

MEADOWBROOK SENIORS PROJECT

PAST MEMORIES & REFLECTIONS OF MEADOWBROOK CHURCH

December 18, 2020

Topic: Drama Ministry

Eric Schwalm

A little bit of background on Eric Schwalm:

- *Eric Schwalm started attending Champaign Assembly (what is now Meadowbrook Community Church) in Autumn of 1984. The Schwalm's moved into town from Springfield, Illinois, due to a job promotion. After moving to Champaign, Eric watched on Channel 3 TV a program, "Sunday Night Reflections", which featured Tom Richardson one night. The Schwalm's were friends with Tom when living in Springfield. They then joined Tom at his church, Champaign Assembly.*
- *At Meadowbrook, Eric has served as an Usher, Counter of the Offering, and Café Ministry Worker. Eric served in many ways in men's lay ministry as an under shepherd to the flock, including serving as cook for men's retreats and cookouts.*
- *Favorite scripture: Hebrews 10: 25: "not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near"*
- *Favorite hymn (psalmist David): "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me..."*
- *Eric was a charter member of The National Day of Prayer Breakfast, held at what is now the Banquet Center at the Hilton Garden Inn. Many people from the community, including professors of U of I and a young man named Mark Burns presently at WGNN radio, gathered for prayer and fellowship every year. The core group of attendees later became members of Promise Keepers.*
- *Eric was involved in the beginnings of organizing the group, Autism Society of Illinois, and later in 1992 served a 3-year term as President for the organization. The organization advocates on inclusion of disabled children into the educational system, giving those with disabilities more of a chance to assimilate into the population.*

God has given us all talents and gifts. Eric was given the talent of acting which he used to bring God's Kingdom forth through his involvement with Drama Ministry. Eric believes drama ministry is a valuable part of lay ministry. Drama has a purpose in the church. Through the powerful media of dramatization, evangelizing makes a difference for the cause of Christ to spread the Gospel. Drama can be used to meet people, especially unbelievers, on their ground. Jesus loved telling parables to the crowds. He probably livened up his stories with different gestures, facial expressions, and voice tones. Drama Ministry can do that also with scripts that make people laugh. Proverbs 17:22 states: "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones."

Eric recalls his role of Simon the Zealot in "the Last Supper" presented at what was then called Champaign Assembly of God. "The Last Supper" was performed at what is presently the Youth Sanctuary prior to Easter, year 1991. On the front platform of the sanctuary, the characters, Jesus and the twelve disciples, were positioned at a long table and "frozen" as in the DaVinci "Last Supper" painting. Eric was frozen holding a piece of bread on the stage and sporting a dark beard with dark brown hair at the time. Eric and the other characters had to remain "frozen" for several minutes as each individually got up from the table and delivered their lines to the congregation. Eric recalled, at one of the presentations, a spider (not part of the cast) came down from ceiling in front of Eric. Without distracting the congregation, Eric swiped the spider from his freezing posture, and then froze back into character. Anything can happen in a live performance.

In history, three main Jewish sects were identified at the time of Jesus ministry: the Essenes, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees. The Zealots could be considered a fourth, causing the problems which led to the First Jewish-Roman War. Zealots were bent on revolution out of a sense of liberty and patriotism and looking for a Messiah to violently overthrow Rome. Simon the Zealot hated traitors to the Jews like the tax collector Matthew, who got rich by collaborating with the despised Romans. Yet with divine irony, Jesus chose Simon the Zealot along with Matthew; brought them together; and blended them into His team. If Jesus saw potential in Matthew the tax collector and Simon the Zealot as His team members who could spread the Gospel throughout the earth, not by force, but by the power of love, then there has to be many more believers in Christ willing to be team members. Drama Ministry is a group of people with acting talent and love of Christ who use teamwork to spread the Gospel. In the midst of today's political strife and division, this love and teamwork can set the Gospel apart from the messages of the World.

The church has been blessed with talent in both acting and staging. Several plays were realistic dramatic presentations. The Chief Priest (Eric Schwalm) in a loud dramatic voice posed the question to Jesus (Mike Shine), "You have heard his blasphemy, what do you say now?" The passion story continued before the congregation with the crucifixion, with Jesus laying on his back against the cross. The church production crew obtained a piece of railroad track iron. With a hammer, the actor portraying a Roman soldier, struck the iron. The sound was like the nails were going through his hands. In a darkened sanctuary, Eric could hear crying and whimpering from the congregation.

In 1997, members of the church re-adapted the fictional "Maltese Falcon" movie characters for drama ministry. Eric recalls playing detective Sam Sleuth, the Humphrey Bogart character, Sam Spade. Kay Lemons portrayed his sidekick. In one scene, there was a need to incorporate the key line, "it hit me like a ton of bricks", often heard in Sam Spade movies. The production crew was in a quandary, as real bricks could not be dropped on Eric's head as a visual effect. Humor entered into this dramatization. Josh Terrio improvised using small toy cardboard bricks found in the kids Sunday school rooms. The cardboard bricks could be dropped on Eric's head when the line was spoken. There was much laughter from the congregation.

Dramatic presentations were performed before the congregation for a period of years up to years 2008-2010 when transition occurred into the new sanctuary. The presentations, between 10 and 20 minutes, were placed between song worship as the lesson to prepare the congregation for the sermon. Eric remains enthusiastic to incorporate drama into church ministry. Being of age for many roles, he eyes re-adapting "The Sunshine Boys" (as played by George Burns and Walter Matthau) in teaching the Word of God.