



THE  
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER  
OF THE  
**FIRST FRIDAY**  
**BREAKFAST CLUB, INC.**

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**CALENDAR**

- ▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, August 2, 2013, at Hoyt Sherman Place, 15th & Woodland, Des Moines, IA.
- ▼ R.S.V.P. by July 29th to [JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com](mailto:JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com) or 288-2500 by phone.

# First Friday News & Views

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## "DON'T ASK—DON'T TELL" BOY SCOUT STYLE

By Jonathan Wilson

"When did you stop beating your wife?" That's a classic question used as a cross-examination teaching tool in law school. On the positive side, it purports to acknowledge that the hapless person being questioned is not *currently* a wife beater. On the negative side -- and intended as the more important point -- it implicitly asserts that there's been some wife beating going on. It assumes something untrue for the purpose of delivering a negative message. It assumes a false premise for the purpose of confusion. It invites an unwitting, favorable response for the real purpose of condemnation.

I was reminded of that classic question when I learned about the decision of the Boy Scouts of America to allow participation by gay youth while, at the same time, reaffirming the policy of not allowing *openly* gay adults to serve as scoutmasters. That policy change held a tiny message that was positive toward gay kids who are coming out at younger and younger ages. It was, and was intended to be, however, loaded with negative, false assumptions and messages about gay adults. Coincidentally, by allowing openly gay kids to participate, it also provides a convenient means of identifying future gay adults so that they can be denied the opportunity to serve as scoutmasters. Under the new policy, that opportunity for community service is to be reserved for closet cases -- the least well-adjusted of gay men.

The reinforced negative message is the false stereotype that gay men are predatory pedophiles. It is a blatant attempt to preserve the term "gay men" as synonymous with "child molesters." Shorthand, if you will. Code for "priest" if you ask me, but I don't intend to go there in this article.

The false stereotype preserved by the new Boy Scout policy got me to wondering how those who supported the new policy think it works -- assuming they think. [editor's note: it's also possible to assume a false positive to send a negative message; see the foregoing sentence.]

Do gay kids suddenly become pedophiles when they turn 18? Then and only then do they become a danger to vulnerable children? Then and only then do they embark on a life of gay recruiting? Or do pedophilia and the urge to recruit come on them gradually as they approach that adult threshold? If it's gradual and starts before adulthood, the precocious pedophile youth is a danger before the age of 18. Or is it only when they turn 18 that the molester transformation begins. It's all so confusing. Actually, it's all so nonsensical.

The Boy Scouts of America should get in touch with reality. Gay man and pedophile are not synonyms. There's no science behind that stereotype. The Boy Scouts of America should be concerned about excluding *pedophiles* from its scoutmaster ranks. That should be the focus. The continued focus on openly gay men tells me they're not looking meaningfully where they should be. They've created their own red herring and are continuing to chase it. It should come as great news to those who are secretly pedophiles and want access to innocent kids. It's like saying that pedophiles are named Jim; the Boy Scouts are weeding out the "Jims" among us with a vengeance; and pedophiles with other names get to have free reign.

The new Boy Scouts of America policy posits the answer, "Yes, at age 18," to the false question, "When does a gay person become a pedophile and a danger to vulnerable children." The new policy is pernicious at its core and, actually, increases the danger to innocent kids by arbitrarily excluding well-adjusted, openly gay men from the scoutmaster ranks. Those ranks are to be reserved for those whose pedophilia goes undetected by this distraction, until it's too late.

## Coincidence? I Don't Think So

By Jonathan Wilson

In **The Des Moines Register** on May 25, 2013 (page 2A), there appeared together two brief articles in the Nation & World Watch section within inches of each other.

One reported that a Philadelphia judge ordered that a couple who believe in faith healing over medicine be held without bail on third-degree murder charges arising out of the death of their 8-month-old son, Brandon. Prosecutors said the couple prayed over their sick child for two weeks before he died, and never called a doctor. *The judge said they were a flight risk because there could be a community of like-minded people out there who might harbor them.*

The other reported that the Roman Catholic archdiocese in Madrid, Spain, says it needs more exorcists to help some of its faithful cope with the devil. It claimed to have only one exorcist priest available and was considering a plan to train more. Apparently, according to the Roman Catholic Church, only a priest authorized by a bishop can perform an exorcism and the brief rite involves blessings with "holy" water, prayers, and an interrogation of the devil by the exorcist during which the demon is asked to leave the victim.

There you have it. In the 21st Century we live in a conflicted world still debating elementary principles of fiction over fact. Debating science over mythology. Debating whether or not the Earth is flat or the center of the Universe. Whether or not all of God's children are straight and the "gay" ones are simply straight ones misbehaving. Debating whether up is down. Debating whether or not illness is the product of demon possession. It's a testament to the failure of public education. When education is available, ignorance is a choice. And prideful ignorance is the foundation of bigotry.

Informed, enlightened, wise folks are dying every day. More ignorant, unenlightened, and foolish folks are being born every day. The Roman Catholic Church has managed to institutionalize ignorance, un-enlightenment, and foolishness. It seeks to perpetuate all three to the detriment of Brandon Schain in Philadelphia whose brother Kent died similarly in 2009.

Coincidence that those two articles appeared virtually together in the newspaper? I don't think so. Thanks to **The Des Moines Register**. It tells me the magnitude of the task before us. It reminds me that education is not a destination, but a relay race from one generation to another. It confirms for me that the judge was right to deny bail; that community of like-minded people who might harbor those homicidal parents could be as close as the nearest Roman Catholic Church.

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"*You have enemies? Good. It means you stood up for something.*" Christopher Reising, 2013 FFBC Scholarship recipient

## Successful Session for Iowa's Middle Class

By Sen. Matt McCoy

The 2013 legislative session proved to be a landmark one for Iowans. With the input of constituents, we focused on strengthening and expanding Iowa's middle class. I am particularly proud of our initiatives to improve:

- **Health:** Our top priority this year was ensuring more people have access to affordable health care by expanding coverage to 150,000 uninsured working Iowans. The new Iowa Health and Wellness Plan will increase access to quality and preventive care, cut down on expensive emergency visits and reduce costs for all Iowans when health care providers treat fewer patients who lack coverage. The Iowa Health and Wellness Plan will take us another step closer to becoming the healthiest state in the nation.

- **Education & job training:** We invested in worker training to help Iowans fill skilled job openings at local businesses, in keeping a college education affordable, and in boosting student achievement with an increase in funding for local schools, small class sizes for young learners, and education reforms to raise standards, improve teaching, and encourage innovation.

- **Tax cuts:** We put together a tax cut package that helps Iowa's small businesses and working families the most. We cut commercial property taxes without shifting the burden to residential property owners or hurting local schools and community services. We encouraged low-income families to work their way out of poverty by increasing the state's Earned Income Tax Credit. And we put some of the state's budget surplus back into taxpayer pockets.

- **Job creation & economic growth:** We expanded efforts to revitalize Iowa communities, grow the local economy, and create good jobs through a variety of financial incentives, tax credits, programs, and partnerships that work with businesses, landowners, and communities.

The best part is that we did it all in a fiscally responsible way. A recent update from the nonpartisan Legislative Services Agency shows Iowa will have hundreds of millions of dollars in our budget surplus when the fiscal year ends on June 30. We also have \$622 million in our reserve funds, the largest amount in state history.

Over the next several months, I'll provide more detailed updates on all the ways this year's successes are growing Iowa's middle class and making our state a thriving, healthy place to live, work, and play.

To review the highlights of the 2013 session, go to [www.senate.iowa.gov/democrats](http://www.senate.iowa.gov/democrats) and click on "2013 Legislative Session in Review."

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*This is a legislative update from Senator Matt McCoy, representing the west part of Des Moines, portions of West Des Moines and Cumming in northwest Warren County.*

*To contact Senator McCoy during the week, call the Senate Switchboard at 515-281-3371. Otherwise he can be reached at home at 515-274-0561. E-mail him at [matt.mccoy@legis.iowa.gov](mailto:matt.mccoy@legis.iowa.gov).*

# Superintendent's Report Card

By Bruce Carr

Our guest speaker on Friday, June 7, was Dr. Jason Glass, outgoing Director of the Iowa Department of Education. Dr. Glass was appointed director in 2010; under his leadership the Department has focused on the values of demonstrating courageous leadership, promoting innovation in education, and acting as a servant to schools and communities in Iowa.

Dr. Glass's presentation outlined his efforts to move the state toward Governor Branstad's vision of a high-performing system, supporting initiatives to restore the state's tradition as a national leader in education, and to lead transformative change. Key to this restoration and leadership, he said, was a focus on improving the educator workforce through increased compensation and raising the reputation and integrity of the profession, making the pool of available educators wide and deep enough to allow school districts to be selective -- choosy -- about the men and women to whom they will entrust Iowa's students. This means supporting professional autonomy, promoting teamwork and mentoring plans, and creating professional pathways that will encourage the best teachers to continue their careers in direct classroom contact with students.

Better attention must be paid, Glass noted, to the highest possible standards in curriculum and methods, so that they are aligned toward the best outcomes -- at the same time, personalizing goals to individuals: where students are starting from and where they are headed. Glass took particular pride in moving these expensive plans through a divided Legislature (and in the political calculation and compromise that allowed successful passage), and gave a special nod to FFBC's scholarship program for recognizing and furthering Iowa's important educational goals.

Born and raised in a family of educators, and married to a teacher, Jason Glass has served in a variety of roles in diverse education settings across several states. After teaching at the high school and university levels in Kentucky, he worked for the Colorado Department of Education to ensure a quality education for students with disabilities. He served as vice president for Qualistar Early Learning in Denver, where he helped develop an early childhood education quality rating system and raised funds to help providers make needed improvements. He was the director of human resources for Eagle County Schools in Colorado, a pioneering district in innovative human resources strategies, including performance-based compensation.



*"A true revolution of values [needed in the United States] will lay hand on the world order and say of war, This way of settling differences is not just. 'This business of burning human beings with napalm, of filling our nation's homes with orphans and widows, of injecting poisonous drugs of hate into the veins of people normally humane, of sending men home from dark and bloody battlefields physically handicapped and psychologically deranged, cannot be reconciled with wisdom, justice, and love. A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death." ML King, Jr.*

*"Here is the true meaning and value of compassion and nonviolence, when it helps us to see the enemy's point of view, to hear his questions, to know his assessment of ourselves. For from his view we may indeed see the basic weaknesses of our own condition, and if we are mature, we may learn and grow and profit from the wisdom of the brothers who are called the opposition."* ML King, Jr. April 4, 1967, Riverside Church, New York City. Are we mature? Dare we apply this advice in our response to those who orchestrated the attacks on 9/11?

*If you have fear of some pain or suffering, you should examine whether there is anything you can do about it. If you can, there is no need to worry about it; if you cannot do anything, then there is also no need to worry.* ~Dalai Lama

## BRIEFS & SHORTS

Because of the Independence Day holiday, there will be no July meeting. The FFBC picnic will be held at the home of Michael Thompson and Allen Vander Linden on July 13 from 7:00 - 10:00 p.m. at 7500 Benton Drive (west of 73rd Street and north of Hickman). No charge for paid members of FFBC.



Thanks to Rick Miller for his introduction of our June speaker, Jason Glass, outgoing Director of the Iowa Department of Education.



Our August speaker will be Ambassador Kenneth Quinn, head of the World Food Prize.



Consider a tax deductible gift to FFBC, or select FFBC for a Donor Direct contribution through the United Way.



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

# Improving Public Education

By Jonathan Wilson

I had occasion to be in Washington, DC recently with the Greater Des Moines Partnership. It was the annual information gathering and lobbying trip, and, in addition to accomplishing both of those laudable objectives, it affords an outstanding opportunity for networking interactions between and among the private sector and government representatives that attend. The delegation was nearly 200 strong, again.

One session was on public education policy and there was an opportunity for Q and A. I took the chance to deliver a sermonette challenging two assertions made by a couple of members on the expert panel. I questioned the assertion that public education decisions must be made at the lowest local level possible because “one size does not fit all.”

I believe that one size can be made to fit all, whether it's a large urban school district or a one room school house in rural Iowa. Three things are required: First, every child should be provided with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) that right now we reserve for Special Education students. An IEP is developed to find out exactly where a child is educationally and what that individual child needs to achieve his/her potential. The development of an IEP requires the focused collaboration of cross-discipline professionals familiar with the individual student's circumstances. The plan identifies needs like nutrition; tutoring; help with homework; the need for a computer or other technology; the need for tablets, pencils, erasures, and consumable workbooks, mentor couplings, and even psychological counseling if necessary. We have readily available the technology to keep track of individual progress in all subject areas from week-to-week and year-to-year.

Second, public tax dollars should be used to fund fully the development and implementation of each IEP, whether that means a nutritious breakfast and lunch for some kids, in-school tutors in subject areas where a student is found deficient, or after-school help with homework. And don't give me that baloney about having parents help with the homework. Some can and will. Great. The public education system cannot be premised upon that expectation. Too many parents are struggling to make ends meet, are exhausted in the evenings after a long day at work or work a night shift. Some parents may have been less than terrific students and may simply not have the ability to help with homework. To expect individual students to succeed in a system based on the commitment and capabilities of their parents necessarily destines the children of the disadvantaged to repeat the cycle of the parents from generation to generation.

Third, teachers should teach. They should be expected to do only three things: (1) attend administrative and IEP staff meetings; (2) prepare lesson plans; and (3) teach and manage teacher assistants who would take attendance; do all the bulletin boards; hand out, collect, and grade papers; fill out accountability reports; whatever.

I also questioned the well-worn maxim that more money is not the answer to our admittedly failing public schools. The three things I have described that would “fit” the urban school district, the one-room school house, and everything in between, would cost a lot of money. I, for one, cannot think of a better way to be spending our tax dollars in the long term. It would hold the greatest promise of meeting uniform, high standards; reducing drop outs; and assuring that our country will maintain an edge in an increasingly competitive world.

Watching public education policy over a period of decades, I've seen reform after reform after reform. They have been no more than smoke and mirrors designed to create the appearance of doing something meaningful. My dad used to say that if things are complicated and you don't understand what people are talking about, as is the case with operating a public education system, assume they're talking about money and you'll almost always be right. All other times they're talking -- usually faster or in slogans -- trying not to talk about money.

I went out on a limb in DC and offered the Des Moines Independent Community School District as a demonstration project for that three-part-proposal and invited a federal grant to fund it. So far, no takers. Do you suppose it's possible that there are those who are afraid that it just might work? More money, properly spent, is the one solution that hasn't yet been tried.

In DC, I heard lots of talk about the national debt's burden on future generations, but very little talk about under-funding public education and the cost of under-educating future generations.

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*“A well-regulated militia isn’t every goofball with aa persecution complex.”* Craig Malin.

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*“Nothing good happens after someone says, ‘Here, Hold my beer.’”* Craig Malin (paraphrased).

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*“We are now faced with the fact, my friends, that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there is such a thing as being too late. Procrastination is still the thief of time. Life often leaves us standing bare, naked, and dejected with a lost opportunity. The tide in the affairs of men does not remain at flood -- it ebbs. We may cry out desperately for time to pause in her passage, but time is adamant to every plea and rushes on. Over the bleached bones and jumbled residues of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words, Too late. There is an invisible book of life that faithfully records our vigilance or our neglect. Omar Khayyam is right: ‘The moving finger writes, and having writ moves on.’”* ML King, Jr.

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# From the Pastor's Pen

## Getting a Handle on Sexual Desire

By Rev. Jonathan Page

Last month, I wrote about a shocker: Christians have a problem with sexual desire. I know that caught you off guard, but it was meant to surprise “traditional” Christians even more. There is the persistent and false assumption that the historical Christian ideal praises sexual desire within marriage. Not true for the early church. Not even true for Martin Luther, father of six children and passionate defender of marriage. Luther wrote, “Intercourse is never without Sin; but God excuses it by his grace because the estate of marriage is his work.” Sexual desire is bad. That view has its roots in First Century Judaism, even though many Jews of Jesus’s day lauded sexual desire. Greek Stoic and Neo-Platonic philosophy only reinforced this negativity toward sexual desire. The question is, given that Protestant Christians today of all stripes do not uphold historical Christian views on sexual desire, what should we do about sex?

The most common conservative Protestant response is to cherry pick biblical texts that support their views on marriage. Celibacy gets no attention. Then, ignoring the evidence from the early church, they cite the command in Genesis 1 to “be fruitful and multiply” as evidence for the blessing of sexual desire. Conservative Christians, then, have the gall to proclaim that their views are the only authentically Christian position. Gay Christians could just as easily do the same thing, and many do. Queer readings of the Bible proliferate. The **Queer Bible Commentary** and **Take Back the Word** are two excellent collections that do just that. The problem with queer readings of scripture is that most straight Christians that I know find them deeply unsatisfying. For those not used to such methods of literary criticism, these post-structuralist readings seem out of place and inauthentic. While I would argue that they are just as authentic as any other reading, I am deeply sympathetic to the fact that queer interpretations often do not sell to straight audiences. Thankfully, there is another approach.

In 2005, I decided to come out of the closet in my final sermon as an intern at Wapping Community Church in South Windsor, CT. Looking through the Bible, the best text I could find that spoke to my experience was a lament of Jeremiah. I wanted to convey the level of self-loathing that is so characteristic leading to the point when someone comes out. Jeremiah nailed it:

“Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed! Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father, saying, ‘A child is born to you, a son,’ making him very glad. Let that man be like the cities that the LORD overthrew without pity; let him hear a cry in the morning and an alarm at noon, because he did not kill me in the womb; so my mother would have been my grave,

and her womb forever great. Why did I come forth from the womb to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame?” Jeremiah 20:14

When I shared the passage and the accompanying sermon with one of my colleagues, she replied, “You’re not seriously going to preach this, are you? There has to be more good news in your sermon.” My colleague was right, of course. It did not make a very good sermon. But it did convey a key point too often lost in debates over scripture. How you characterize desire, and gay sexual desire in particular, has major implications beyond sex. When gays and lesbians disproportionately kill themselves for the discrimination against who they are, the stakes are changed. Sex and sexual desire are about justice as much as sex.

Once you acknowledge that the biblical ethic of sexual desire is not relevant to our current context, it opens up the possibility of using other ethical guidelines to talk about sex. We do not share first century assumptions about the body, desire, marriage, procreation, or sex itself. I know of no Christian who honestly advocates that we return to a sex ethic of the First Century. Unlike in those times, relationships today are based on love, mutuality, and are in a context where intimacy can happen without the risk of pregnancy. We are in desperate need of new ways of thinking through a faithful approach to sex. The most convincing contemporary Christian treatment of sexual ethics that I have read is Margaret Farley’s **Just Love**. Farley argues that justice should be the key concept in healthy, Christian relationships. That means not harming the other person physically or emotionally. It means free consent of both parties and mutuality. Honesty, commitment, equality and, finally, social justice round out Farley’s criteria for Christian sexual ethics.

Farley’s approach has big implications for gay sexual ethics. As my coming out sermon showed, we, who are gay, suffer tremendously for our sexual desire. We are told our sexual desire is bad and sinful, and we hate ourselves for it. The most just and loving thing to do is to jettison the First Century conception of sexual desire and focus on justice and love instead. Once we say that gay sexual desire is good, we can begin to focus on being better in relationships with others. What if we took Farley seriously? What if the focus in gay sex was on honesty, mutuality, and seeking fruitful relationships, of any duration? Gay men, and young gay men in particular, can be shockingly cruel to one another. Gay sexual ethics matter and Christianity, properly interpreted, can have a lot of important things to say.

FFBC member Jonathan Page is senior pastor of the Ames United Church of Christ, 217 6<sup>th</sup> Street, Ames, Iowa. Sunday service at 10:45. He can be reached at [jon@Amesucc.org](mailto:jon@Amesucc.org).



*It is possible to live twenty-four hours a day in a state of love. Every movement, every glance, every thought, and every word can be infused with love.*  
~Thich Nhat Hanh

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*A good manager does things right; a good leader does the right things.*

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# FFBC

*First Friday  
News & Views  
Des Moines, Iowa*

*JULY 2013*

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## My M.O. (Monthly Observations)

### Gone Is the Romance

By Steve Person

I am not in the habit of recommending a new book that I have yet to read, but I am going to make an exception. The other day, I tuned in to **CBS This Morning, Saturday**, and saw an extremely fascinating interview with Lynda Obst, author of **Sleepless in Hollywood: Tales from the New Abnormal in the Movie Business**. Among other not-so-ancient films, Obst produced **Sleepless in Seattle**, a film she asserts could not be made nowadays because of its non-blockbuster genre. Obst observed in the interview that Hollywood films used to depend on domestic box office receipts that produced eighty percent of a film's revenues with the remaining twenty percent coming from international markets. Not true anymore! The exact opposite is now the case with the overseas markets, especially China, making up eighty percent of a film's gross revenue as compared to a paltry domestic market share of twenty percent. That, explains Obst, is exactly why such films as **Sleepless in Seattle** could not be produced in Hollywood nowadays. The foreign audiences would either be upset with the language and adult situations or they would never be able to catch the nuances of a witty script that exist only in the English language. The foreign audiences have no trouble at all with blockbuster productions and 3-D movies that rely on grotesque special effects (think of **Transformers** and others of that ilk), and the inane dialogue that can easily be dubbed to supplant English.

A recent example of the blockbuster and 3-D phenomenon is Baz Luhrmann's butchering of the classic American novel, **The Great Gatsby**. Astonishingly, the film was unnecessarily made in 3-D as well as in traditional format. Luhrmann, by the way, is no stranger to taking a classic and turning it into tasteless movie making. One only needs to see his 2001 remake of **Moulin Rouge** to understand this. In addition to turning the narrator of **Gatsby** into a mental case—where did that come from?—Luhrmann oversaw some of the hokiest special effects that I have seen in the movies in a long time. The outdoor view of Gatsby's outrageous mansion in the new version is so phony that one is reminded of those train sequences filmed in miniature in 1930s and 40s films. He did, however, get a nice performance out of Leonardo DiCaprio—rather a good Gatsby rather than a great one—but beyond that the film falls appallingly flat. A viewer would be better off to revisit the 1974 Robert Redford/Mia Farrow version.

In addition to the reversal of the domestic and international markets, Obst further points out the destruction of the DVD market in 2006, brought on, of course, by the Internet and the rise of pirated films. Hollywood producers used to depend highly on the sale of DVDs of expensive films to help them turn a profit. That is no longer the case.

Arianna Huffington posted about Obst's book by saying, "From her unique perch as a maker of real movies—not sequels, prequels, or reboots—Lynda Obst explains why the movies we all loved growing up don't get made anymore. With her sharp wit, she gives an inside account of how the industry has changed but also offers hope that Hollywood will meet the challenges of the digital age and the global marketplace. If you love movies, this is a must read."

I am looking forward to reading it.

*He who cannot love must learn to flatter.* Goethe