



THE  
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OF THE  
FIRST FRIDAY  
BREAKFAST CLUB, INC.

# First Friday News & Views

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1

## HowYA' DOIN'?

by Jonathan Wilson

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### CALENDAR

▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, January 7, 2011 at Hoyt Sherman Place.  
R.S.V.P. by January 4 to [JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com](mailto:JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com) or 288-2500 by phone.

**How ya' doin'?** We hear that almost every day. No one who asks it really wants to know. The truth is that we all have our issues, whether they're physical ailments, psychological challenges, relationship problems, financial reversals, job frustrations, interactions with family and friends, or -- and most likely -- a fluctuating combination of those and other things that we deal with day in and day out. Still, when asked, I answer and answer honestly, despite the particulars, and without sharing the particulars. I say I'm doing fine. And it's the truth -- so far -- because I don't answer based on more or less difficult things I'm having to deal with in one aspect of my life or another. No. I answer using my personal litmus test: "Can I think of anyone who, sight unseen, I'd be willing to trade places with? Is there anyone whose place I'd be willing to take, swapping my "stuff" for their undisclosed current and future "stuff?"

Yes, there are people who are younger than I am, who are more attractive than I am, who are smarter than I am, who are in better physical shape than I am, who have more money than I have, and who are in uniquely enviable positions of influence and leadership. There are people who, today, are healthier than I am and who have a longer life expectancy. Believe me, I have and continue to have my challenges. You name the category. In one of life's dimensions or another, it's easy enough to find folks who, on the surface, appear to have it better than I do.

But, we have one thing in common; we're all going to die. My litmus test is therefore designed to check in with myself and evaluate whether I'd rather deal with my fluctuating issues between now and then, or someone else's undisclosed problems that are confronting them now or will be in their future.

Now, if you decide to try using my litmus test -- no charge for its use, by the way -- don't cheat. You can't pick one favorable characteristic from one acquaintance, and another one you'd like to have from a different person. You're not assembling the perfect person with no problems now or forever. That person doesn't exist. For the test to be valid, you have to be okay with accepting the whole package from just one other human being -- with no prior disclosure, no questions asked, and no returns.

Don't get me wrong. There could come a day when I'd make the trade. There could come a day when my burdens are simply so great and my life is such a struggle that I will be able to look around me and find more and more people with whom, sight unseen, I'd be willing to trade places. When that day comes, and I'm asked, "How ya' doin'?" I'll be answering, "Not well." Hopefully, I'll still have the circumspection -- and good grace -- even then, not to bore people with the particulars. I don't know exactly when that day will be except that it will definitely be the day I can no longer wipe myself. I've teased my partner, saying that he should do that for me now and then just to get in practice for the day when I actually need the help. Truth be known, I don't want that help now or ever from him or anyone else. Hmmm. I think I'm about to write an article on doctor-assisted suicide.

So, "How ya' doin'?"

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*Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit; wisdom is knowing not to put it in a fruit salad.*

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*To age gracefully requires a great attitude. To age attractively requires a great skin lotion.*

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## David Ruhe

By Bruce Carr

Our speaker on December 3 was Dr. David Ruhe, senior minister of Plymouth Church in Des Moines, who gave us a compelling homily on the issue of same-gender marriage. He was, to be sure, “preaching to the choir,” but his message was less about sexuality and more about the absurdity of politicians wrangling over messy church-doctrinal issues. “Sanctity cannot be legislated,” he said.

Churches exist, he implied, to argue over what is sacred and how people should go about being or becoming sacred. Churches have risen, fallen, divided, prayed, wrestled, and come to blows over these issues; it’s what they do. Ruhe gave the example of baptism: who is to be sanctified by this rite, and how and when? Children, adults, sprinkled, dunked, privately or in public? But we do not allow the state to have a say in any of this. Some of us even call this the “separation of church and state.”

Similarly with marriage, Ruhe said. Who may enter this particular condition of sanctity, and how may they do so? We may differ individually on the answers to these questions, but they are theological questions and not political ones. Sanctity cannot be legislated.

Ruhe spent some time praising and thanking the people of Plymouth Church for already completing the intensive theological work of becoming an Open and Affirming Congregation in 1993, the year before he was called to minister there. The phrase “Open and Affirming” designates congregations, campus ministries, and other bodies in the United Church of Christ which welcome persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities into their full life and ministry. He also cited the resolution which his congregation adopted at the beginning of this year in response to the case of *Varnum vs Brien* then before the Iowa Supreme Court. Here is an extract from that inspired and inspiring document:

WHEREAS the United Church of Christ was the first American denomination to ordain an African American minister (1785) and the first female pastor (1853), and

WHEREAS in 1972 the United Church of Christ became the first denomination in America to ordain an openly gay man, and

WHEREAS in 1985 the General Synod of the United Church of Christ passed a resolution that called on congregations to declare themselves open to

and affirming of gay, lesbian and bisexual people in the full life and ministry of the church, and

WHEREAS Plymouth Congregational Church in Des Moines became an Open and Affirming congregation in 1993, and has been recognizing commitment ceremonies of same sex couples since that time, and

WHEREAS, in 2005 the General Synod of the United Church of Christ adopted the resolution “Equal Marriage Rights for All” calling upon all settings of the United Church of Christ to engage in “serious, respectful, and prayerful discussion of the covenantal relationship of marriage and equal marriage rights for couples regardless of gender,” and

WHEREAS civil marriage carries with it significant access to institutional support, rights and benefits; and

WHEREAS equal marriage rights for couples regardless of gender is an issue deserving of serious, faithful discussion by people of faith, taking into consideration the long, complex history of marriage and family life, layered as it is with cultural practices, economic realities, political dynamics, religious history and biblical interpretation;

THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED, that Plymouth Church affirms equal access to the basic rights, institutional protections and quality of life conferred by the recognition of marriage; and

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED, that the officers, ministers and members of Plymouth Church are called upon to communicate this resolution to appropriate local, state and national legislators, urging them to support equal marriage rights for couples regardless of gender.

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David Ruhe was born in Pittsburgh and grew up in suburban Chicago. He graduated from Grinnell College as a philosophy major, then earned a master of divinity degree from Yale and a doctor of ministry degree from Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis. He served two Congregational churches in Connecticut -- the first as director of Christian education and the second as associate minister for Christian education -- and then moved to Omaha to work as associate minister at First Central Congregational Church, where one year later he was named senior minister. After serving in Omaha for 16 years, David became senior minister at Plymouth in 1994. He is married to Priscilla, a family practice physician, and they have two sons, Jonathan and Paul. He may be reached at 515.255.3149 x. 17 and [druhe@plymouthchurch.com](mailto:druhe@plymouthchurch.com).



*Young’s Law: Fights within the church are so vitriolic because the stakes are so low.*

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*Fitted sheets should come with instructions how to fold them.*

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## How Ya' Doin—A Sequel

by Jonathan Wilson

Speaking of people who would appear to have it all, consider Elizabeth Edwards. A very few years ago, she was an attractive woman; married to an attractive, wealthy man (thanks partly to expensive haircuts, I guess -- for the attractive part); nice looking family and, depending on just a few lucky breaks, someone very close to becoming the First Lady of the United States someday.

And what befell her: a couple of failed political campaigns, a child lost in a car accident, cancer, an unfaithful spouse, becoming stepmother to a bastard, and premature death, all in high profile public view. Given what life ended up handing her, it makes my point about whether and with whom to trade places. A considerable number of us who are older than she, have now lived longer. Coupled with relatively good health, on any given day, that's winning.

And wouldn't you know it; the reverend [sic] Fred Phelps decides to show up at her funeral to protest and to declare that she's in hell. As if what she lived through weren't enough hell. If I go relatively soon, she and I could share the distinction of a Phelps appearance perhaps. If it happens, be sure to turn it into a fund raiser for the FFBC scholarship fund. It's certainly possible that God could send me to hell, with Elizabeth and a bunch of other really fun folks, but if Fred isn't there, it won't be all bad. Now there's a real dilemma for God.

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## Speaking of Famous People

By Jonathan Wilson

Tipper Gore came to our house once when her husband was a candidate for President. She was there for a fund raiser and an opportunity to meet and greet members of the GLBT community in Central Iowa. It was fascinating to deal with the Secret Service people who wanted to identify where she would be prior to her actual appearance, and wanted it to be somewhere with access to a windowless closet large enough to use as a "safe" place. As it just so happened, I had a closet I wasn't using. It was suitable for their purposes even though I hadn't found it all that safe.

Knowing that such a special guest would be using the master bath (and closet, potentially), we cleaned in there to a fair-thee-well, and we set up a vase with a rose bud, along with a crystal goblet and her choice of bottled water or a carafe of expensive white wine.

She showed up; was her usual charming, disarming self; and went on her way without any security challenges.

While she was there, by the way, she chose the wine over the bottled water, in order to fortify her for meeting and greeting our local GLBT community. Can't say I blame her. I still have the crystal goblet she used, with her lipstick print still showing. Its appreciating value is the proverbial Plan B to pay for my retirement someday.

## My M. O. (cont from page 4)

by Steve Person

Another case of imminent death is the word *well* when referring to one's health or physical condition. How often have you asked someone, "How are you today?" and received the reply, "I'm *good*." The person obviously means he is in excellent physical condition, but what he is really saying is that he is a person to be admired for his behavior. *Good* in this usage has nothing to do with health. The correct reply is, "I am *well*."

I could go on with the demise of *you're*, so often incorrectly expressed with *your*, but I will save that for another occasion.

Happy New Year!

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*Why do we press harder on a remote control when we know the batteries are getting low?*

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*Think you're a good driver 90% of the time? If everyone is as good, that means that, at any given moment, one out of every ten cars that share the road with you is about to do something really dumb. Assume that and you're likely to live longer.*

## BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the January 7 meeting no later than January 4. E-mail [JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com](mailto:JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com) or call him at 288-2500. Our speaker will be the Reverend Elizabeth Dilley of Red Oak.



Save the date: The Red Party fundraiser will be February 4, 2011, with special guest Wayne Besen, Executive Director of Truth Wins Out (TWO), a national organization that tracks and challenges folks involved in ex-gay "ministry." Wayne will be at our regular meeting that day and at the party.



Be sure to peruse the front table for a book you might like to read. Book donations are always welcome.



Thanks to Rick Miller for his introduction of our December speaker, the Reverend Dr. David Ruhe of Plymouth Congregational Church.



# FFBC

*First Friday  
News & Views*

*Des Moines, Iowa*

*JANUARY 2011*

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## My M.O. (Monthly Observations) The Imminent Demise of *Whom?* And Other Sad Tales

Steve Person

A perfectly good word, a bedrock of English grammar, is under fierce attack and could easily go the way of the now-extinct dodo bird. I refer to the objective pronoun, *whom*. English grammar is a strange and wonderful creation. When Henry Higgins finally gets through to his pupil, Eliza Doolittle, he tells her, “Think what you’re dealing with—the majesty and grandeur of the English language. It’s the greatest gift we have . . .” How right he was!

The usage of *whom* is often confused with its nominative case pronoun-cousin, *who*. Such confusion is often the result of attempts to over-explain the correct usage of these two words. For example, the Usage Note in **The American Heritage College Dictionary** for *who*, runs thus: “The traditional rules that determine the use of *who* and *whom* are relatively simple: *who* is used for a grammatical subject, where a nominative pronoun such as *I* or *he* would be appropriate, and *whom* is used elsewhere. Thus, we write *The actor who played Hamlet was there*, since *who* stands for the subject of *played Hamlet*; and *Who do you think is the best candidate?* Where *who* stands for the subject of *is the best candidate*. But we write *The man whom the papers criticized did not show up*, since *whom* is the object of the verb *criticized*. Considerable effort and attention are required to apply rules correctly in complicated sentences. It is thus not surprising that writers from Shakespeare onward should often have interchanged *who* and *whom*. We may say either *The scientist who discovers a cure for cancer will be immortalized*, or *The mathematician over there, who solved the four-color theorem, is widely known*, where the nonrestrictive clause *who solved the four-color theorem* adds information about a person already identified by the phrase *the mathematician over there*. It is entirely acceptable to write either *the man that wanted to talk to you* or *the man who wanted to talk to you*. The grammatical rules governing the use of *who* and *whom* apply equally to *whoever* and *whomever*.”

Huh? Such an attempt to explain the usage of the two words is tantamount to trying to discern the small print in a credit card application or a life insurance policy. In their extremely concise **The Blue Book of Language & Usage**, Marilyn Grant-Wadden and Jerry Wadden explain the usage of *who* and *whom* in the clearest manner: **who** a nominative case pronoun used to stand for *he, she, I, we, they* (If you wonder whether to use *who* or *whom*, just substitute *he, she, I, we, or they*; if it makes sense, *who* is the right word. *Who will go? (Will he go? It makes sense, so who is the right word.) whom* an objective case pronoun used to stand for *him, her, me, us, or them* (If you can substitute *him, her, me, us, or them*, then *whom* is correct. *Whom did you work for? (Did you work for him? It makes sense, so whom is the right word.)*

Clarity is such a useful tool in understanding English grammar!

(See My M. O., page 3)

*Do they sterilize needles for death by lethal injection?*