

COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE MIDLANDS

Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically Progressive

Pastor's Paragraph

IT'S TIME TO CELEBRATE!

Can you believe it? We are beginning our *19th YEAR* as a fellowship of faith in the Midlands of South Carolina! That's quite an achievement when one considers the fact that most "new start" churches are given a substantial sum of money from a denominational entity or continuing financial support from another very large church for a period of about 3 years before they "go it" on their own. CCM began, at the suggestion of Harriet Hancock, without *any* of those usual forms of assistance. We began with prayer, dedication, a small donation, and the desire to offer people in our area an opportunity to grow deeper, spiritually, in a fellowship in which they do not have to "sign on" to a list of dogmas that Jesus himself never mentioned. So we aspired to create a caring fellowship in which people can flourish in a non-dogmatic atmosphere marked by love and openness, the kind of environment that Jesus offered to his own early followers. And people such as yourselves have helped to make that dream a reality.

With all of that in mind, we have a reason to celebrate! CCM is offering to people the opportunity to experience an unapologetically Christian, unapologetically progressive community that, to my knowledge, is not available in many conventional churches throughout the state of South Carolina. That is not to say that other churches aren't offering meaningful spiritual guidance and numerous other attractive options that we are not wealthy enough to offer. But some of those advantages take place in a dogma-drenched atmosphere or one that does not nurture each person's being open to the Holy Spirit to lead people into *new* truth. Instead, they frequently are subjected to hearing only what they always have heard, are rarely encouraged to think deeply for *themselves*. or to *challenge* generally accepted viewpoints that may be untenable. The result: Members of most conventional churches tend *not* to follow the biblical mandate to be transformed by the *renewing* of their minds! Whatever our limitations at CCM, the imprisonment of the *minds* of our congregation is not one of them! So, indeed, we *do* have something precious to celebrate: the freedom to *grow*, to *become*, and, thereby, we hope, to experience more nearly the fullness of life that Jesus said was the *purpose* of his ministry.

But *how* shall we celebrate the beginning of our wonderful new year together? Fortunately, we have what appears to be an exciting opportunity. Trustus Theatre just happens to be featuring a play this month that seems particularly appealing. It's called *Hand of God*. A young man by the name of Jason becomes involved in the Christian Puppet Ministry sponsored by his church. Jason's already complicated relationships with his pastor, a school bully, a girl who lives next door to him, and especially his mother, are thrown into upheaval when his puppet takes on an irreverent personality. *Hand of God* thoughtfully explores the nature of faith, morality, and the ties that bind us; and publicity about this hilarious nominee for "Best Play" of the season promises that it will leave everybody talking about it long after they've left the theatre. So we are indeed fortunate that it is available to us as a way to celebrate our 19th anniversary at CCM.

Our celebration will take place on Sunday, April 30, 3:00 p.m., at Trustus Theatre (520 Lady Street, downtown in the Congaree Vista). Tickets are \$25; however, we have a special potential advantage: If we have a certain number of people to attend, we will receive a discount of \$5 on every ticket. So, be sure to invite other members of your family, friends, and neighbors, and each of us will be able to receive a nice reward!

In order to get good seats and to sit together, it is imperative that we make our reservations well in advance. In other words, we need to act *NOW*! So, we will be taking reservations and collecting money for tickets immediately. That's because, in order to get our discount, all preferably *this week*.

After we see *Hand of God*, perhaps we can go somewhere for a bite to eat and even discuss some of the salient issues (the nature of faith, morality, the ties that bind us, etc.) suggested by the play.

The aforementioned events should result in a memorable CCM anniversary celebration for us. But don't get left out! Call me *immediately* to make reservations for yourself and any others you would like to invite (331-9999). You can reimburse me for your ticket(s) at our next church gathering. But, for now, put on your "happy face" and rush to your nearest telephone. After all, it's time to *CELEBRATE!*

With deep love, overwhelming gratitude for each of you, as well as for another year together, I continue to be

Your pastor and friend,
John

IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM

April, 2017

Please note that, during the month of April, we will be gathering on three Sundays: April 9th, April 16th, and April 30th.

Sunday, April 9 (2^d Sunday of the Month)
10:00 a.m. SPIRITUAL JOURNEY SUNDAY

Stories are wonderful, but they especially are marvelous when they are true and reflect the experiences of someone we know and value. That is what we have discovered when we shared our own spiritual journey and listened attentively to that of others. We'll have the privilege of doing so again today! By all means, join us! (Out by about 11:30 a.m.)

Sunday, April 16 (3rd Sunday of the Month)
10:00 a.m. EASTER SUNDAY WORSHIP

Although many people think that *Christmas* is the most important day in the church year, actually it is not. That distinction belongs to Easter alone. That which is of overwhelming importance is this: What will happen to us *ultimately*? In the Judeo-Christian Bible, surprisingly, there is more than one view. Our pastor will shed light on those different perspectives and end by focusing on the assurance given by Jesus himself, who taught that insights were mediated to his consciousness by the Spirit of God. (Out by about 11:15 a.m.)

Sunday, April 30 (5th Sunday of the Month)
3:00 p.m. CCM's SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Good news! We'll be having a gala celebration of the beginning of our 19th year together as a fellowship of God's people in the midlands of South Carolina. So *plan* now to join the fun—a hilarious play about religion at Trustus Theatre followed by food, fellowship, and an interesting discussion. Please see our pastor's newsletter article, "It's Time to Celebrate," for details, because a swift response from everyone is necessary. Also, in order to find a good parking space, please remember to arrive *at least 15 minutes early*. We hope to have *all* of our members and friends present for this "fun" occasion, and you're welcome to bring other family members and acquaintances with you to add to your enjoyment. It's also a great way to introduce them to our CCM fellowship. See ya there!

ANNOUNCEMENTS
ARE BIBLICAL ACCOUNTS RELIABLE?

The question of whether--or to what extent--we can depend upon apparently historical biblical accounts to be accurate is an important one. The answer depends upon whom one asks. Archeologists have demonstrated that our Bible contains many *different* kinds of accounts, some of which are factual, and others of which are teaching stories. For instance, Jesus utilized the teaching story tradition by using many wonderful parables, all of which he hoped we would take seriously, but none of which he intended for us to take literally. So, the issue we face is this: Which accounts are *historical* occurrences, and which are teaching stories never *intended* to be taken literally?

Even our *greatest* biblical scholars have difficulty separating what they call "historicity" from helpful teaching stories. One such account is the Old Testament account of the Jews as they were attempting to flee from enslavement by their Egyptian captors. We're told that God parted the waters of the Red Sea so their Jewish slaves could escape. They were pursued by an Egyptian Army; but as the army chased them, the biblical account tells us that God "closed" the waters and the entire Egyptian army was drowned.

Most biblical scholars have understood the aforementioned account as a *teaching* story, the intent of which (they believed) was to leave readers with two truths: 1st, that God never forsakes us, and 2nd that God ultimately will conquer evil and injustice. However, one of our fine members, Gary Davis, came across the results of a recent archeological discovery that shed new light on the biblical account of the Exodus, and he graciously passed it on to me. (Thanks, Gary!)

Here's the gist of the article.

The Egyptian Antiquities Ministry has just announced that a team of underwater archeologists discovered the remains of a large Egyptian army from the 14th Century BC at the bottom of the Gulf of Suez. The team was searching for the remains of ancient ships and artifacts related to trade in the Red Sea area when they stumbled upon a gigantic mass of human bones. The scientists, from the Cairo Faculty of Archeology, now have recovered more than 400 different skeletons as well as hundreds of weapons and pieces of armor. They also have retrieved the remains of war chariots. Moreover, the scientists estimate that more than 5,000 other bodies could be dispersed over a wider area, suggesting that a huge army perished on the site and can be linked to the biblical account in Exodus. The ancient soldiers seem to have died on *dry* ground, because no traces of boats or ships have been found in the area and, of course, war chariots do not float! Also, the positions of the bodies and the fact that they were stuck in a vast quantity of clay and rock implies that the army could have died in a mudslide or a tidal wave.

The conclusion of the archeological faculty is as follows:

"This astounding discovery brings undeniable scientific proof that one of the most famous episodes of the Old Testament was, indeed, based on an historical event."

CCM:
WE CAN TAKE YOU *DEEPER*
THAN MOST OTHER
LOCAL VENUES
ARE LIKELY TO DO.

WHEREVER YOU ARE, THE DIFFERENCE
IS WORTH ANY DISTANCE!

Our Telephone:

Senior Pastoi: (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

CommunityChurchOfftheMidlands.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 2^d 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 1-26 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!