

Bringing a Smile



by **Mike Massar**
 CBF-LA Coordinator

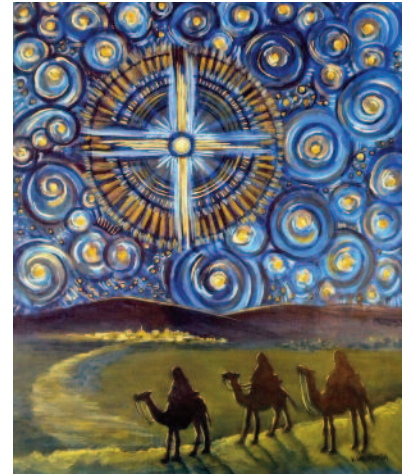


Jonathan Winters and Robin Williams both died a few years ago, and my world has been much the sadder for it. They both had most fascinating minds as well as ever-adaptable facial expressions and voices that allowed them to morph into a seemingly infinite array of characters. Their gift was improvisational humor, in that they could take a mundane object or idea and create a comedy sketch that would make people laugh until they cried. Tonight Show host Johnny Carson once said that in preparation for most comedians' appearances on the show, he would be given prompting questions to ask so that they could naturally move right into their routine, but with Winters and Williams he developed his own questions just to see how far they could go. He said that they never let him down and delighted everyone on the set with their naturally funny spirits. When Winters joined Robin Williams on the old Mork and Mindy comedy sitcom, it was reported that oftentimes Winters and Williams would escape the script and absolutely commandeer scenes with ad-libs. They were both geniuses at what has become known as improvisational humor.

That genre of humor eventually spawned a variety of comedy troupes, the most famous being The Second City group out of Chicago, whose members eventually became the nucleus of the popular Saturday Night Live television show. With SNL's success, improvisational comedy clubs popped up all over the country. The basic guidelines in doing improv are: (1) trusting your fellow comedians/partners, (2) paying attention to all the information your partner gives you, and (3) always finishing with a transitional line for your partner. The Second City group defined their work as learning how to say "yes, and . . ." That is, do your shtick, and then make way for your partner to pick up and move on with it.

Stephen Colbert, today's enormously popular comedian, started in improv, and so much of his humor is influenced by that medium. He once gave a commencement address at Knox College, the first college he attended. In that address he talked about the discipline of improvisation and life. To the graduates he said: "Well, you are about to start the greatest improvisation of all. With no script. No idea what's

Look up, you whose gaze is fixed on this earth, who are spellbound by the little events and changes on the face of the earth. Look up to these words, you who have turned away from heaven disappointed. Look up, you whose eyes are heavy with tears and who are heavy and who are crying over the fact that the earth has gracelessly torn us away. Look up, you who, burdened with guilt, cannot lift your eyes. Look up, your redemption is drawing near. Something different from what you see daily will happen. Just be aware, be watchful, wait just another short moment. Wait and something quite new will break over you: God will come.



— Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *God Is In the Manger*

going to happen, often with people and places you have never seen before. And you are not in control. So say "yes." And if you're lucky, you'll find people who will say "yes" back. Now will saying "yes" get you in trouble at times? Will saying "yes" lead you to doing some foolish things? Yes it will. But don't be afraid to be a fool. Remember, you cannot be both young and wise. Young people who pretend to be wise to the ways of the world are mostly just cynics. Cynicism masquerades as wisdom, but it is the farthest thing from it. Because cynics don't learn anything. Because cynicism is a self-imposed blindness, a rejection of the world because we are afraid it will hurt us or disappoint us. Cynics always say no. But saying "yes" begins things. Saying "yes" is how things grow. Saying "yes" leads to knowledge. "Yes" is for young people. So for as long as you have the strength to, say "yes."

So, what does all of this have to do with CBF Louisiana? Well, I believe that we are at a time in church life that desperately needs the gift of improvisation. Life in the church is changing rapidly, and we are called to meet those changes with the dynamic spirit we find in Christ Jesus. The folks who went before us did an amazing job in the creation of CBF. They said, "Yes," but they also added "and," which is a way of saying that they passed things on to us. It is now our turn to take the gifts that have been given and improvise in such ways that we bless our community and our world.

However, I would push this idea a bit further and suggest that the first and greatest improv artist was none other than God Almighty. In the beginning God created a universe for us and said "Yes," but without missing a beat God added the "and," which is where you and I come in. Heaven now stands on tiptoe to see what we are going to do with what we have been given. What confidence God has in us, what anticipation!

Here's hoping that we can bring a smile to heavenly faces, **Mike**

P.S. I would be remiss if I didn't express my gratitude for your commitment to CBFLA. Some good and important things are being done because of you. Thank you so much.





by Marc Boswell, CBF-LA Together for Hope Director

The town is currently bustling with Christmas energy! White-light Christmas trees are dotting the Hwy. 65 roadside by the lake. Decorations are up on the lamp posts, the tree is lit at the courthouse, and the community choir is preparing for its annual concert.

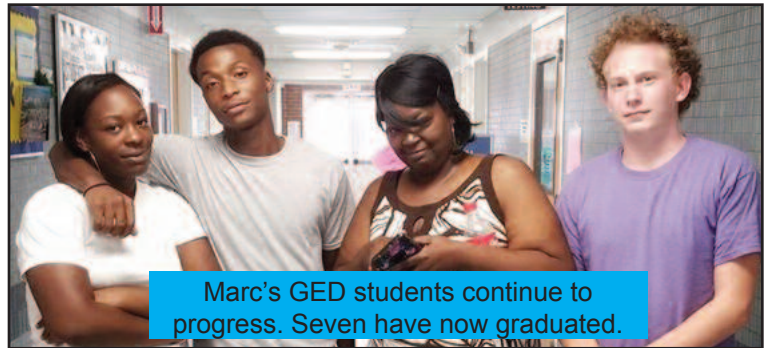
The students in the GED class are busy at work, as well, trying to finish their degrees before the end of the fall semester. Eleven students are in the process of completing their five tests, and hopefully four or five students will have completed all of the parts before Christmas. For those who don't, they'll keep chipping away at the tests in January after holiday festivities have come to a close.

Between the months of November 2016 and October 2017, I had seven GED graduates. While I'm happy with this number, I'm especially excited that almost twice as many students will now be completing the process in a much shorter amount of time. (The students have been working very hard, of course, while their GED teacher is also learning how to be a better GED teacher.)

The Learning Center has also been a success so far. Folks are continuing to take advantage of the space for night GED classes, especially during the harvest season when students weren't able to come during the day because of work opportunities. Post-harvest time, students continue to come at night for extra tutoring and practice. In the spring, the space will be multi-purposed as I partner with local high school teachers for ACT prep and financial aid/college application information sessions.

A special thanks is in order for Church for the Highlands (repairs) and First Shreveport (materials) for the work they've done recently on the garage. Some rot has been taken care of, boards replaced, masonry work, protection added, and a new coat of paint freshly applied!

Thanks, also, to the individuals and congregations who have donated funds for the Learning Center and for GED study materials (calculators, pencils, notebooks, and prep books). For as little as \$120, a GED student can be fully sponsored, which includes the cost of the HiSET tests (\$100) and a prep book (\$20). Please email (mjboswell3@gmail.com) or call (252-363-8098) if you're interested. This would make for a wonderful "Pay It Forward" type of Christmas gift. Blessings to you all in the Advent and Christmas seasons!



Marc's GED students continue to progress. Seven have now graduated.



Church for the Highlands members Arthur Dubois, carpentry, Jason Smothers, masonry repair, and Cordre Tolliver, painting, were with a group of 7 who repaired the mission house garage at Thanksgiving break. First Baptist Shreveport covered expenses for the materials.



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