

## INTRODUCTION TO CLOWN MINISTRY



Photo by Danny Chamblee

David Suhs appears as "Christoph" while participating in a pantomimed presentation of holy communion.

**CLOWN MINISTRY** first appeared in the United States and Canada in the late 1960s. Creative artists searched for ways to express the Christian faith in new and dramatic ways. Director Rolf Forsberg created a short film for the 1964 New York World's Fair entitled "Parable." In this film, Jesus is depicted as a clown and humanity as a travelling circus. Stephen Schwartz and John-Michael Tebelak were inspired by

"Parable" to write the musical of Jesus's life and ministry entitled, "Godspell." In this musical, Jesus and his disciples appear as clowns.

Clown Ministry is a dramatic art form that attempts to communicate the message of our Lord in a new way through pantomime and laughter. The use of the clown in ministry finds some of its justification in scripture such as—

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| <i>1 Corinthians 4:10</i> | "We are fools for Christ's sake;"   |
| <i>1 Corinthians 1:27</i> | "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise;" |
| <i>Psalms 100:2</i>       | "Serve the Lord with gladness."   |

Throughout history, the clown has been about serving others whether in the circus or reaching out to others in various settings. What better symbol for Christians then to serve and to love each other like the clown? Jesus said we must be like the child to enter the kingdom of heaven. The clown is a very powerful symbol of this child-likeness.

Clown ministry is not just entertainment; nor preaching in costume and make-up. It is a means of touching souls, something most clowns somehow manage to do. The clown through pantomime may be able to communicate the Lord's message to people who are not able to be reached by the spoken word or other forms of communication. The clown reminds us that Jesus came to give us "Good News" and that we should be happy and joyful. The clown in its "child-likeness" reminds us of what Jesus was saying that we must become like children in order to enter the kingdom of God. We hope that the Lord will touch you through His servant, . . . . .  
the Clown.



# SCRIPTURE AND THE CLOWN

Clown as ministry finds some of its justification in the scripture such as those given below. Thoughts are also given below on how these scriptures might be interpreted to incorporate the clown.

## VERSE & SCRIPTURE

“We are fools for Christ’s sake,  
but you are wise in Christ.”  
*1 Corinthians 4:10 a (RSV)*

“I am willing to act like a fool in  
order to show my joy in the Lord.”  
*2 Samuel 6:21 (Paraphrased)*

“Has not God made foolish the wisdom  
of the world? For since, in the wisdom  
of God, the world did not know God  
through wisdom, it pleased God  
through folly of what we preach  
to save those who believe.”  
*1 Corinthians 1:21 (RSV)*

“Let the children come to me, do  
not hinder them; for such belongs  
the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to  
you, whoever does not receive the  
kingdom of God like a child shall  
not enter it.”  
*Mark 10: 14b-15 (RSV)*

“But God hath chosen the foolish  
things of the world to confound  
the wise;”  
*1 Corinthians 1:21 (RSV)*

## THOUGHTS

As Christians we are in the world, but our actions and faith make us operate in a manner different from the rest of the world. We, like the clown or fool, are laughed at for what we are and what we do. In our foolishness or clown spirit, we actually demonstrate our wisdom of being one with Christ.

King David demonstrated his heartfelt joy and intimacy with God by dancing without his clothes before Him. The fool or clown reminds us how joyful we can be over the love God has for us and the gifts the Lord has given us, including Jesus’s very “Good News.”

God chose a wisdom that we as humans cannot understand and, in fact, one that looks foolish. The clown often operates on a level different from our own which seems foolish, but often has wisdom. If we were to become like the clown, we might better understand the message God has given us.

The child and the clown are alike in that they both accept unconditionally with little question and much faith and love. Our Lord makes it very clear that our faith should be like this. The clown tells us to love, trust, play, imagine, create, and dream as a child would, but most importantly to have unquestioning faith.

Although the word “foolish” is used in many different ways in scripture including to be “unwise or one without wisdom,” the Apostle Paul again uses it as a juxtaposition for what is wisdom for God seems to be foolishness to men. The clown is a metaphor of foolishness, but at the same time a character who has wisdom of what might be more important in life, that being laughter, joy, and unconditional love.