

COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE MIDLANDS

***Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically
Progressive***

Pastor's Paragraphs

"CAN WE MAKE ROOM FOR REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS?"

I trust that all of you who keep up with the news are aware of the chaotic situation that recently occurred in the state of Virginia. As you may recall, Gov. Ralph Northam was attacked by Breitbart News, a well-known ultra-conservative source associated with Steve Bannon that found a photograph in his medical school yearbook of a person in 'black face' standing next to someone else dressed in a Ku Klux Klan robe. That revelation on Northam's yearbook page resulted in a barrage of calls for his immediate resignation.

The situation was complicated by the fact that Northam's next-in-line successor, Lt. Gov. Justin Fairfax, was accused of sexually assaulting two women in 2004. Then it was discovered that Fairfax's potential successor in office, Attorney General Mark Herring, had appeared in blackface when he was a 19-year-old college student who went to a party dressed as a rapper. However, it is only on Gov. Northam that I want to focus in this article.

Upon his hearing about the blackface photograph taken 35 or more years earlier, Gov. Northam's immediate response was to apologize for it. However, upon reflection, he said he thought that the picture in the

yearbook was not of him, but he apologized because, initially, he had confused the blackface picture in the yearbook with an occasion on which he actually did dress in blackface (a spot of brown shoe polish on each cheek) for a dance contest in which he wanted to represent Michael Jackson by doing the latter's famous moon walk. He did so with such considerable expertise that he won the dance contest.

At this point, I am not concerned about whether or not one of the persons in the yearbook picture was Northam. In fact, I have no trouble considering the possibility-even the probability-that one of them could be he. Many people unthinkingly do ridiculous things when they are young, and scientists have found, interestingly, that all parts of the human brain do not become fully mature until age 25 or 26. So who among us has not thought, said or done something earlier in life that he or she would not, years later, want flashed on a screen for the entire world to see. I am not attempting to excuse any behavior depicted in the yearbook photograph IF indeed Northam participated in it. I simply am making the point that it would not be a major concern for me if I discovered that, 35 years or more ago, some young man or woman used poor judgment. Indeed, many of us do that even as supposedly mature adults!

That which does concern me is the instantaneous judgmental response on the part of many of Northam's peers who called for his immediate resignation-prominent, otherwise respectable people including most declared presidential candidates, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, both of Virginia's U.S. senators, and the Congressional Black Caucus, to name a few. In my opinion, their knee-jerk response was unjust-but not because of any racist behavior on the part of Northam, even 35 or more years ago, should be acceptable. That which is unjust is the incredible facility with which virtually all of Northam's detractors ignore completely the

person he has become during the past 35 years and who he is today. It is a kind of tunnel vision that focuses only on the past and refuses to pay attention to a person's subsequent life and influence that is unjust.

The eminent Democrats and Republicans who reacted with such judgmental ferocity and demanded Northam's immediate resignation probably are made up of numerous persons who claim, at least, to be devoted to the spiritual wisdom contained in the Judeo-Christian religion and, especially, the high ethical teachings of Jesus. But in Northam's instance, they appear to be doing so

in word but not in deed,
in profession but not in practice,
in allegiance, but not in action.

As I have reflected upon accounts of the 35 years or so following Northam's student days, I have been impressed by his unwavering dedication to the welfare of persons of different races and his practice of not only working for them but with them! I also have been impressed by the comments of black community leaders and legislators that he has solicited their input and responded by developing programs that can address long-neglected needs in Virginia's black communities.

Apparently, if Northam was racist many years ago, he certainly must have undergone a dramatic change since that time; so much so that he is even an active member of an African American church, beloved by the people in his congregation. Therefore, vitriolic demands for his resignation because of an inordinate emphasis on "ancient history," true or untrue, and the ignoring of his later and present life seem to me to be misplaced and-I'll say it again, unjust. Such a stance 'X-es out' any efforts to take seriously the high value of looking at the possibility of

repentance—a change of mind, heart and behavior that negates, whatever instances of poor judgment or inappropriate action that may have been present at an earlier time.

Each time I recall an incident in the life of Jesus in which a group often were anxious to punish a woman caught in the act of adultery, I always am moved by Jesus' words to those who wanted to kill her: "Let the one of you who has never 'fumbled a ball' cast the first stone at her." What was Jesus highlighting here? It appears that he was emphasizing the importance of taking seriously the possibility of repentance, that presumably guilty woman's potential for constructive change. Moreover, he was pointing to the inestimable value of forgiveness. The call of spiritual wisdom is always to love, to love even our enemies; and it is psychologically impossible to love someone whom we refuse to forgive.

At this juncture, the concern with which I am left is not for Gov. Northam; it is for those who are fixated on the past with such unremitting tenacity that they cannot allow themselves to evaluate compassionately the interval of time that has elapsed since a supposedly hurtful incident occurred. My concern is for those who seem unwilling or unable to consider whether repentance, constructive change for the better, has taken place. But what is forgiveness? Jesus taught that forgiveness is relating to a person who has used poor judgment or hurt us in the past as if that action never took place— which, of course, is how Jesus taught that God relates to us.

The good news is that, not only the people who responded unjustly to Gov. Northam, but all of us would-be followers of the teacher from Nazareth who have ignored repentance and forgiveness of others can ourselves repent and be forgiven. With that good news, there is hope for

all of us! Why is that important? Because, infallible human beings that we are, every one of us has used poor judgment and has behaved in a hurtful way at some time in his or her life; as a child, teenager, high school or college student, as a young adult, in middle age, or even during our senior years. None of us is exempt from a history of unloving moments! Yet, thank God, most of us have transcended at least some of our dysfunctional "past" and moved on to a greater degree of maturity.

Others need that opportunity, as well. Can we, then, make room for repentance and forgiveness? I know we can. So, let's make it happen! With abiding love and appreciation for each of you, I remain, gratefully,

**your pastor and friend,
John**

IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM –

March, 2019

*Our gatherings in February will take place, as usual,
on the 2d and 4th Sunday of each month.*

Sunday, March 10th (2^od Sunday of the Month)

11:00 a.m. 20th ANNIVERSARY FELLOWSHIP BRUNCH

Back in March of 1999, when we had our first worship gathering in the auditorium of the Catholic High School in Forest Acres, who would have guessed that our ministry in the midlands of South Carolina would continue for over two decades?! And yet, voila: here we are!

It is with deep gratitude that we celebrate God's use of us as a progressive spiritual fellowship in a state that has a national reputation for being anything but progressive. In fact, we are the only Christian fellowship that is progressive---that is, in the way that we define it. Although, since our church began, there are now other Christian churches that are open and welcoming to all people, to our knowledge, we are still the only progressive Christian fellowship that neither requires, or expects our members to give assent to a creed or a specified set of dogmas and doctrines. Why? Because Jesus himself never superimposed such a requirement upon his followers! So, as followers of the spiritual path that he set for us, our only desire is that our people answer affirmatively to his continuing invitation: "Come, follow me [as I attempt to point you to a pathway marked by unconditional love that can enable you to experience life in all its fullness]."

We believe that an ' open and accepting, non-dogmatic Christian fellowship that seeks to put willing people in touch with that which is ultimate is still greatly needed, especially in our hyper-dogmatic, bitterly divided community (in religion and in politics!) in which not only love, but even basic civility, are in short supply. So, dear people, let us celebrate ourselves-and that to which we are committed! Instead of our usual worship gathering on Sunday, March 10th we'll celebrate our 20th anniversary and the beginning of our 21st year together by sharing in a lovely brunch at locally popular DiPrato's, 342 Pickens Street. (Did we mention that DiPrato's has outrageously good deserts?) Since DiPrato's does not have a private room suitable for our group, there will be no speaker-just good food and equally good fellowship. But space is at a premium at DiPrato's, so reservations are absolutely necessary! If you have not yet made yours, you still can do so by calling our pastor at 331- 9999; but the deadline for receiving reservations is Thursday, March 7th.

See ya at DiPrato's! (Notice the time: 11:00 a.m.)

Sunday, March 24 (4th Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. MINDFULNESS FOR BETTER LIVING

Today, we'll have our third session- an opportunity to learn mindfulness-free of charge. Although many people still do not know what mindfulness is or realize its potential value to impact their happiness, the practice has become extremely popular throughout the United States and in many parts of the world. One reason, no doubt, is that, according to a study at Harvard Medical School, people who do regularly practice mindfulness to experience greater happiness tend to add approximately 9 ½ years to their lifespan! Pretty significant, huh?

In addition to a video of Dr. Rick Hanson, one of the most outstanding experts on mindfulness in the world, our pastor will present the latest research on the relationship of mindfulness to a person's level of happiness and how mindfulness activity can help one to experience greater happiness- and, of course, even the potential for a longer life.

We look forward to seeing you! To help you in planning, we anticipate adjourning around 11:30 a.m. (The 'Lunch Bunch'-that includes anyone who's hungry-will go out to eat together after the session. We'll be driving only a few blocks away to Zorba's. You'll be delighted and amazed at their economical 'specials,' and the portions usually are incredibly generous; so, depending on what you order, you may be able to take a few bites home for dinner!)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

THANK YOU!

Apparently, Gary Davis has an amazing memory, and Jeannie Marvin has a very big heart. The two of them were responsible for the delicious, surprise birthday cake they conspired to bring to our last worship gathering to celebrate our pastor's birthday. John never mentioned to anyone that he was about to be a year older, and so he thought no one would know. But Gary and Jeannie outsmarted him and added a superlative gastronomic dimension to our fellowship on February 10th. A big thank you to Gary for remembering and to Jeannie for furnishing the cake. Our pastor also wants to thank all of your thoughtful people who somehow were able to remember his birthday and helped to celebrate it with cards, telephone calls, and delightful meals. You're appreciated!

LOOKING AHEAD

Spring seemingly has come early this year, and Lent and Easter are almost here--next month, in fact. Because of that, our schedule for April will be a bit different than usual. Because of the date on which Easter falls, we'll be gathering on the 2nd and 3rd Sundays of the month instead of the 2nd and 4th. Please note that change on your calendar.

Here's what will be happening. On April 14th, we'll have our first opportunity in 2019 to share in an informal discussion that we call Conversations with Our Pastor. This gathering will be in celebration of Lent and will offer an opportunity to ask John any questions you might have about the death of Jesus- why it occurred and whether or not it was necessary. Did God want it to happen? Did God, as some people believe, cause it to happen (predestination)? However, any other questions about ethics, beliefs, Christian teachings, the Church, or

spirituality will be welcomed. Most churches never give their people this kind of opportunity. Some wouldn't dare! But in our fellowship, this opportunity has become a CCM distinctive.

On Easter Sunday, April 21st, our worship gathering will attempt to address doubts about the possibility of life beyond this life that atheists claim to invalidate Christian teachings on the issue. Our pastor will share with us some important data about which even our most sophisticated atheistic friends seem to be unaware. His sermon will be entitled "The Undiscovered Country: Hints of the Hereafter." You may leave convinced that there definitely is a reality that transcends the reality that we now know, one that, one day, will make a great difference to every one of us. So if you know someone who has had a loved one taken away by death, please, PLEASE invite him or her (or them) to join you at CCM this Easter Sunday. By sharing information, they are unlikely to encounter anywhere else, we'll be sure to make the occasion one that they won't forget.

WHOEVER YOU ARE, WELCOME TO CCM!

AS FOLLOWERS OF THE PATHWAY OF JESUS,
WE ARE A SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP IN WHICH
WE SEEK TO GROW IN LOVE FOR GOD, SELF,
AND
OTHER PEOPLE IN A WAY THAT AFFECTS ALL OF
OUR RELATIONSHIPS, ACTIONS, AND DECISION
MAKING, THEREBY HELPING TO MAKE THE
WORLD A BETTER PLACE IN WHICH TO LIVE.
WE WELCOME WITH OPEN ARMS, MINDS, AND
HEARTS ALL WHO DESIRE TO CONNECT
WITH US

***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

CommunityChurchOITheMidlands.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!