

COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE MIDLANDS

Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically Progressive

Pastor's Paragraphs

MAKING THE WORLD SAFE FOR DIFFERENCES

— OR —

MARK FOX SCORES!

As most of you know, a few months ago, our church began to do something that few (if any) churches do. We began a new series dealing with important issues that we as individuals and as a nation are facing; but instead of limiting our discussion only to our *personal* opinions, we've evaluated each topic with the guidance of timeless *spiritual* principles. Then, based upon the spiritual values that we reviewed, I shared my own viewpoint and invited others to share theirs.

Toward the end of one of our sessions that dealt with the proliferation of guns and the prevalence of violence in our country, Mark Fox said, in response to my presentation, "I couldn't disagree with you more."

Because some of you might not have been able to be present on that occasion, I'll summarize my personal viewpoint, so you'll know to what Mark was referring. After a great deal of thought, I have come to the conclusion that the part of our country's Constitution that refers to guns is partially out of date. Why? It requires that guns be available for "a well-regulated *militia*"—a group of volunteer citizens who, on a moment's notice, could defend our newly organized country if it were attacked by an outside enemy. Of course, the need to be able to defend our country against an outside enemy *always* will be a valid concern, and our country *does* take that seriously.

So, what is out of date? Today, militias are not needed, so we no longer have them—for a very good reason. We have something much better and

immensely more effective: a well-regulated army, navy, air force, marines, as well as numerous reserve units, and equally numerous armories, all of which are stocked with a huge array of weapons. Therefore, the part of the 2nd Amendment regarding guns (actually out dated muskets) for a non-existent and unneeded militia is anachronistic. The 2nd Amendment refers to a period of history that no longer exists; consequently, it cannot *legitimately* be used to support positions regarding the ownership and use of weapons in the 21st century without “stretching” it to mean something that the Constitution originally did not intend.

Despite my aforementioned conclusion, however, (1) I am not in favor of taking guns away from law-abiding citizens as some persons have advocated; but (2) I am in favor of enforcing the laws already “on the books” regarding the sale and use of guns for hunting and self-defense. Also, (3) I believe that background checks on buyers and accurate registration of all sales (including gun shows) should be instituted. Finally, (4) I am in favor of limiting automatic and semi-automatic weapons designed to kill large numbers of people in seconds for use by the military—the purpose for which they originally were made.

Mark’s position, if I remember it correctly, was that we should not have restrictions on guns because we might need them to defend ourselves from our own government—a potential totalitarian state.

Depending upon one’s point of view and perception of threat, I think *either* of the two positions could be legitimately defended. However, any positives or negatives in my position, or in my friend Mark’s, are not what I want to highlight here. What is *important* for all of us is that every time we get together, we have a golden opportunity to do something that none of us probably would do individually. As stated earlier, we examine, from a *spiritual* perspective, a number of issues that are important to us so, if we choose, we can utilize any resulting insights in our own decision making.

At CCM we also welcome the expression of *multiple* points of view. I believe that God can speak to us through faithful pastors who serve as spiritual coaches, but that God can and does speak through thoughtful lay people, as well. Moreover, I believe that in a loving community—one that

practices love instead of just *talking* about it—all of us can learn from *one another*. But that involves listening to different perspectives, some of which we may not always agree with, and sharing our *own* insights in the hope that they might be of potential value to others. So, my heart *sang* when Mark said, “I couldn’t disagree with you more.”

Of course, Mark could not have gotten away with his comment in just *any* church and still be accepted by the people there; but, at CCM, he not only was *accepted*, he also, as always, was and is deeply *appreciated*. The reason, as most of us are aware, is that we have developed a culture here in which we not only allow but actually encourage people to love God with their minds *by* thinking for *themselves*. Contrast *that* approach with something that we’re told happened to Jesus. One day, in his own house of worship, Jesus shared his *personal* interpretation of a scriptural passage—one that was different from that of the majority. Instead of the positive response that Mark received from me and our group, people chased Jesus out of their house of worship and even tried to kill him. Well, so much for *that* not-so-loving community. They no doubt *talked* about love, and even the importance of loving God with one’s mind, but they simply did not practice it when confronted with a different viewpoint—one with which the majority disagreed.

Today, of course, people in most churches certainly wouldn’t try to kill someone with whom they disagreed. Instead, the person with a viewpoint different than that of the majority likely would be rejected, berated, shunned, given “the silent treatment,” labeled as unorthodox or a heretic and perhaps banned from the fellowship. Many people still seem not to have realized that truth is not determined by majority opinion! That’s why we need people like Mark to risk speaking up to help the rest of us hear another point of view and to reevaluate our own perspective.

Of course, the *way* in which one speaks up is important. In the New Testament, there is a spiritual principle that I profoundly value. It encourages us to “speak the truth in love.” Since all of us human beings are fallible, we know that *our* truth may not always be *the* truth. *Our* perspective does not necessarily reflect *God’s* perspective. But if we share our viewpoint in a spirit of love and caring, even any *misguided* insights will have been

touched by the Sacred. That realization gives me hope every time I step into the pulpit!

Moreover, when we follow the spiritual injunction to speak our truth in *love* and to *listen* to someone lovingly, we shall have done our part as a speaker or a listener to fulfill one of CCM's cardinal objectives: to help make the world safe for differences!

So, thank you, Mark, for courageously and lovingly sharing your perspective with us. And thank you, dear fellow CCMers, for *listening* lovingly to Mark, to me, and to one another. As I stated earlier, to experience that kind of openness and welcoming love is a spiritual reality that one cannot find just anywhere! No wonder I am so grateful for you and for the privilege of being a part of this remarkable fellowship.

Warmly, your pastor and friend,
John

P.S.:

It seemed appropriate to me to write the above article for this *particular* newsletter. Probably because Valentine's Day comes at this time each year, February often is referred to as "love month." At CCM, though, our hope is to try to make *every* month love month; and your vital participation helps to make that possible.

IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM

February, 2018

PLEASE NOTE: This month, our fellowship
will gather on the 2nd and 4th Sunday.

Sunday, February 4 (2nd Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. WORSHIP SERVICE

As indicated earlier, February sometimes is referred to as “love month.” But *is* it? Do most people feel more loved in one particular month than another? And, oh yes, what does it *mean* to love and be loved? Since love was central in the teachings of Jesus, our pastor will help us today to think more deeply about love than usual. His message is entitled “LOVE: ASPIRATION OR REALITY?”

Following worship, as is our custom, we’ll have an opportunity to ask questions and discuss issues related to love and loving in an informal period of sharing. (Out by about 12 noon)

Sunday, February 25 (4th Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. ENLIGHTENMENT: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

In our session last month, we watched a riveting DVD on immigration featuring footage taken by actual immigrants fleeing Syria and other localities in an attempt to save their lives. But there are some very real issues related to immigration, *both* pro and con, that need to be taken seriously. Most people probably feel strongly about the matter, one way or another. However the majority of viewpoints one hears are *not* based upon *spiritual* values!

Therefore, in the spirit of our pastor's article in this newsletter, *our* goal will be to focus especially on whatever biblical and spiritual wisdom is available to give us clearer vision. Our hope is that, when we turn to leave, each of us will have gained new insights that will be helpful to us in our own decision making. (Out by about 11:30 a.m.)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RETROSPECTIVE: FOOD AND FELLOWSHIP

Immediately following our New Year's worship service and discussion, we experienced a nice surprise. Mary Ann Clary extended an invitation to all of us who were still there (a couple of people already had left) to come to her home for a festive lunch. She and two other members of her family (Evelyn and Elizabeth) had prepared quite a number of dishes for us, and we were able to serve ourselves buffet-style. Our communal gathering was a lovely occasion and a delightful opportunity to experience food and fellowship together in a relaxed, informal setting. Mary Ann mentioned that she would like to provide similar occasions for us in the future. Thank you, Mary Ann, Evelyn and Elizabeth for such a superlative idea and for your deeply appreciated hospitality.

If others of you would like to host such an event, please talk with our pastor about a possible date. We'll be happy to announce it in our newsletter.

UNAVAILABLE SERMON CDs

Since our inception as a progressive fellowship in the Midlands, we have been pleased to offer our sermons to numerous shut-ins, hospitalized persons, neighbors, family members and others who tell us they have benefited from them. However, since the recorders we used each Sunday were stolen and a replacement we utilized in our last worship service malfunctioned, we have been unable to make our Christmas and New Year's sermons available. Since we have received a high number of requests for those particular messages, we deeply regret that we cannot provide them. We hope to have new recording devices in place for our worship service in February and look forward to having CDs of all messages available when you need or want them.

BIRTHDAY GREETINGS

Let us remember to wish our fellow CCMers well on their natal day. Known birthday celebrants in February are:

**Norma Joy Sessions (2/4),
John Whatley (2/7), and
Tim Werts (2/26).**

OFFERING THE GIFT OF FOOD

Most of you are aware that, on Christmas Day, our fellowship provided a delicious, nutritional meal for 50 hungry people. In addition, during 2017, CCM provided another 500 meals for struggling families. We hope to do at least that in 2018. We thank God for the privilege of being able to have a small part in making a difference in the lives of so many persons less fortunate than we.

CCM:

BREATH TAKING RELEVANCE FOR LIVING IN TODAY'S WORLD

***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 Websites:

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!