

COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE MIDLANDS

Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically Progressive

Pastor's Paragraph

THE BIG ANNOUNCEMENT

In my article last month, I promised that something new and exciting would soon take place in our fellowship; but, because of space limitations, I waited until *this* month to tell you what will be happening. So, it is now time for the big announcement. Ready?

First, a bit of background information might be helpful. As you know, our country seems literally to be torn apart as a result of the unrelenting partisan, fractious wrangling that exists currently in politics. The horrific, angry divisions between Republicans, Libertarians, Independents and Democrats in our government have spread like a cancer in our society, causing bitter conflicts between husbands and wives, neighbors, relatives, and even, unfortunately, precipitating break ups of previously deep, life-long friendships. The fact that a large number of these people are active, dedicated members of Christian churches, synagogues, or mosques seems not to have made this heartbreaking situation any better. Why?

The difficulty appears to be that almost *no one* involved in dreadful, draining conflicts thought to apply *spiritual values* when making political decisions.

Just before our last national election, I wrote a newsletter article entitled “How Can One Vote as a Christian?” In it, I indicated that every election poses a challenge for all *spiritually* oriented persons and for those who *want* to be, precisely because it presents us with the opportunity and *responsibility* to bring spiritual values to bear when deciding for whom to vote. The truth is that most people probably never have done so—even among those of us who like to *think* we are good Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, or whatever. The problem, then, is this: Without realizing it, we tend to *compartmentalize* our spirituality, to apply it to *some* areas of our lives but not to others.

I shared with you in my earlier article the fact that deciding for whom to vote is no longer a difficult task for me when I follow some sage advice offered by Jesus. He recommended a vital but easy way to make necessary evaluations of others: “You will know them by their *fruits*.” Look at the full sweep of their lives, he said, and certain crucial characteristics will be obvious. Jesus called those qualities “fruits.”

Fortunately, the New Testament contains a list of *nine characteristics* called fruit of the Spirit: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*. The *presence* of those qualities in a person’s life and relationships can indicate that a candidate might be able to help us; the *absence* of those qualities can indicate that the individual is likely to hurt us.

So let’s try an experiment. With the nine fruit of the Spirit *and* with the person for whom you voted in the last election in mind, answer honestly: Does my candidate relate *lovingly* to other people (including perceived “enemies”)? Does this person appear to be *joyful*? Is he or she a *peaceful* person? Does the candidate exemplify *patience* with those who annoy him/her? Is the person’s demeanor toward others marked by *kindness*? Has the individual lived a life that is characterized by *generosity*, working regularly for the good of others, or has that one lived primarily for *self-aggrandizement*. Is the person *gentle*—or belligerent. Does the candidate manifest *self-control* in both speech and action? If we do *not* take those nine vital fruit of good character with radical *seriousness* in evaluating a president, vice-president, congress person, governor, or any other major candidate for office—that is, if we do not utilize vital *spiritual* values in our decision making, we, our country, and the entire world could pay a heavy price.

I hope my suggestions, just before our national election, were helpful for some of you. But there is a problem that I did *not* address. While the so-called “fruit of the Spirit” can be helpful in making decisions about *whom* to vote for, they are *not* necessarily of great value in helping us to make decisions about whatever controversial *issues* divide Republicans, Democrats, and many other political factions! Is there anything that can help us address *that* difficulty? The answer, fortunately, is yes.

Here again, it is of paramount importance to take *spiritual* values into consideration. The issue is compounded by the fact that a much *broader* combination of accumulated spiritual wisdom than just the “fruit of the Spirit” is called for; and, unfortunately, our churches have dropped the ball entirely in helping people to know how to apply that large aggregate of spiritual wisdom to any of the *specific* controversial issues that face our nation currently.

But rejoice! Beginning *this month*, CCM will come to the rescue! We’ll attempt to fill the void left by other churches by beginning an exciting new series in which, on one Sunday each month, we will take one of the major issues that divide our nation and demonstrate the potential value of bringing spiritual wisdom to bear on it. And, in order to be as *helpful* as possible, we’ll be as *comprehensive* as we can by looking carefully at a number of issues and attempting to lift them—and ourselves—to a *higher* level of awareness, allowing *spiritual principles* to *trump* the usual divisive partisan concerns. In our sessions, partisan party politics will be displaced by values that virtually all spiritually-oriented people judge to be of ultimate significance.

What *are* the topics we’ll have an opportunity to address? Big Government or Small? Personal Wealth or Shared Resources? What About Health Care? National Interest or the Common Good? Gun Control or Not? What About Climate Control? Just War or Pacifism? The Right to Life or the Right to Choose? And more!

I try my best to keep up with what churches of all major denominations are doing; and, to my knowledge, *no* other church or denomination in the United States is making an effort to help its members and friends learn how to utilize spiritual principles to make decisions about the major issues facing us as individuals and as a country. So CCM appears to be on the cutting edge *nationally* in offering this opportunity—proof that sometimes small groups do extremely important things!

Our first session will take place this month on Sunday, July 23rd. The presentation and discussion will be on an issue that simply won’t go away: Big government—or small? Feel free to bring with you any of your spiritually sensitive friends who would like to live more responsibly in the world today.

Even *before* we gather together again, please know that my love and appreciation for you grow deeper with each passing day.

Fondly, your pastor and friend,
John

IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM

July, 2017

A Note to Our Visitors: We usually gather together on the second and fourth Sunday of each month. Any temporary change in that practice will be announced in a worship service, on our website, and in our monthly newsletter.

Sunday, July 9 (2nd Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. WORSHIP

During the past few months, numbers of people have expressed dismay over what they see as the deplorable state of our nation and the world at large. Several individuals have indicated that our country seems to be in deep trouble, and, in too many ways, is in disarray. Some have questioned how God could allow both America *and* the planet to be in such lamentable shape—mentioning mounting racial tensions, foreign interference in U.S. elections, terrorist attacks, the growing drug abuse problem, cybercrime, lack of trust in government, the media and many of our leaders, the tendency of too many of our representatives to “play fast and loose” with the truth, and the hostility and incivility of so many citizens to one another, compounded by dangerous actions and conflicts abroad that easily could result in a nuclear catastrophe—perhaps World War III, which some believe could be the virtual end of the earth as we know it. A number of people have asked, “Is God AWOL?” Our pastor will attempt to respond to those expressions of concern in the message for today: “LOOK AT

OUR WORLD: IS GOD ON VACATION?" Since the picture a number of people are painting is quite dismal, let's look for some hint of positivity. If there is hope for the future of our country and our conflict-ridden world, what *is* it and how might we embrace it? The answer just may be hidden in plain sight!

We'll have our usual informal discussion of the sermon following worship. (Out by about 12 noon)

Sunday, July 23 (4th Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. EDUCATION

Hooray! Today we begin an adventure which, to our knowledge, no other church *anywhere* is offering. What an opportunity! As announced, we will be able to delve deeply into the possibility of utilizing often ignored spiritual values and wisdom to transform our thinking and make wiser decisions about issues that, both directly and indirectly affect each of us. We plan to move *beyond* partisan politics and unproductive divisiveness and allow *sacred* values to raise our consciousness to a more *lofty* level. In the process, we hope also to heighten our awareness of how relevant and productive a truly *vital* faith can be! (Out between 11:30 a.m. and 12 noon)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

LOOKING BACK APPROPRIATELY

In a previous Enlightenment Gathering, our second in a series on Easter-themed topics, we reserved some time for our members and friends to share any experience(s) of apparitions (visions of persons no longer living) consistent with those reported in the New Testament and in the literature of virtually every culture world-wide. Our pastor shared two experiences in which his own mother briefly appeared to him after her death. During our discussion, Bill Austin, who perhaps had doubts about the possibility of life beyond this life, raised an excellent question. He asked if someone's

thinking strongly about a deceased person could cause a response in the brain that enables the individual still alive to have a visual experience of a deceased loved one.

Our pastor responded that perhaps Bill's idea *could* be a possible explanation of the mystery, and, in a spirit of openness, all tenable theories need to be considered. However, John added that, on the two occasions on which his mother appeared to him, he had not been thinking about her at all; so he believes it might be possible for a deceased person, under certain circumstances, to impinge visually upon the consciousness of a living individual in order to enable his or her recognition of what actually is a *spiritual* presence. (After all, presumably the deceased person no longer has a *physical* body!)

At CCM, we value people like Bill Austin who have an inquiring mind and dare to ask, really good questions. In fact, the *freedom* to do so is an important part of who we are in the Community Church! Indeed, our pastor always has done so himself and continues to do so today. Carl Sagan has reminded us that "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence." That is important because facile gullibility is hardly an acceptable way to honor God, and it is blatantly inconsistent with the spiritual injunction to love God with all your *mind*! Moreover, the New Testament helpfully reminds us to "test *everything*, and hold fast to that which is true." So, that always has been a hallmark of our life together in the CCM fellowship.

Consequently, in Bill Austin's honor as a person who is not afraid to ask tough questions that may challenge accepted viewpoints, our pastor decided to use our *next* enlightenment gathering to present some of the abundant scientific research concerning near death experiences, apparitions, out-of-body experiences and the possibility of life beyond this life. The work of many outstanding medical doctors and other scientific researchers at major universities has enabled them to provide us with evidence that seems to point strongly to the possibility of the continuation of life after what we *call* death; yet they consider one's passing *not* to be death at all but merely a transition from one dimension of reality to another.

Since much of the legitimate scientific literature on the aforementioned issue is filled with highly technical jargon that would not be accessible to persons

who have no extensive medical/scientific training, John recommended to the group two excellent little books that were written especially *for* lay people—persons *not* trained in a scientific specialty. Those books present simple, easily understandable examples of available evidence.

Although, unfortunately, Bill Austin was not available on that day to take advantage of the session planned as a tribute to his wonderfully inquiring mind, our hat is off to him for his openness and willingness to ask truly important questions that enable all of us to do a better job of separating truth from error. Thank you, Bill; and may your tribe increase!

YES, WE DO HAVE JULY BIRTHDAYS!

If it isn't too warm in famously hot Columbia this July, several CCMers will be celebrating their natal day: Frankie Stroker (7/2), Donald Sayles (7/4), Sue Dillon (7/19) and Andy Marvin (7/22). Cheers and best wishes to each of you!

*PLEASE SUPPORT IN PRAYER AND GRATITUDE
THE FOLLOWING WONDERFUL PEOPLE.*

Some of these individuals are experiencing challenges, others are celebrating positive occurrences, and others are having a combination of both. Let us share life with them as we lift them up to God in prayer.

Anita Baker
Dr. Saba Damien
Margaret Davis

Dr. Carl Evans
Dr. Norman Masters
Dr. Deborah Rosen

The Rev. Dale & Norma Sessions
Marian & Jim Shapiro
Our pastor, Dr. John Whatley

REMEMBER:

FOR A SPIRITUALITY THAT IS *DEEPER*,
YOU NEED A FELLOWSHIP THAT CAN *TAKE YOU*
DEEPER.

CCM

IS HERE FOR YOU!

*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!