

Do Not Be Conformed, but Be Transformed

Romans 12:1-8

I begin by reading two pages from Dan Coughlin's new book entitled *Crazy, With the Power to Prove It*. As high school football practices begin, I checked out this story with our own Divinity Filipic brothers and they told me this really happened, although their version is a little different than Dan Coughlin's . . .

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By Dan Coughlin, alias Hubert Hopeful, alias Dan Jaworsky

The best present Parma High School football coach Brian Burke received on his 32nd birthday yesterday was my voluntary retirement. I am proud of my bruises, but glad to be a football observer again, rather than a participant.

For the last five days I have been malfunctioning as Hubert Hopeful, candidate at inside tackle for the Parma High varsity. At Parma I masqueraded as a kid named Dan Jaworsky, a transfer student. I proved to be a lousy football player and an even lousier actor. The Parma boys began chinking away at my disguise the first day.

The first kid to spot me was Mike Filipic, a 140-pound safety. He's the one who beat me in a kicking contest. Mike remembered me well. Two years ago I credited a bad snap from center on a punt to his brother. It resulted in a safety and a 2-0 Parma loss and Mike's brother wasn't the center.

"I want first crack at that guy," Filipic is reported to have told Coach Burke.

"He's got more guts than any kid I've seen," assistant coach Mike Norcia told me later.

For four days I carefully avoided Filipic. I kept an eye over my shoulder, anticipating 140

pounds of dynamite to come careening into me.

Wayne Mudge was another kid who had suspicions about me. He returned home from drawing equipment and commented to his mother, "There's an old man trying out for the football team. What is football coming to?"

The next morning his mother called Hal Lebovitz. She was laughing. She said Wayne had taken the first "Hubert Hopeful" article to practice. Hal played innocent.

As we trotted through calisthenics, Mudge went out of his way to pass near me. "You're gonna die," he hissed. I'm glad Mudge did not make that his personal responsibility, for he is developing into a quick, hard-hitting inside tackle.

Eileen Schneider, 16-year-old daughter of our baseball writer Russ Schneider, attends Parma. She was pestered by one player, Dave Loomis, to find out who the ringer was.

Loomis exclaimed to Eileen, "Hey, there's this guy everybody thinks is Hubert Hopeful. He wore yellow socks. No high school kid would wear yellow socks."

But Eileen said, "The kids didn't really know for sure."

I must hastily note that the socks weren't yellow, just dirty white. And Loomis wears NO socks, so there!

Loomis' curiosity was satisfied Sunday night when he saw a *Plain Dealer* sports calendar at the Schneider house. On it was a picture of Hubert Hopeful. As far as Loomis was concerned, the mystery was over.

By Monday, the number of uninformed players had dwindled. Most of them seemed to enjoy the ringer's presence.

"I think the kids enjoyed it," acknowledged Coach Burke. "It took a little of the drudgery

out of the two-a-day practices."

I received a valuable insight into the Parma coaching staff. Burke is a gentle commander, in control all the time, an *amazing* organizer. He spent hours during the spring and summer planning the practice sessions. Every coach was working with a group of kids all the time.

His assistants are firm, but not abusive. My coach, Ed Kilbane, was a patient teacher and well-informed on the finer points of line play. The entire staff showed enthusiasm and optimism. It must rub off on the players.

During the course of the season, if the players get down in the dumps, maybe they'll remember "Jaworsky." We had some laughs together, but I'm glad they're over.

The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans challenges us to not be conformed to this world of multi-million dollar athletes, oversized homes and SUV's, and \$7 mega-meals.

Paul addresses Christians who are tempted to conform to the world's mania for accessories. The apostle has some advice: "Don't conform; transform. Don't accessorize, specialize." Because when you conform, when you accessorize, when you spend \$100 plus for a basketball or concert ticket or \$40,000 for a new vehicle, you begin to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, rather than "thinking with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned."

Paul then proceeds to trot out a variety of spiritual gifts necessary to the harmonious functioning of the Christ body ministry in the world. These are the gifts necessary for this Divinity community of ministers to function harmoniously as the Body of Christ in Parma Heights, in Ohio, and in the world.

Paul writes, "We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in

proportion to faith; ministry in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Ah, so many spiritual gifts in this Divinity community of ministers and so little time: prophecy, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leadership, and compassion.

Whatever our gift, we are to make the time to use it and not worry about what gifts we don't have, or what gifts someone else has. All the gifts and the ministers who administer those gifts are of equal and profound importance as Divinity ministers live out our calling to be the Christ body in this place.

Some have the gift to prophesy and give vision to the future of Divinity and Cuyahoga County while challenging us not to conform but be transformed; not to accessorize, but specialize in using our God-given gifts today. The vision of an all day preschool and summer camp to minister to our children. The vision of a new relationship with Parma Park grade school across the street in reaching out to those in need who live around our church and school.

Some have the gifts to minister with our many nursing home residents and shut-ins, to minister with families in divorce, families in alcoholism or drug abuse, families grieving the death of a loved one.

Some have the gift to teach in our public school system, in our community college, in our Sunday school rooms, in our pre-school, in our Y.M.C.A. summer camp, in our adult Bible studies, or most importantly, the gift to teach our children or grandchildren in our homes, as we again commit ourselves this morning to teach our newly baptized child of God – Anderson – what it means to be a Christ-follower, what it means to be transformed and not conformed.

Some have the gift to exhort or to encourage others not to conform but to be transformed, not to accessorize but to specialize, not to cheat but to be faithful, not to sleep but to do Sunday morning worship, "not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned." Some have the gift to exhort or to encourage others while so many are critical of one another. The gift to exhort and encourage one another is such a valuable and precious gift in our relationships with one another.

Some have the gift to give of their time, talent, and money. Volunteer time given to this church as the Christ body doing his ministry in this place. Time and talent given to our Food Pantry, to our music ministries, to our youth and education ministries, to our Stephen ministry, parish nurses; time and talent given in maintaining our building and grounds with our capital campaign, in preparing for and serving at weddings and funerals, and in welcoming the visitor to our worshipping community. The gift to give of our money to support all these ministries as the Christ body in this place and not to hold back in giving our gift to build up our Christ body.

Some have the gift to lead in diligence, a committee meeting, a woman's circle group, our men's prayer group, or whenever there is a need for a leader to step forward and lead with diligence. I think of Joan Huetter grieving Carl's illness this past year and now his death; but continuing to volunteer in our office entering our attendance data into the computer every week.

And some have the gift to be compassionate in cheerfulness with the person diagnosed with cancer, with the person who just lost their job, with the person whose child was just killed in an accident, with the depressed person who sees no light at the end of a dark tunnel. Compassion in cheerfulness.

This is the difference between the conformed and the transformed. The conformed are always trying to add on, to accessorize, and to buy something else. Our culture says you can never have enough. You always need more and more.

The transformed are focused on the ministry and the gifts the Holy Spirit gave them.

The conformed seek a promotion; the transformed seek a ministry.

The conformed seek more stuff; the transformed seek less stuff and more relationship.

The conformed seek the pleasures of the flesh; the transformed seek the renewal of the mind.

The conformed pretend to be on the team; the transformed are willing to sacrifice for the good of the team.

The conformed invest in immediate gratification; the transformed invest in the eternal.

Let us be sensitive to the voice of God and to the needs of the entire church community.

We're a family, a fellowship of believers that is not another version of the "rat race" where I win if you lose or the other way around. That kind of thinking may belong in the business world, or the sports world, but not in the church community. Paul tells us, "do not be conformed to this world."

To be transformed requires a new way of looking at things and a new way of thinking - a "renewal of our minds." To be transformed requires a spiritual vision nurtured by worship, prayer, study, and gratitude to God. These are the gifts God wants all of us to have and enjoy.

The bottom line is this. "God does not want us to be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect."