group

5:30 pm Board of Directors Meeting

6:30 pm Women's Folk Choir

7:30 pm Chancel Choir

THURSDAY:

1/28 6 pm New Day Committee

SATURDAY:

1/30 2 pm Marketing Committee



"We are like islands in the sea, separate on the surface but connected in the deep." — [William James](#)

DO YOU NEED HELP with yardwork, cleaning, vacuuming, snow shoveling, etc? *Max Grice* will do it! He is available. For rates and times you can call Max or Michelle Grice –Chase.

NEW YARD SIGNS—We will be ordering some different yard signs soon. If you have an old one, keep the metal part and we can give you the new sign without having to replace the metal. We'll let you know when they arrive.

FREE TO A GOOD HOME: We've been asked to announce that there is a 1960s baby grand piano someone wants to donate to an organization. It needs to be repaired and moved. Call Annie in the office if you know of a use for it.