

COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE MIDLANDS

Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically Progressive

Pastor's Paragraphs

PARENTAL SPIRITUALITY?

After one of our most recent CCM gatherings, I exited the building to find a scene that reminded me of free admission day at the State Fair. Almost every space in multiple parking lots was taken. Then I realized that the vehicles were owned by parents who had brought their child or children either to play ball or to watch the game. It was a lovely Sunday morning, the time that persons in just about every church in the city had gathered to pursue their spiritual journey.

As I drove away, I couldn't help pondering the powerful message all of those parents were giving to their children: Your involvement in sports is far more important than your spiritual welfare. Surely it would have been possible for spiritually sensitive parents to have said to the planners of the game: Listen. We are grateful that you're providing this activity for our children, and we want them to take advantage of it; but does it *have* to be held between 10 a.m. and 12 noon on a Sunday morning? What about a Sunday afternoon, or a Saturday morning or afternoon when all the children are out of school? Why are the games scheduled only *during* the two hours traditionally reserved for *spiritual* growth and development? But apparently such a thoughtful intervention didn't occur.

Recently, I read an article indicating that children's spiritual development is in danger of becoming non-existent because, increasingly, it is now taking a back seat to just about every other competing activity. The reason is obvious, the writers observed. There is a palpable lack of *parental* spirituality that is seriously impacting contemporary children. It seems that an increasing number of parents no longer value an area of development that Jesus said is *most* important.

It appears that Jesus took spiritual sensitivity on the part of parents and other adults with radical seriousness. In fact, there is a warning in *all three* of the synoptic gospels regarding adult influence on anything that hinders children's spiritual development. Jesus is quoted as having said that it would be better for a parent to have a millstone hung around his or her neck and be hurled into the sea than to lead a child astray by doing anything that would compromise that one's spiritual development. So, he utilized startling hyperbole to emphasize the fact that attention to the *spiritual* journey of children is *that important!*

It is possible that Jesus' concern for the crucial significance of *parental* spirituality for the development of children was influenced by a keen awareness of the momentous influence that his own parents contributed to *his* remarkable spiritual maturity. That certainly was the case in the development of *my* spiritual identity. From the time I was born until the day I left home, my parents nurtured me into a deep spiritual consciousness by both word and example. That was supplemented

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through our presence in church each week, broadened by my own study, and enhanced by a gradually heightened awareness that not only added *to* my earlier influences but actually moved me *beyond* some of them. However, the *foundation* on which my growth process was built was the constant, abiding influence of *parental* spirituality. Without that, this article would never have been written. Without that, CCM would not exist. I owe *so much* to the spiritual sensitivity of my two devoted parents who seemed to intuit that which would be *most* helpful to me in my own development. For them, the ingredient of spirituality was crucial.

So, I was fortunate. But what about all the children in the 7 Oaks ball park who seem *not* to be so fortunate? A great deal of research indicates that it is extremely difficult for a child, when he or she grows into adolescence and adulthood, to overcome the powerful impact of parents who do not make spiritual development a constant priority in their own lives as *well* as those of their children. Studies indicate that it is nearly impossible to find a deeply spiritually-oriented adult whose *parents* lacked spiritual sensitivity. So, the evidence indicates this: If the *parents* are devoid of that vital quality, their children will be too—and so will their grandchildren and even their great-grandchildren! Research validates the alarming reminder of scripture that if parents do not take the spiritual welfare of their children seriously, the consequences of that serious omission will be replicated in the 3rd and 4th generations of their progeny.

The absence of meaningfully spirituality in the life of children, adolescents, and adults occasioned by a parental lack of spiritual sensitivity does not mean that they will not have many sterling qualities—including devotion to the parent(s). What it *does* mean is that their lives will be devoid of the essential spiritual dynamic that could enable them to experience life in *all its* fullness. They will have no transformative Meaning (with a capital M) to give meaning to all of life's lesser meanings. If, as spiritual wisdom asserts, we are made in the *image* of God, we cannot experience life *most* fully if we are out of touch with who we are at our *core*. Therefore, unless a miracle happens (and occasionally one does—such as having a spiritually-oriented friend, spouse or partner), their God-given potential to experience the holy in a way that has the power to transform their quality of life and all of their relationships will remain untapped, ignored, unembraced. The overflow of children filling ball parks on Sunday mornings points to the fact that the lives of numerous innocent children could suffer unnecessarily, without their even knowing why.

But, hooray! All is not lost! The *good* news is that regardless of what has or has not happened in the *past*, parents *still* can contribute positively to the lives of their children, even after they become adults. I may have mentioned this to you before, but there was a lovely lady in one of my former churches who was a member, but she was an off-and-on attender who reared 5 children with no concern for their spiritual development. Otherwise, she seemed to be a very caring mother. It's just that neither her spiritual welfare *nor* that of her children was even close to being a priority. The injunction of Jesus to put it *first* was ignored.

Although four of the lady's children never began a spiritual journey, one of the five, after a nasty divorce, met and married a spiritually-oriented individual (that rare miracle that sometimes *does* happen!) and began a spiritual growth process that changed her life. Her mother noticed how much her daughter was maturing, how self-aware and sensitive to the feelings of others she had become and felt sad that *she* (the mother) had not modeled the importance of a maturing spiritual

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consciousness for her daughter or any of her other four children. Thankfully, she didn't "beat herself up" over her omissions in the past. Instead, she did something much more positive. Since she was now a senior citizen, she decided that she didn't want to *leave* this planet without letting her dear children know what she was now feeling.

The mother gathered her adult children together, told them how deeply she loved them (which they already knew), and that she had tried to give them every advantage she could—except one. She said that she had not withheld that one vital advantage *intentionally*; rather, it was an oversight that she regretted and wanted them to know how overwhelmingly important she now realized spiritual development is. She then told them that she didn't want to leave them permanently without sharing that awareness, and she hoped they would take advantage of the opportunity to explore their own vital spiritual potential.

Next, with profound perceptivity, the mother admitted that she had put other interests ahead of her *own* spiritual development and had paid a price for it in her own marriage. "Indeed," she said, "I can't give you what I myself don't yet have; but, if you're interested and will allow me to do so, I'd like to grow spiritually *with* you. I love it if we could make a commitment to do that together!"

The report I received is that there was not a single dry eye in the room. They all hugged one another, and, with a sense of expectation and excitement, they appeared together at church the next Sunday. A month later, all of the children decided officially to join our fellowship, so they could immerse themselves in a joy-filled journey to discover their own spiritual promise. From that day forward, I don't remember their missing a Sunday or mid-week gathering unless they were ill.

Several years later, just before the mother came to the end of her life, she told me that her much-later-than-she-could-have-wished decision to put the sacred (the Kingdom of God about which Jesus taught) before *all* of her other interests had lessened her stress, improved her health, given her unanticipated deep peace, enabled her actually to feel, for the first time she could remember, a sense of the presence of God, *and* created even greater intimacy between herself and her children—as well as people in general. Moreover, not only her children, but also her adorable grandchildren had become living monuments to the good news that it is never too late to make a positive difference in the life of our children—*IF*, as did that mother, we act as soon as we experience heightened consciousness.

If you are reading this article and you have children you truly love, is there a priceless gift you haven't offered them that, even now, you would like to give? If so, know this: If you decide to do so, it could be the most important thing you will ever share with those who are so dear to you.

With deep appreciation and abiding love,

Your pastor and friend,

John

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P.S.:

Because May is the month in which many churches celebrate the Festival of the Christian Home and Mothers' Day, my article in this newsletter is addressed primarily to *parents*. But I have had the marvelous privilege of seeing children influence spiritually the welfare of their parents as well as their brothers and sisters. And I have witnessed a number of people who are *not* parents whose deeply spiritual orientation has positively impacted friends and, sometimes, even other people's children. The injunction of Jesus to let the image of God (the Light already within us) shine, on *whomever* we encounter, still stands. So, in a sense, it is not just for parents; it has relevance for *all* of us!

IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM

May, 2018

Sunday, May 13 (2nd Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. WORSHIP GATHERING

This Sunday, on the so-called secular calendar, is Mothers' Day; and, on the calendar of many churches, it is the day on which we observe the Festival of the Christian Home: the helpfulness of *spiritual* values in our *families*. In our celebration at CCM, we will focus on our *parents*—not just Mothers only, but fathers, as well.

Our pastor's sermon will help us to reflect on an important issue that seldom is dealt with as appropriately as it deserves. Based on one of the 10 Commandments, he will address an ancient injunction that is frequently mentioned but almost always misunderstood. The title of this thought provoking message is "HONOR OUR PARENTS? OKAY, BUT WHAT DOES THAT *MEAN*?" The word "honor" in the 6th Commandment just may not mean what most of us think. So, please be prepared to be surprised!

On Mothers' Day Sunday, we traditionally do not have our usual discussion of the message following worship. If you are scheduled to go to your parents' house, planning to take them out to lunch, or are having out-of-town family to visit, we hope to maximize the time you have together by adjourning somewhat earlier than usual. We anticipate that worship will be over between 11:00 and 11:15 a.m. So, join us—and bring your parents, your children, and anyone else with whom you want to share important time together.

Sunday, May 27 (4th Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. ENLIGHTENMENT GATHERING

(Definition of Enlightenment: Enlightenment is gaining helpful insight or deeper understanding.)

In our last session, we continued our current series in which we help one another to apply valuable spiritual values to contemporary issues. The topic was "Right to Life or Right to Choose?" We transcended the partisan political divisiveness, so common in our nation, that drives people apart and enables us to solve nothing. Instead, we reflected positively on the issues from three different perspectives: spiritual

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guidance, scientific wisdom, and ethical insight. Our time together was *indeed* enlightening!

Today, we'll be reflecting on another challenging issue that is constantly referred to on social media, radio, TV, and, of course, every major newspaper; and what our nation does (is doing) regarding it will affect us all. The subject often is referred to by the confusing term "globalization." But in everyday English that's more understandable, the issue is, simply this: Should our country emphasize *national interest* or the *common good*? We'll have valuable input from our pastor as well as usual lively discussion from the group. And, oh yes, we'll value *yours*! (Out by about 11:30 a.m.)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

CCM GATHERING DATES

We cherish our members and friends who thoughtfully plan other activities *around* the dates of our gatherings at CCM, and we hope you feel enriched and rewarded for doing so. To assist you in your planning, we thought it might be helpful to let you know in advance the dates of our future gatherings for you to reserve on your calendar; and you'll find them amazing easy to remember!

We anticipate that, during the next six months (May through October), we'll be gathering on the 2nd and 4th Sundays. (An announcement about November and December will be made at a later date.) In the meantime, thank you for your faithfulness in supporting your fellow CCMers and for opening your own life to the Holy by your deeply valued presence.

FELLOWSHIP NEWS

Gloria Stroud is experiencing a major change in her life. Beginning on May 1st, she will be moving to Amara Place, an assisted living residence for seniors on Pollo Road. Gloria hasn't been able to give us her new address yet, but she will be able to do so soon. Her children will be helping her with packing, moving, and the sale of her house. Let us remember Gloria in our prayers as she begins this new chapter in her life.

A BIRTHDAY? YES!

During the month of May, we have only one *known* birthday. Surprise: It's Gloria Stroud's! She was born on May 13th, so she'll be celebrating her birthday *and* her move into new quarters in the same month. We'll be thinking of you with love, Gloria; and we hope you have a memorable time with your family and a veritable host of new friends.

CCM:

KEEPING THE DOOR OPEN FOR THE HOLY

AND

**OFFERING A ROAD MAP FOR REACHING YOUR
UNIQUE POTENTIAL**

***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!