

# ***COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE MIDLANDS***

***Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically Progressive***

## ***Pastor's Paragraphs***

### **AN EPIDEMIC OF LONELINESS?**

It seems counterproductive to think that, in this age of social media and constant texting, loneliness might be a problem. But, ironically, it appears that social media and other forms of trivial conversation can even *exacerbate* feelings of loneliness and the absence of meaningful connection. The key words in that last sentence are “*meaningful connection*.” It seems that social chitchat, on a smart phone or even in person, can satisfy an immediate *urge* to connect but does not leave either party with an abiding sense of deep satisfaction.

Psychologists, psychiatrists, and other mental health professionals are reporting that Americans appear now to be experiencing a virtual *epidemic* of loneliness, a situation that is far more serious than most of us probably are aware. According to the latest research, loneliness is not just an uncomfortable *emotional* feeling. The data indicates that loneliness is a significant *health* hazard—equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day, thereby predisposing us to depression, anxiety, heart attacks, strokes, and premature death. It is discouraging to hear from medical professionals that loneliness actually can kill us, but that knowledge can empower us if we utilize it to affect amelioration.

However, researchers are telling us that we need to be aware of another problem. They are calling it “*counterfeit intimacy*”—purely social, “surface” contacts with little or no depth or significant caring fall into this category. But in our currently bifurcated nation, with a seriously divided Congress, and angry, over-against political parties, we often find ourselves “relating” primarily to people with whom the only thing we share is someone or something we’re both *against*, a common enemy!

**Loneliness can touch us all, but it is especially a problem for the elderly, individuals who live alone, persons who have unsatisfactory relationships in a work place, and anyone who lives with someone else in a less than fulfilling marriage or other relationship. That is true, researchers indicate, for an estimated 80% of the population! We can feel insulated, cut off, unloved, or not valued *even* when we are surrounded by people. That especially is true when we don't feel that we can share our deepest feelings or thoughts and still be accepted. Consequently, many people have few, if any, *profoundly meaningful* lasting relationships. It would be an overstatement to call most of the people to whom we relate close friends or intimates. In fact, recent surveys indicate that a lot of us have only a number of "good acquaintances"—contacts, but with little or no deep, heartfelt sense of oneness.**

**The *hopeful* news in all of this is that *the situation can be reversed*. Deeper, *more* meaningful relationships *are* a possibility! Indeed, Jesus indicated that the purpose of his ministry was to help us actualize that potential, to enable us to experience life in *all* of its fullness—in relationship to God, ourselves, and others. But because so many of us seem not to know *how* to do that, I plan to address the issue in our next worship gathering. The message is entitled "LOVE: ASPIRATION—OR REALITY?" I plan to deal with the *not-so-good* news about the current epidemic of loneliness by sharing the *good* news of some potentially helpful *spiritual* wisdom. So, my dear people, welcome to the opportunity to experience a more abundant life. If we are open, it's ours for the taking!**

**With continuing love for each of you,**

**Your pastor and friend,  
John**

# IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM

During most months, we gather on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday.  
Any change will be announced in our newsletter, on  
our website, and in one of our worship services.

**Sunday, March 11** (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the Month)

**10:00 a.m. LENTEN WORSHIP GATHERING**

Since the major theme of Jesus' teaching was about love, and since—let us admit it—we human beings are still novices when it comes to loving in all its *fullness*, there is no more relevant topic with which to observe Lent—our traditional period of thoughtful contemplation just before Easter—then that of truly *fulfilling* love. Moreover, the image of God in us expresses itself as a yearning to love and to *be* loved; and, in the absence of *mutual* love and *reciprocal* caring, our experience of *unfulfilled* love expresses itself as loneliness. An old book, *The Lonely Crowd*, and a significant new one, *The Lonely American: Drifting Apart in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, as well as a number of articles in medical journals, alert us to the need of every person to understand what spiritual wisdom teaches us about *how* to love in more profoundly meaningful ways. With that in mind, our pastor's sermon for today, as announced in his article, will be **LOVE: ASPIRATION—OR REALITY?** Aspiration is a good thing, but the *goal* for all of us is to move from mere aspiration to *appropriation*—actualizing love as an experienced reality; so that will be our theme. Worship will be followed by a valuable opportunity for dialog on the subject with our pastor and with one another. (Out by about 12 noon) **Please note: daylight savings time begins today, so we will *lose* an hour! Please remember to set your**

**clock ahead by 60 minutes before you retire on Saturday night.**

**Sunday, March 25 (4th Sunday of the Month)**

**10:00 a.m. LENTEN ENLIGHTENMENT GATHERING**

**Do we know everything about what *actually* happened during the final days of Jesus' life? For a long time, biblical scholars thought so. But archeologists and historians have discovered evidence that seems to indicate that may not be the case. They have uncovered new evidence that might help us to see the final days of Jesus in an entirely new light. Consequently, biblical scholars have come up with a totally different, alternative understanding of what may have transpired—a viewpoint of which very few Christians are aware and one that most will never have an opportunity to know.**

**However, this new viewpoint has been set forth by a number of outstanding theologians in a film that we will show in our enlightenment session today. This is not a sweet, feel-good devotional or a warm, fuzzy “you’re gonna love it” sermon. Rather, it is a qualitative expression of biblical scholarship for people who are serious about trying to understand what may or may not have happened that led ultimately to the crucifixion of Jesus. Hint: Think, unknown until now, *politics!***

**At the end of the film, our pastor will tell us whether he “buys” this new theory about what actually happened, as well as the significance for our lives of nefarious new information that startled biblical archeologists and historians. (Out by about 12:15 p.m.)**

# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## *PLAYING A JOKE ON GOD?*

There's something hilarious that you may not know. This year, Easter Sunday falls on *April Fool's Day*. *OOPS!* What a perfect time for every atheist worth his or her salt to turn the occasion into an opportunity to joke about the most basic meaning of Easter. I can hear them now. "The possibility of life *beyond* this life is appropriate only as April Fools trickery. We atheists win. The joke is on God." If any of those folks do laugh at the incongruity of Easter Sunday's falling on April Fool's Day, many of *us* will be laughing *with* them!

But, of course, atheists are not the only ones who have questions about the reality of "more beyond." Many church people have wondered, though usually not out loud: Can we really *know*? Actually, *that is a legitimate question!* After all, extraordinary claims demand extraordinary evidence, and the possibility of life beyond life *is* an extraordinary claim. So, *is* there any evidence? With an issue such as *that* to ponder during our pastor's Easter sermon this year, it is doubtful that you'll be tempted to take a nap. He has promised to address the aforementioned issue precisely because it *is* legitimate.

However, as you make your plans to be present for our special Easter service on April 1, please remember that we'll be meeting on the *FIRST* Sunday of the month in April *instead* of on the second Sunday. We wanted to remind you well in advance, because if you *don't* remember that crucial tidbit of information and show up on the *wrong* day, the *biggest* joke won't be on *God*. It'll be on—well, you know. So we'll see you on April *FIRST!*

## *NEW SERIES CONTINUES*

**When Jesus asked his followers to “let their light shine” in the world, he, of course, was referring to our regularly utilizing spiritual values in our relationships, decision-making and actions.**

**We and our nation are dealing with a wide variety of issues that currently are dividing our country instead of bringing us together. One reason for that is that we tend to base our opinions and decisions on what we hear from family members, friends, our particular political party, place of worship, radio, TV, or social media. It appears that, no matter how spiritually sensitive we think we are, few of us make decisions or vote based on spiritual values. In fact, many serious church members probably have a difficult time articulating the *meaning* of “spiritual values.”**

**On several occasions through the years, our pastor has been told by a number of caring church members that they simply don’t know *how* to apply spiritual values to issues in their own life or in the life of the nation; and the reason is that, unfortunately, *churches* have dropped the ball in helping their members and friends to actualize their potential *to* “let their light shine,” *to* make a positive difference in their own lives and in the world. To our knowledge, only one church in the entire state of South Carolina *is* doing that. CCM!**

**Thus far, we have taken an important issue and, on one Sunday each month, we’ve sought to relate it to timeless spiritual principles—a higher, more vital level (thank goodness) than that of partisan politics. Thus far, we have discussed “Dealing with Differences and Disagreements,” “Big Government or Small?” “Guns, Guts and God,” and Health Care: Can We Afford It?” In our last session on February 25<sup>th</sup>, we took an in-depth look at the issue of “Immigration.” Our pastor did extensive research into this area and shared with us a great deal of information—facts, figures, and situations—of which most people are unaware. Then we looked at several frequently ignored spiritual principles that have the potential to bring us all together to and our current polarization and work toward a meaningful solution.**

**One thing we have all learned from our sessions thus far is that just going to a worship service will not, by itself, be a comprehensively *transformative* experience—not for us and not for our world. It is only when we care enough and are committed consistently to gather regularly to engage important issues in our lives, our relationships, our world, with timeless spiritual values that we will have an opportunity to discover the light-potential within ourselves that is necessary to revitalize ourselves and our world. Our hat is off to each of you who is making this unique opportunity at CCM a priority in your schedule. The new series will resume after the Easter holidays.**

## ***WHAT WE DO AT CCM MATTERS***

**It's not unusual for our members and friends to tell us that a worship experience, an educational opportunity, a discussion, Q and A session, the progressive nature of our fellowship, or some other facet of our ministry is meaningful. And we have received lovely notes, checks, telephone calls and other expressions of appreciation from persons, locally and from other states, thanking us for CDs of our sermons. But recently, we experienced a "famous first." We received a lovely note and a check from a non-member in Chapin who wanted to thank us for *the content of our newsletters*, and we wanted to share it with you.**

*Thank you so much for keeping me on your newsletter mailing list. You can't imagine how each one inspires me, and I am glad to know what great inspiration you are providing for the community.*

*I was sorry to hear that someone relieved us of the recording equipment, and I hope you are able to replace it to your satisfaction.*

*I am enclosing a donation, with love, to use for any needs. Again, thank you.*

*My love and appreciation to all of you.*

*Judy Richey*

**Thank you, Judy, for making us aware that our ministry has value for you. You're taking the time to communicate with us and providing a donation means more than you know. (If you haven't already done so, you might want to check out the wide variety of sermons that are now available on our website, [listed on the last page of this newsletter].)**



**ARE YOU ACTUALIZING  
YOUR SPIRITUAL  
POTENTIAL?  
  
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 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 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> 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!***