

COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE MIDLANDS

Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically Progressive

Pastor's Paragraph

GOD AND IMMIGRATION

God and immigration? What do *those* two issues have to do with each other? That's precisely what one of my most recent callers wanted to know! The voice on the other end of the line said something like this: "I'm really confused about the issue of immigration and some of the actions our new president is taking. I feel compassion for people who are being persecuted and have to flee for their lives, but I also want to protect our country from terrorists who could hurt us. I realize that this is basically a political issue; but, recently, I've been wondering whether there is guidance in the Bible or the teachings of Jesus—any *spiritually* based values—that can speak to the issue of immigration. I haven't heard about anything like that, so I'm assuming that nothing exists."

Well, if my former church member in another state hasn't heard about any biblical teachings that speak to the issue of immigration, that doesn't mean that they don't exist! It probably means that I and many of my fellow ministers haven't been doing a very good job of keeping people informed. So I'm happy to take this opportunity to correct any unintentional omission!

The truth is that there are a *multitude* of biblical references to the issue that, today, we refer to as immigration. That word "immigration," of course, is a *modern* term, so it did not exist in the first or second century. But immigration as an experience *did* exist in that era; however, instead of using the word "immigrant," the Bible refers, instead, to "foreigners," "strangers," "sojourners," "aliens," etc. In most instances, *foreigners* were individuals from another clan, city, or country who were merely passing through an area. They planned to be there for only a *brief time* before returning home or going elsewhere. On the other hand, *sojourners* were people who traveled to another locality but *did* plan to stay. They wanted to become a long-time or permanent part of the culture. So the issue of immigration has *always* been a

concern, even if the *word* we use for it today was not employed in the 1st century.

To explore *fully* how God's people dealt with foreigners and sojourners who came to their area and the attitude of Jesus and Paul to such individuals would require more than this brief article to address; so I'll greatly simplify my comments by pointing out only a few basic facts that can be applied to our present situation.

The truth of the matter is that *all* cultures in the ancient Near East practiced hospitality toward strangers. It was "in their DNA." That which is striking is that, in the Bible, hospitality to both foreigners *and* sojourners was a *duty*. It was not merely an elective or an occasional act. Generous hospitality was a *sacred obligation*, grounded in God's love for *all* of God's children—especially God's gracious blessing of the Hebrew people, even when they may not always have deserved it.

But the sacred *duty* of God's people to provide hospitality also was based upon the obligation to love their neighbors as they loved themselves, especially non-Israelite foreigners and sojourners who were homeless, landless, and needy or destitute, because they were vulnerable and *unable* to provide for themselves. Israel was not to treat others in the inhospitable way that Egypt once treated them!

But the sacred duty of God's people to care for strangers who came their way with generous hospitality did not mean that they were to abandon all concern for their *own* security. Strangers had to be *assessed* in some way to discover their intentions. If the strangers passed evaluation, they advanced to the next step and were received as honored guests. They were given excellent food, water, clothing, lodging and protection from harm. For sojourners who wished to become *permanent* residents, it was possible for them to be hired to provide menial tasks that would benefit themselves as well as the community; and some of those sojourners even made *major* contributions. But the *important* part to remember is that all foreigners and sojourners were *carefully vetted*!

But *why* did God's authentic people extend such generous hospitality to non-Israelites? *Why* did it seem to be "in their DNA"? It was because biblical law required it. Here are only a couple of examples:

“You shall...*love* the stranger....” (Deuteronomy 10:18)

“You shall not wrong or oppress a stranger....” (Exodus 22:21 and 23:9)

“The stranger who sojourners with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself....”

That same motif appears in the Psalms, the Prophets, and other Hebrew scriptures. And, in the New Testament, Paul claims that all *unloving* distinctions between themselves and others have been erased and need to be recognized by every follower of Christ. Paul was very much “on target,” because Jesus *himself* identified with strangers and encouraged his disciples to do so, as well: “*I* was a stranger,” he said, and you welcomed me. You gave me food, drink, needed clothing, and if I were sick, you took care of me. Jesus also told a story about a Good Samaritan who did *all* of that for a total stranger.

It is sad that there are people who have been in a church all of their lives, have heard the gospel proclaimed over and over again, yet seem unable to connect it the very clear biblical witness to issues that we are encountering in our own country in the 21st century. Have our churches dropped the ball? People seem somehow to have missed the message of Ephesians that if one is *truly* “in Christ,” all *dividing walls* between people are done away with, shattered, totally eradicated! *Despite* such biblical teaching, huge numbers of people who like to think of themselves as followers of Christ prefer to put politics *before* the spiritual values to which they claim to aspire. Indeed, relevant spiritual values actually are displaced by patently unloving relationships. In light of that reality, I particularly am grateful for the call from my former church member in Alabama who decided to take a “road less traveled.” She dared to seek a higher wisdom than that which *any* of our political parties is willing to espouse. Can we *learn* from her?

Two thousand years ago, Jesus is reported to have said: “I stand at the door and knock.” He still does—and waits for us to respond. I hope that always and, in all ways, we at CCM can be a church that *does* respond by opening the door to a higher wisdom. I am immensely grateful for each one of you, love you deeply, and am thankful that you allow me to engage with you in

the only journey that ultimately matters. Let's keep "at it," folks. Let's keep "at it!"

Your pastor and friend,
John

IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM

March, 2017

CCM will gather on the 2nd and 4th Sunday during the month of March.

Sunday, March 12th (2nd Sunday of the Month)

IMPORTANT: DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME BEGINS TODAY!

10:00 a.m. WORSHIP GATHERING SUNDAY

As we all know, the Christian Church has been under attack by detractors since its inception; yet, the Church still stands! But, today, people “in the know” are aware that the Church faces a different *kind* of threat. Now, the most severe threat is coming from within, the result of which could lead potentially to the death of Christianity. This morning, our pastor will address this assault-from-within from a realistic, yet, essentially *hopeful* perspective; and his message should enlighten and challenge us all. It is entitled, “LET’S BE HONEST: IS CHURCH REALLY ‘WORTH IT’?” As is our custom, an opportunity for informal discussion of the message will follow worship. (Out by about 12 noon)

Sunday, March 26th (4th Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. SPIRITUAL JOURNEY SUNDAY

One of the most valuable experiences we CCMers have had together was to share our spiritual journey with the congregation as well as to have the privilege of hearing the journey of others. As a result, a delightful outcome occurred: we all felt much *closer* to one another! Our sense of vital *connectedness* increased! That phenomenon took place about two years ago.

Although approximately 95% of our congregation already has shared his or her journey, some of our newer companions-in-Christ have not yet had that opportunity. So today, we are *resuming* “Spiritual Journey Sunday” as LaVoice Kallestad gives us a vision of her own spiritual pilgrimage. On successive

occasions, others who wish to do so will be given an opportunity to share theirs, as well.

As you listen to each presentation, be prepared to experience the possibility of a more profound connection with the valuable folks whom we regularly see but didn't *really* know. *Why* have these sessions tended to draw us closer together? Because many of those who have shared with us have not tried to impress us or "look good." They have trusted us enough to be vulnerable by sharing their ups *and* downs; and all of us have had our share of "downs!" But that's a good thing, because *none* of us is able to relate to a "perfect" person, but we *can* embrace with profound understanding and love people who are ordinary human beings like the rest of us! So that is why, at times, we have been able to experience an incredible sense of intimacy, share hugs, and be moved to something deeper than mere "conventional" community with our fellow presenters.

Every presentation, including the one today, will be followed by our usual time for informal discussion. We expect to adjourn by around 11:30 a.m.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

LOOKING BACK

According to comments from our members and friends, our last gathering was an immensely meaningful experience. The occasion was the CONVERSATION WITH OUR PASTOR opportunity that we resumed after not having scheduled that particular event for about three years.

After someone said, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if *every* church were to do something special for its people like we have at CCM?," LaVoice Kallestad pronounced the experience "awesome," and Dr. Norman Masters effusively praised our time together as "the best CCM experience I've had since I've been a member here." (That's a period of about 10 years!) Also, hopes were

expressed that we could schedule *more* CONVERSATIONS WITH OUR PASTOR opportunities in the future. So, we'll make it happen!

Thanks for your excellent questions, your rapt attention, and, above all, your loyal presence. We're delighted to know that the gathering was a definite highlight for so many of you.

LOOKING AHEAD

To assist, well in advance, your making plans for the month of April, here is some important information you might want to know: Easter comes this year on the 3rd Sunday in April, not the 4th (which, of course, is our *usual* Sunday meeting time). Therefore, we'll be gathering on April 9th (2nd Sunday of the month) and April 16th (3rd Sunday of the month) *instead* of the 2nd and 4th Sunday.

Please note, also, that on BOTH Sundays we plan to adjourn early—by about 11:30 a.m. instead of at 12 noon. We do that each year since a number of you traditionally have had out-of-town family members visiting during the Easter season; consequently, we want to help you to maximize your valuable opportunity to be together. But, if you *do* have visitors on those Sundays, why not bring them to CCM with you?

TV, ANYONE?

Speaking of the Lenten-Easter season, television station CNN is featuring two special programs in which you might be interested. Both of them have been extensively advertised. The 1st special attraction is entitled "Finding Jesus" at 9:00 p.m., and the 2nd, "Believer," will follow at 10:00 p.m.

Since we have not seen either of the aforementioned programs, we cannot comment on their quality, accuracy, or depth. We simply wanted you to be aware that they will be available. The viewing date is Sunday evening, March 5th.

CCM:

**ADDING WONDER,
VITALITY, AND *DEPTH*
TO YOUR SPIRITUAL
JOURNEY**

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***WHEREVER YOU ARE, THE DIFFERENCE
IS WORTH ANY DISTANCE!***

Our Telephone:

Senior Pastor: (803) 331-9999. Our mobile cell phone is more reliable than our landline phone, because it is on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If no one answers, it usually means that our pastor is in a meeting, in a counseling session, doing regular spiritual mentoring, or is involved in some other form of ministry; but he will return your call as soon as possible, so please be sure to leave a message.

Our Website:

CommunityChurchMidlands.com (Also .net, .info and .org)

or

CommunityChurchOfTheMidlands.com (Also .net, .info and .org)

Our Mailing Address: P.O. Box 6946, Columbia, S.C. 29260-6946

Our Location: CCM usually gathers on the 2nd and 4th Sunday of each month, and any changes will be noted in our monthly newsletter. Please join us at the gorgeous Seven Oaks Community Center in beautiful Seven Oaks Park, 200 Leisure Lane (between St. Andrews and Piney Grove roads, just off I-26 West). When you enter the spacious parking lot, you'll see the main entrance to our newly renovated building on your right. Once you are inside

the Reception Area, our meeting locality is on your left. For updates on our programming, to verify meeting times, to learn about changes in scheduling, or for any pastoral need, please feel free to call 331-9999, night or day.

ALWAYS, WE'RE HERE FOR YOU!