

LET'S SEE TO BOTH  
THE CHURCH'S BUSINESS AND  
THE BUSINESS OF THE CHURCH!

For the annual groups-planning  
meeting of  
South Congregational Church,  
Cape Cod, MA

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The point of this meditation is powerful in its simplicity, but my parable for it will be so powerful in its visuality that the message will be in danger of being forgotten, all your memory energy flowing into the parable. Whenever that calamity occurs, public speakers call it an instance of a runaway illustration--the illustration of the illustration being the runaway horses, especially on firetrucks, my mother used to warn me against when I was so young that I then could hardly wait for a runaway horse so I could run straightaway out of the house to see it. If the calamity occurs tonight, it won't be the first time for me. At last year's annual meeting of the Rhode Island Conference of the UCC, the man who's now its moderator introduced me by telling the vivid, humorous, highly pertinent story with which many

years before I'd begun my sermon on the occasion of his ordination. Afterward, I said to Wilke, "Kit, what was the point that illustration was to illumine?" Embarrassed, he said, "Sorry, I can't remember." Then I could see vengeance flash in his eye & he said, "Can you?" I feared he would ask me that, & I was trapped.... So now tonight I'm going to do my best to avoid such a calamity: I'm going to tell you my point first & put it in bold type for you to take home with you. The point of this meditation is this: **The business of the church**-- to celebrate, live, & radiate the grace of God in & through Jesus Christ our Lord--& **the church's business**--what we are doing here tonight, organizing ourselves to care for the church's body in all its inner & outer aspects--are complementary rather than competitive, mutually supportive as soul & body, functionally interdependent as end & means.

What's my illustration? It's that two-headed, one-stomached black rat snake two boys found in their family's garden twelve years ago & turned over to a lab, where the critter's been under close scientific study ever since (AP byline, 2 Feb 89). Name's "IM," for "instinct" & "mind." Have you heard of him, IM? The snake eats every other week & always the same dull diet, a mouse. In the early years, the heads had separate identities, so each tried to keep the other from getting the food. Then it gradually dawned on them that, since they had the same tummy, they benefited equally no matter which of them did the work of eating the mouse. Now there's never any trouble except when the mouse runs perpendicular to them & they both snap at once & one gloms onto the head & the other the tail. Then, says the U. of TN prof. in charge, "they can fight for hours unless you stop them." Now, sisters & brothers, this here illustration is in many ways a mighty useful parable of every church congregation I've ever had anything to do with. Read our church covenant & our mission statement & you see that the church's business & the business of the church are meant to nourish each other with the implications & applications of the gospel, God's good news of grace for us & for the whole world.... Please turn over the sheet, meditate on the saying, which then we'll read together to close.

## Studies on two-headed snake search for insights into behavior

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. — Heard the one about the two-headed snake that couldn't agree on which head got to eat dinner?

It's no joke, if you're talking about the two-headed black rat snake named "IM" (for "instinct" and "mind") that has been under observation at the University of Tennessee here since shortly after its birth 12 years ago.

"If one head gets a good grip on the head of the mouse and the other gets a good grip on the tail, they can fight for hours unless you stop them," said Gordon Burghardt, who teaches psychology and zoology at the university.

"They're simply fighting for the privilege of swallowing the mouse," he said yesterday. The prey in their twice-monthly meals, he noted, ends up in the common stomach.

IM is showing researchers whether over time animals can learn to share,

he said. "We found the left head ate more prey, but it was smaller," he said. "And the right head ate fewer prey which tended to be larger."

"Over five years, the weight of the prey eaten was identical (for both heads)," he said. "So the animals were in some sense splitting the resource. We didn't expect that."

The university got IM from nearby Oak Ridge National Laboratory, where two boys found the animal in their family's garden.

Back then, the two heads "really had two separate identities," said Jerry Klein, a research engineer and amateur herpetologist at the Oak Ridge lab. "If one wanted to eat, it would try to keep the food from the other."

Burghardt said the animal also is providing clues on theories of motivation and cognition. "We can test out some ideas in motivational psychology that we normally couldn't, such as, why do you stop eating?" he said.