

Remarkable people in our midst

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For those of you who have run into John Stapleton on area tennis courts, you might think he's got "game", and he's a good conversationalist, too. There is a depth to John you might not have a clue about. In fact, one of the many admiring members of his Sunday School class told me, "John is *so humble*. When he is not teaching us, he sits and quietly listens so intently, hardly ever saying anything, unless he is asked. We love him!" A sought-after teacher, faithful patron of the arts, volunteer for Kairos and other missions, informed world traveler, and (soon to

be again) published author, John is witty, urbane, tall and handsome, with a *touch of ... well... you get the picture.*

He's got "game", all right! Having served for many years as a popular United Methodist Minister in the South Carolina Conference, Dr. Stapleton is occasionally heard from the pulpit at St. John's UMC in downtown Aiken, where he and his beautiful and *giving* wife Cynthia are members these days, while residing on York Street. In fact, on a recent Sunday, the congregation seemed spellbound, while he spoke of coming to grips with relationships, healing of



John Stapleton



Karen De Mauro

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wounds, and a college-boy's delight at once standing right next to Marilyn Monroe!

However, that is not the only place one can hear John M. Stapleton. A Ph.D. graduate of Union Seminary, NYC, John taught preaching while also directing the Doctor of Ministry program at Candler School of Theology (Emory), and has taught at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary. At Lake Junaluska, North Carolina, John directed the preaching program at the Growth Center there as well.

Now, every few months John journeys to New York City. Yes, it is true, he has experience as an actor and director, but

it's not just to take in a few Broadway shows that this journey takes place.

Together with Karen DeMauro, Director of The Acting Center in NYC, John holds a two-day workshop that focuses on techniques to improve delivery of sermons. Karen and John remind these public speakers *WHAT you say deserves attention to HOW you say it!*

Who among us has not sat through an interminable sermon, wishing we could really get the point the preacher was trying to say? (*Not here in Aiken, mind you, but somewhere in our past we might have had such an experience.*) That is where this workshop has made an amazing difference! As an experienced actor and director, John is dedicated to assisting ministers and interested laity with their work on sermon delivery and religious address. Karen and John are unique in their teaching and coaching in that the emphasis is upon the participant. They listen, address the sermonizer's goals and objectives, identify the strengths, and encourage the sermonizer to unleash and use them.

Credit to those attendees honest enough with themselves to know they could be helped by such a workshop. There is a real mixture of participants, from vicars and other senior theological thinkers, well seasoned, to those wanting

to sharpen their new skills.

One attendee summed it up this way. "As I've now learned, preaching is more than simply reading words off a page. It involves your whole body: rate, volume, pitch, waiting for the message to land, clarifying your objective, understanding space and atmosphere." Another says, "The time was invigorating, terrifying and uproariously exciting!"

Eerdman's Publishing will soon have available through Amazon a brand new publication that includes a chapter from John entitled "Loving God with the Mind, and Thinking with the Heart". This book, entitled *The Power to Comprehend: The Formation and Practice of Pastor Theologians*, is a collection by recognized theological experts, underwritten by the esteemed Lilly Foundation, through The Center of Theological Inquiry, of Princeton, New Jersey.

Heroes in our midst can take on many personas. With his rich background, he could be *anywhere*. How lucky is Aiken that he is here? What a joy it is to know John. He is aware of the need to help even the most gifted thinkers improve their delivery so our ears and hearts can hear their true message. With John's help, we may never again think of glancing at our watches, much less holding them to our ears to make sure they have not stopped running!