

Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church
 281 Edgewood Road
 Asheville, North Carolina 28804

THE SALTSHAKER

A PUBLICATION OF COVENANT REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

Office: 828-253-6578—Email: crpchq@gmail.com—Website: www.covenantreformed.net

Time Well Spent

By Rev. Sean McCann

One of my goals during our first six months together was to visit every member of Covenant Reformed in their home. With just one or two exceptions (and please let me know if I've somehow missed you), I believe we have reached that goal; and I say *we* because I certainly couldn't have done it without the diligent scheduling assistance of Ms. Lannae Graham! I had anticipated this would be a fruitful way to spend my time in these early months, but I had no idea how much I would learn in your homes. Time spent in the living rooms, kitchens, and back porches of Buncombe County (and beyond) has been time well spent, so I thought it might be helpful to share some things I've learned with you. While none of you will be represented in each and every one of these points, I suspect most of you will find some of yourself in this account. And since I've recently finished a preaching series in Revelation, I couldn't resist finding the perfect number of lessons; so with that in mind here are *seven lessons I've learned about you from my first round of pastoral visitations*.

Your stories are long and cannot be told in one hour. What I found out in my early visits with some of our elderly members is that after an hour we would have barley covered the past couple of decades in their lives, not to mention the span of their years! By trying to keep my mouth shut, I think I learned some of the truth of Proverbs 19:20 "Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future."

You are a scattered bunch. From traveling to Black Mountain to Hendersonville to Hot Springs to Arden to Montreat to Burnsville to Fairview to Newland to Marshall to Fletcher to Canton to Weaverville to Swannanoa (and not to mention countless visits to Haw Creek), I certainly know my way around Asheville better than anyone else who has only lived here for six months.

While the vision of our church is certainly to reach the North Asheville community with the gospel, I believe our geographic diversity is a strength as we seek to multiply our ministry in the broader community.

You are faithful Christians who are not immune to hardship. Without going into detail, more of you shed tears than not when we prayed together. As is true in every gathering of believers, you are sinners and you have been sinned against. Some of you have hurt yourselves and others by your foolish choices and sinful words and actions; some of you have been hurt - and hurt deeply - at the hands of others; and many of you just plain hurt for your children. Elizabeth Stone has written that in having a child you "decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body," and that certainly is not a painless experience. Yet despite all these hardships you are not alone, but are a people trusting in a Savior who knows the pains of life under the sun, who hears the cries of your hearts, and who lives even now to make intercession for you.

Your gift of hospitality is alive and well. And judging by the amount of sweet tea I drank, Asheville may need to reconsider its "Beer City" nickname. I loved being in your homes and I want to encourage you to keep your doors open because I know others are blessed by your hospitality as well.

You are more theologically and denominationally diverse than our church name would imply. With a name like Covenant Reformed, one would assume this church is made up of died-in-the-wool Presbyterians who were raised on a steady diet of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms. But while there are certainly some of you like that, the vast majority of you come from an array of

Upcoming Events

January and February

The services listed below are in addition to regular Sunday morning worship.

January 1		No Sunday school
January 8	11:00 am	The Lord's Supper
January 8	6:00 pm	Evening Worship
January 15	9:30 am	Right to Life Prayer
January 15	Noon	Congregational Meal
January 22	11:00 am	The Lord's Supper
January 22	6:00 pm	Evening Worship
January 29	6:00 pm	Evening Worship
February 5	Noon	Elder Groups
February 12	11:00 am	The Lord's Supper
February 12	6:00 pm	Evening Worship
February 19	Noon	Congregational Meal
February 26	11:00 am	The Lord's Supper
February 26	6:00 pm	Evening Worship

Weekly Events

Sunday Morning:		
Opening Exercises	9:30 am	
Sunday School	9:45 am	
Morning Worship	11:00 am	
Wednesday Evenings:		
Supper	6:00 pm	
Bible Study/Prayer	6:45 pm	
Bible Study		
For Men:		
Men's Prayer Breakfast	8:00 am	2nd & 4th Saturdays
ROMEOS	8:00 am	Every Thursday
<i>(Retired Old Men Eating Out)</i>		
at J&S Cafeteria, River Ridge		
Norm Bomer's Home	7:00 pm	1st & 3rd Thursdays
For Women:		
Carol Belz's Home	9:30 am	Every Tuesday
Fellowship Hall	10:30 am	Every Wednesday
Debbie Cate's Home	7:00 pm	1st & 3rd Thursdays

Our annual congregational meeting to review the 2017 budget will take place in January; the date and time are yet to be determined.

Continued on Page 2

Continued from Page 1

religious backgrounds: Methodist, Baptists, Episcopalians, Dutch Reformed, Pentecostal, and even a few converted Catholics and Jews. You are covenant children and adult converts; backsliders and aisle-walkers; mature Christians and young believers. Yet despite these differences you have found unity here around the faithful proclamation of the gospel and sound theology, the warmth of our shared fellowship, and a desire to reach our city and our world for Christ.

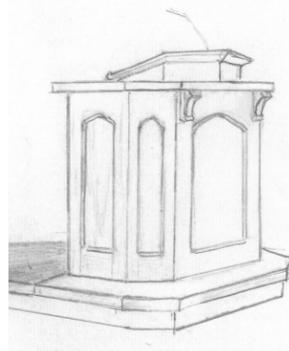
You have been shepherded well. By my count there are seven men in our membership who have served as elder but who have rotated off the session and are now inactive. Most of these brothers served for decades and though they are all still very involved, they are enjoying a well-deserved respite from the duties of the office. To be honest, I was a bit apprehensive about coming to a church with so many inactive elders, but to a man each of these men have received me with deep humility and many – quite unprovoked – have taken responsibility for past failings. And speaking of the past, it was clear in almost every home I visited that you truly love your former pastor, Rev. Bob Drake. I continue to be grateful for the pattern of ministry he established here and the deep foundation I have inherited because of his faithful and fruitful ministry.

You love our church and long for her to thrive. There is no getting around it: CRPC has had a rough go of it the past few years. In numbers alone, you once had around 250 in worship but have now dipped into double digits. Though numbers certainly don't tell the whole story, I know these hard years have impacted each of you. You all have different theories and opinions on what has happened, but you all share the same heart to honor Christ and see the gospel go forth. More than anything it was this resilient spirit that first drew me to you: the spirit of faithful brothers and sisters who have endured much but have stuck it out for Christ and for one another. You are not dwelling in the past, but instead believe that the Lord is not done with our church, and that by his word and Spirit there are truly brighter days that lie ahead.

Finally, as I reflect on these seven lessons, I do so with a sincere sense of gratitude. Thank you for allowing me into your homes and into your lives, I know for some of you that wasn't easy or comfortable. Thank you for finding time for me and for your generous hospitality. But most importantly, thank you for the privilege of being your pastor. The affection I had for this church has only grown exponentially with each home I visited, and I am confident that it will only continue to grow over the years to come.

The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Sean McCann



With the conclusion on Christmas Day of the Advent sermon series comes the beginning of a new sermon series, and I am excited to announce that I plan to spend 2017 preaching through Exodus. I love the story of the exodus of God's people from Egypt and their time in the wilderness because it is a story of redemption. It is a story of enslaved people delivered by the power of God and established by his law in order that he might dwell in their midst forever. And it isn't just any old story of rescue: it is *the story* of rescue in scripture. It defines God's people throughout the Old Testament and is fulfilled in the life and redemption accomplished by Jesus in the New Testament. While the book itself is full of memorable individual stories and iconic images (the baby in the basket, the burning bush, the Red Sea crossing, the golden calf, etc.), I hope in this series to weave them all together into a beautiful tapestry that displays the glory of God's steadfast love and mercy.

I want to alert you to two things before we begin. First, when preaching expository sermons through Old Testament narratives I believe it is best to study each narrative section as a whole, and that will necessarily mean reading and studying large passages of scripture in one sermon. In outlining the Exodus series for the coming year, I have planned some Sundays when the Scripture reading alone will take at least five minutes, and sometimes more. The point is not to speed through Exodus, but rather to chew and digest God's word in the packages that it comes to us. While preaching through Romans one chapter at a time would certainly miss the trees for the forest, taking Exodus verse-by-verse runs the opposite danger: missing the forest for the trees.

Second, I have planned this entire series to have a redemptive-historical focus. When the resurrected Jesus met two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus, he conducted quite possibly the greatest Bible study ever: "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). While I certainly can't replicate that lesson, I have scheduled some breaks in our Exodus series for some shorter, topical series to pause and turn to the New Testament to see how the exodus, the law, and the tabernacle all point us forward to Christ.

Preaching Schedule		
Date	Morning	Evening
Jan. 1	Exodus 1:1-7	
Jan. 8	Exodus 1:8-22	John 3:22-36
Jan. 15	Exodus 2	
Jan. 22	Exodus 3:1-4:17	John 4:1-26
Jan. 29	Exodus 4:18-31	John 4:27-45
Feb. 5	Exodus 5	
Feb. 12	Exodus 6	John 4:45-54
Feb. 19	Exodus 7	
Feb. 26	Exodus 8	John 5:1-18

Transitioning to 2017

By Rev. Bill Clark

Last year Cecelia and I traveled through several transitions. I started a great Bible reading plan. Now I have accomplished reading the whole Bible again. In January, 2016, Cecelia was diagnosed with atrial fibrillation. We saw the transition of the McCanns joining us in May which caused me to transition from Interim Pastor back to Associate Pastor. Unexpectedly, we found ourselves in the midst of Cecelia's mother's serious illness and then death. After that, our son, Andrew became engaged to his Canadian girlfriend, so we get to help plan an international wedding. The Lord has faithfully dealt with us through all of this and more. And I believe largely because we were driven to pray more earnestly than we normally did.

The Lord has been faithful to bring CRPC through 2016. Our gifted Search Committee concluded its work, the McCanns arrived and have already meant so much to all of us. We have seen new members come and join us. Church officers have been elected, the budget reflects great generosity from the congregation so that we plan to support new missionaries and other ventures. Even more could be said but the Lord has been at work powerfully answering the prayers of His people in often greater ways than we expected.

That leads me to the point of this article. Will you commit yourself to regular, earnest and specific prayer for this congregation. As I read through the Scriptures again I was struck by the prominence of this discipline. All the significant people of the Bible pray, especially our Lord Jesus Christ.

I hope you do not hear this as a guilt trip. The point of reflecting on 2016 is to realize what the Lord has done and is doing and what we might see Him do in 2017 IF WE ASK! J. C. Ryle, in speaking of prayer says, "I commend to you the importance of intercession in our prayers... We should study to be of a public spirit. We should stir ourselves up to name other names besides our own before the throne of grace. This is the highest charity. They love me best who love me in their prayers. This is for our soul's health. It enlarges our sympathies and expands our hearts. This is for the benefit of the church. The wheels of all machinery for extending the gospel are moved by prayer. They do as much for the Lord's cause who intercede like Moses on the mount, as they who fight like Joshua in the thick of the battle. This is to be like Christ. He bears the names of His people, as their High Priest, before the Father. Oh, the privilege of being like Jesus! This is to be a true helper to ministers. If I must choose a congregation, give me a people that pray."

In 2017 take your Bibles and see what the Lord intends His Church to be and then ASK Him to do it. Let us look forward to His gracious answers.

The Pastor's Reading Challenge

by Rev. Sean McCann



As the new year roles around and you are making (or already breaking) your new year's resolutions, I'd like to humbly propose something we could all do more of in 2017: read. Many of you like to read for fun and to relax, while some of you have to read for work, but I think our word-based faith gives us an even better reason to read. Good books are a means by which the Lord disciplines and sanctifies us. Through the words of men and women we don't know - many already gone on to glory - the Lord teaches us and stimulates thought; he challenge our wrong beliefs and sharpens our right ones; and he even at times rebukes and convicts us. Be-

cause of the high value I place on good books, I want to encourage you to read more in 2017, and one way to do that is to join the Pastor's Reading Challenge.

I have chosen six books that I will read this coming year and I would like to invite each of you to join me so we can read them together. If you join this challenge then you will be responsible to read each book on your own, and then six times during the year we will meet together to discuss the book, and then I will review the book in the following issue of *The Saltshaker*. With only two months to read each book, I have chosen relatively short books that I trust will be helpful and thought provoking. For example, the first book in the challenge is *What is the Mission of the Church?* by Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert. As a part of the challenge you will read the book and we will gather to discuss it together in late February, and then in early March I will announce the next book, and so on through December. By signing up for the challenge you commit to thoughtfully reading each book and participating in the discussion groups every other month. Books can get expensive, so the more people that sign up the better price we can get on a bulk order, but please don't let finances keep you from joining, we have scholarship funds to help those who might need it. If you would like to join the challenge please email me (smccann24@gmail.com) in the next few weeks so we can order the books and get started.

I'll let Charles Spurgeon have the last word on this topic (from his sermon on 2 Timothy 4:13): "We are quite persuaded that the very best way for you to be spending your leisure, is to be either reading or praying. You may get much instruction from books, which afterwards you may use as a true weapon in your Lord and Master's service. Paul cries, "Bring the books"—join in the cry."