

## COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THEMIDLANDS

Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically Progressive

### Pastor's Paragraphs

#### **"A REASON FOR THANKSGIVING"**

Recently, I was fascinated by a Sixty Minutes program on TV. It featured an individual with a not-to-admirable past who had robbed five banks and spent eleven years in prison for his crimes. Of course, there was nothing amazing about that. But the mind-blowing aspect of the man's story is that he is now a distinguished professor of law at Georgetown University and is considered one of the most outstanding legal scholars in the country. When an interviewer asked what enabled him to experience such a remarkable transformation, he said, "It was the people who went out of their way to provide grace to me that made all the difference."

I thought to myself, what a lesson that is for all of us. That criminal and former convicted prisoner's life was changed by persons who went out of their way to make a difference, people who saw a need and made an effort to meet it. And, now, the one whom they helped is going out of his way to help countless numbers of students to make a positive difference in the lives of others. That transformed individual was not just grateful for the grace he had experienced, his gratitude prompted him actually to GIVE thanks, to do something positive to pass on the gift he had received.

That powerful Sixty Minutes program enabled me to think of the numerous people who have helped me on my journey-individuals without whose taking advantage of the opportunity to make difference by lovingly "reaching out" has not just helped me to survive but to make my own small contributions to others along the way. And, frankly, those opportunities, not just to be grateful, but to GIVE thanks in tangible ways have been my greatest joy.

My experience is that there are numerous people who make that kind of difference every day, people for whom we can all give thanks and so many of them offer their acts of grace with no thought of reward. Simply to see a need and to meet it is their reward!

A few days ago, I was on my way to a luncheon appointment at Compton's in West Columbia, a small, no frills eatery whose claim to fame is homemade food at a ridiculously low cost. I was crossing the Gervais Bridge, driving toward West Columbia, when I felt my car's giving out of gas. The gas gage on my automobile is broken, so it's a miracle that giving out of gas in heavy traffic hasn't happened to me before; but this time, the inevitable did happen.

I was hoping that my vehicle wouldn't stall in the middle of the bridge, thereby creating a terrible traffic jam during the very congested lunchtime hour. As luck would have it, my car just did make it across the bridge but "died" at the traffic-laden intersection where the bridge ends and Sunset Boulevard (Hwy 378) connects with Meeting Street; so I was in the worst possible location, the place where three of the busiest streets in the area converge!

Then, immediately, a nice-looking black teenager appeared, seemingly out of nowhere. He rapped on my window and said, "Sir, would you like for me to push your car off the street to the area in front of Al's Upstairs Italian Restaurant?" He was not a burly guy, so I knew he wouldn't have the strength to

move my heavy car up the incline; but he said, "I'd really like to try, if it's okay with you," so he did. No matter how much he strained, the car didn't budge. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, a Caucasian young man ran across the street and joined the effort. The car moved a few inches, but no further.

At that point, a vigilant trucker parked his vehicle and, with lightning-like speed, came to add his able assistance. The three of them were indeed able to move my car out of the intersection but were unable to get it from the street to the nearest parking area in front of Al's Upstairs. The incline was posing a problem. But, at that very moment, another individual suddenly appeared and helped to complete the mission.

By the time I got out of my car to thank my helpers, those caring individuals, obviously not interested in reward, had disappeared. I had hoped to give them some small financial recompense for their help, but, of course, their having vanished so quickly made that impossible. So, I got back in my car and called AAA. The recorded message explained that "due to a high volume of people who need assistance, we cannot take your call at this time." My hearing those words brought back memories of a time several years ago when my engine literally "blew up," as a mechanic later described it, and I was left in an extremely dangerous location by the roadside for over five hours. Oh no, I thought, not again! My day was filled with appointments, and people were depending on me. ·

Just as my heart sank, another individual suddenly appeared, "Can I help you," he asked: When I explained that I was out of gas, he said, "Believe it or not, that has happened several times before in this very spot. I'd be glad to help you." Before I knew it, he jumped into his car and sped away. A few minutes later, he returned with a container of gas, jumped out of his vehicle and said, "I'm glad I was here. I'm the owner of Al's Upstairs and just happened to be here at the right time." I took out my wallet to reimburse him for the cost of the gas, but he refused. His last words: "I'm just thankful I was here to make a difference when you needed me."

All five of those "good Samaritans" had something precious in common. As was the case with the wonderful people, unknown to me, who helped the criminal that became a Georgetown University professor and noted legal scholar, each one of the dear individuals who came to my rescue saw a need and attempted to meet it. It is for people such as they for whom I particularly am thankful during this special season.

Jesus once told a parable about sheep and goats that symbolized human beings. The sheep were acceptable to God, but the goats were not. Why were the sheep acceptable? One reason only: The sheep, but not the goats, were aware of the needs of others and tried to meet them. I, as well as the professor to whom I referred earlier, have benefited repeatedly as a result of the difference made by caring "sheep," and I'm profoundly thankful. May the tribe of those carers increase, and may their difference-making efforts include you and me.

With abiding love and deep gratitude for each of you during this Thanksgiving season, I remain Warmly,  
your pastor and friend, John

## IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM

**November, 2017**

### **PLEASE NOTE THE CHANGE!**

**Although, in most months. we gather on  
the 2nd and 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday, IN NOVEMBER AND  
DECEMBER, WE WILL GATHER ON THE  
2nd and 3<sup>rd</sup> SUNDAY**

### **Sunday, November 12** (2nd Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. ENLIGHTENMENT: YOU CAN ASK THE MINISTER!

Former members of CCM who have moved to other states tell us that they especially miss the opportunities we offer to engage in dialog with our pastor. These informal sessions give our members and friends a chance to ask questions about how to apply vital spiritual principles to everyday situations and relationships. Also, if you've ever wondered about a religious teaching that seems to make no sense to you, questions about issues such as that also are more than welcome. There are times when you may not have a question of your own, but might be interested in one raised by someone else.

We had a YOU CAN ASK THE MINISTER SESSION several months ago, after which Dr. Norman Masters remarked that the occasion was one of the best experiences he has encountered in the decade of his membership here. There are times when our discussion seemed not to be the most memorable we've had, but there frequently are others when the Spirit of God seems to move among and within us with incredible power. No one knows when that will happen, but who would want to take a chance on missing the latter opportunity? Today, you won't have to!

We'll look forward to seeing you.

(Out between 11:30 a.m. and 12 noon, depending upon the extent of group involvement)

### **Sunday, November 19** (3rd Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. ANNUAL THANKSGIVING WORSHIP SERVICE

After your having heard approximately 20 Thanksgiving sermons from our pastor, he tells us that "relief is on the way!" This Thanksgiving we will have the high privilege of hearing an extremely capable young minister, Dr. Lewis Bozard. In addition to his bachelor's level work, he not only holds a Master of Divinity degree and a doctorate in counseling, he also is a marvelously insightful person who has something to say and says it well.

Dr. Bozard has a counseling practice here in Columbia and, on various occasions, is a guest proclaimer in area churches. We look forward eagerly to his ministry among us.

Our usual period for informal discussion of the message will follow worship. (Out by about 12 noon or before)

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### THANK YOU, CCM!

Thank you to all of the wonderful CCMers who contributed to the meaningful, riveting discussion at our last Enlightenment gathering on the subject, "Gun Control: Yes or No." In response to the tragic event that occurred recently in Las Vegas, our pastor presented examples of biblical spiritual values related to violence, self-defense and other related issues such as how to deal more effectively with difficult people. He also presented interesting new medical research on how following certain teachings of Jesus can lessen the possibility of developing heart disease and cancer. But the "stars of the show" were all of you who made our time together come alive. So, thank you, CCM. You 're the greatest!

After a pause during the Thanksgiving/Christmas season, our new series on applying spiritual values to current secular issues will resume in January, 2018.

## PLANNING FOR CHRISTMAS

If you haven't yet started preparing for Christmas, why not begin now? A great way to begin is to plan now to include your spiritual family in your agenda! We're gathering for two special occasions in December; so please put them on your calendar now.

### **Sunday, December 10** (2nd Sunday of the Month)

11:00 a.m. CCM FELLOWSHIP BRUNCH

We'll gather at Arabesque (2930 Devine Street, Columbia) for a joyful, intimate opportunity to share the Christmas season together. Since we need to make reservations with the restaurant, please sign the Reservation Sheet at the CCM Welcome Table on Sunday, November 12th or Sunday, November 19th; or, if you wish, you can call our pastor at (803) 331-9999 to make your reservation at any time during the month of November. Extended family and friends are welcome to join us; so plan now. Let's celebrate the Christmas season together!

### **Sunday, December 17** (3rd Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. ANNUAL CHRISTMAS WORSHIP AND CANDLE LIGHTING CEREMONY

Since several of our members and friends plan to be out of town to celebrate Christmas with family on Sunday, December 24th (Christmas Eve), we're having our annual Christmas Service a week early to make it possible for those valuable people to join us.

We're planning a very special worship service to celebrate this holy season. Our pastor will be sharing a message with an intriguing title: "DISCOVERING THE DEEPER MEANING OF CHRISTMAS." Did you know that Christmas has a deeper meaning, and do you know what it is? Even if you think you know, you probably don't, since our pastor has never heard this frequently overlooked theme talked about in a Christmas service. As we celebrate this wonderful season at CCM, we'll have an opportunity to change that! Join us for this significant final service of 2017.

(Traditionally, we do not have our discussion of the sermon following worship during the Christmas season. That opportunity will be resumed in the new year.)

## NOTICE: PASTOR AWAY

Please note that our pastor will be taking a drive into the mountains of North Carolina to see the changing leaves-always a breathtaking experience. He will leave on Wednesday, November 15th and return on Sunday, November 20th. However, he will keep his cell phone on and wants you to feel free to call him if you have any need. So do not hesitate to get in touch if you have a concern with which he might be able to be of help. His confidential number is (803) 331-9999

## NOVEMBER BIRTHDAYS

We have three known natal celebrations this month. Our outstanding audio technologist and digital expert, Mark Fox, will celebrate his birthday on 11/9. Not to be outdone, our incredibly special soloist, Evelyn Clary, will "whoop it up" on 11/13. Finally, our resident philosophical genius, Betty Jo Sullivan, will commemorate her birthday by taking a trip to the mountains, possibly early in November, although the natal day is actually on 11/28. Let us remember each of the aforementioned wonderful people and give thanks for their presence among us.

## A FINAL REMINDER

Although every person in our fine fellowship no doubt has an elephantine, never-forget-anything memory, please indulge us for reminding each of us once more of the change of schedule during November and December. We'll be gathering, both months, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays instead of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>. Thanks for remembering. Your CCM friends don't want to have to miss you if you inadvertently appear on the wrong date!

WE NEED TO HA VE

CONVERSATIONS

THAT

MATTER.

CCM is here for you!

WHEREVER YOU ARE, THE DIFFERENCE

## WHEREEVER 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 Websites:

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

or

CommunityChurchbfffheMidlands.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 change 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!