

THE SALTSHAKER

A PUBLICATION OF COVENANT REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

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It Takes A Village

By Rev. Sean McCann

"Do you as a congregation undertake the responsibility of assisting the parents in the Christian nurture of this child?"

If you have ever witnessed a baptism at our church (or any PCA church) you have been asked this question, and responded—I hope—with an enthusiastic "YES!" It is the final vow taken before the baptism itself, and it personifies so much of what it means to be a member in our church and part of our covenant community. We baptize our members during worship, and in the presence of the congregation (as opposed to in a private ceremony), because this represents their spiritual union not only with Christ but also with the family of God. And as members of this family, we recognize that it is the responsibility of every church member to assist the parents in raising their children to love God and believe in Jesus as their Savior.

You have all taken this vow many times, but have you ever considered what are you doing to keep it? How are you fulfilling your vow to help the parents in our church? At last count we have at least 26 parents who need help raising their 40+ children still in the home. While these numbers are certainly an answer to our many prayers, they should also impress upon us the importance of our spiritual duty to support these parents. You are already such a loving and supportive church family, so in this final article on the membership vows, I hope to encourage you to keep it up so that as God blesses our congregation with children, we will respond with loving and faithful assistance and care.

Dr. Robert Rayburn summarizes the responsibility of the congregation: "In the Presbyterian tradition the members of the congregation are the child's godparents, and are accountable for his spiritual welfare. When an infant is baptized, the church...must receive the little one into its fellowship and promise to surround him with loving care, with tender nurture, with watchful prayer, and with an environment of active faith, so that at an early age,

having had such gracious influences, he may come to confess Christ as Lord and Savior and enter joyfully into the service of His kingdom." What a wonderful summary! For the sake of application, I would like to break our responsibilities into four categories:

1) Pray. Not everyone can serve in the nursery or teach Sunday school or mentor a teenager, but everyone can pray. I remember years ago visiting a dear elderly widow who knew her time was short. She lamented the loss of so much independence in her life, but rejoiced that she could still pray! Would you commit to praying personally for the covenant children of our church? It means the world to our parents when you work to learn the names of their children, and what better way to do this than praying for them!

2) Model. Children need role models. They need to look around and see Christians who are striving together to follow Jesus. What are our children learning when they watch you? Do they see someone given fully to the Lord who lives a life of repentance and faith, at peace with God and man? Do they see a heart-felt worshiper, a selfless servant, and a loving witness? Or do they see a hypocrite, an empty suit, a noisy gong, the type of person their parents are always warning them about? I yearn for my daughters to follow women of faith who cling to Christ even when they walk through the darkest of valleys. Are you one of those women? Do the sons of our church see men of divine strength and tender compassion who lead them to follow Christ? What a joy to have such models in our community, and also a sobering reminder to us all that our children are watching.

3) Encourage. Proverbs 19:21 says that "death and life are in the power of the tongue" – is your tongue killing our parents, or giving life to them? Raising children is a wonderful and joyous task, but it is also exhausting. No parent has it all together (despite those beautiful

July – August

Upcoming Events

For more information about any of these events, refer to our website (www.covenantreformed.net), or the church office (828-253-6578; office@covenantreformed.net).

The Lord's Supper

Please prepare your hearts in advance to take of the sacrament together.

Morning Worship:

July 7, 21

August 4, 18

Fellowship Lunch:

July 7 following morning worship

Shepherding Groups:

August 4 following morning worship

Youth:

July 26, 5:00 Summer Pool Party at the Golden's

Summer Church Picnics:

July 17, 5:30 pm, Lake Julian Park
August 14, 5:30 pm, Roy Pope Park

Women's Summer Book Discussion:

July 27
10:00–11:00 pm, Fellowship Hall

Weekly Events

Sunday:

Sunday School	9:30 am	
Morning Worship	10:45 am	
Evening Worship	6:00 pm	Except on 1st Sunday

Our Wednesday evening gatherings resume on September 4.

Bible Study

For Men:

Men's Prayer Breakfast	8:00 am	2nd & 4th Saturdays
ROMEOS	7:30 am	Every Thursday
(Retired Old Men Eating Out) at Cornerstone Restaurant		
Norm Bomer's Home	7:00 pm	1st & 3rd Thursdays

For Women:

Gail Albee's Home	9:30 am	Every Tuesday
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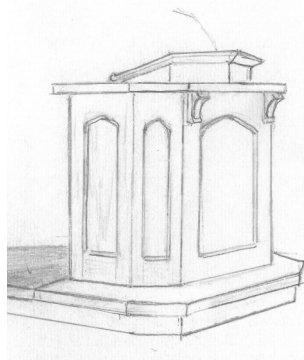
pictures you may see of them on Facebook) and we all need life-giving words of encouragement. Parents don't need unsolicited advice, no matter how true it might be. They need words of sympathy, compassion, and mercy. When parents fail, they need to be reminded of the forgiveness found in Jesus and hear anew the precious promises of the gospel. When parents are overwhelmed with doubt and worry, they need to be reminded of God's unchanging character and covenant faithfulness. When parents grieve the disastrous decisions their children make, they need to be encouraged to trust in God's unfailing mercy. Please beware of the impact a negative comment can make. You may think you are helping a parent by subtly critiquing their parenting decisions or a child's behavior, but you are doing nothing of the sort. Parents need to hear the truth about their children, but unless that truth is spoken out of loving concern and humility, it is likely not to be received very well. Be slow to speak and quick to listen, for "gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body" (Prov 16:24).

4) Serve and Protect. (Forgive me for borrowing a police phrase!) As adults in our community we must cultivate an environment of safety and peace for our children. We must make families and children feel welcomed and not a burden, protected and not disregarded, embraced and not merely tolerated. One simple way to do this is to joyfully serve in our children's ministry. The nursery is a great place to start: I am

sure Bekah Woodard, our Nursery Director, would love to have the problem of too many nursery volunteers! Consider teaching or assisting in a children's class, either on a regular basis or as a substitute, or serving on the Security Team. This service also extends beyond the meetings of the church. What a joy it has been at times for our family to be welcomed into your homes for a meal. Your efforts at gracious hospitality are such an easy way to serve and get to know our young families. Be creative in serving our children and their families; a little effort goes a long way—my wife has wonderful childhood memories of "Mr. Pete" who always had a piece of candy for her and her friends!

And one final word to parents: help us help you! So many of us are eager to walk this road with you, to sit with your kids in worship, to babysit, to bring a meal, to come alongside as you teach, mentor, and love your children. We know the struggles (and bear the wounds to prove it), so don't be too proud to ask for help or advice; you honor us when you seek our counsel and assistance.

The Bible says that "children are a heritage from the Lord" (Ps 127:3). So may we cherish and nourish our heritage as we seek to fulfill our congregational baptism vows unto the glory of God.



The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Sean McCann

"More than most of the Bible, perhaps more than any other book, Isaiah seems to stress polar opposites. So, exultation and degradation, glory and shame, desert and garden, and many others... Perhaps the most prominent of these is judgment and hope, in part made more prominent because they seem to coincide with the two most obvious divisions of the book: chapters 1-39 and 40-66. In 1-39, judgment receives the major focus, while hope receives it in 40-66. This particular bipolarity has so much impressed some scholars that they have gone so far as to suggest that all appearances of the other theme in the other section are the work of another hand."

This is how Isaiah scholar John Oswalt explains the primary division in the prophet Isaiah. Of course, there is only one author of Isaiah, but we might be excused for thinking chapter 40 and the following are written by another hand altogether.

We've been in the "judgment section" from January to June, according to Oswalt. From the introductory warnings to the glorious vision of God's holiness in chapter 6, through the condemnation of the rebellious nations in the desert of judgment in chapter 34, and the ominous prophecy of the Babylonian exile in chapter 39, we have seen a lot of judgment. These passages warn the nations to submit to the rule of the only sovereign king while also calling the people of God to return, trust, and wait upon the Lord.

And who is this Lord who we wait upon? The second section begins to answer that with the glorious opening words: "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God" (40:1). Despite the hope, comfort, and peace of the second section, we still find threads of judgment that remind us that all is not yet right. Instead of a triumphant king, we encounter a suffering servant who endures the judgment of God to extend hope. For the rest of the series, we will see how the beautiful intertwining of these themes of judgment and hope point us to Jesus. In the closing words of Oswalt: "What else is the Cross of Christ than the eternal vindication of the justice of God and the eternal proclamation of the mercy of God? If God can use the Cross to bring us to hope, then no judgment need be final."

Preaching Schedule		
Date	Morning	Evening
July 7	Isaiah 41	
July 14	Isaiah 42	Hebrews 11:1-3
July 21	Isaiah 43	Hebrews 11:4-7
July 28	Isaiah 44:1-20	Hebrews 11:8-22
Aug. 4	Isaiah 44:21-45:25	
Aug. 11	Isaiah 46-47	Hebrews 11:23-29
Aug. 18	Isaiah 48	Hebrews 11:30-40
Aug. 25	Isaiah 49:1-50:3	Hebrews 12:1-2

General Assembly and What It Does

By Rev. Jim Curtis

A few weeks ago, over 2,000 elders in the PCA gathered together for the 51st meeting of the General Assembly. If you are new to CRPC and the PCA, the General Assembly (GA) meets annually to do the business of the PCA as a denomination. Generally, the meeting can be broken into three main parts. See our recent GA episode on the *Watering Seeds* podcast for more detail than I can give here.

Elections

Each year, the GA has a host of elections to wade through. On the first night, we elect (or re-elect) the Stated Clerk, a new Moderator, and many parliamentarians who know the rules to assist these men. This year, we re-elected Dr. Bryan Chapell as Stated Clerk and RE Steve Dowling as Moderator. These are not the only elections, though! Later in the week, we elect elders to positions on Permanent Committees and Boards of Agencies. These Committees and Agencies oversee the day-to-day work of our organizational ministries like RUF, MTW, MNA, Ridge Haven, Covenant College, and Covenant Seminary. In addition, we hold elections for other special committees and the Standing Judicial Commission (SJC), which is designated to serve as the highest appellate court of the PCA. The work of these Permanent Committees, Agencies, special committees, and the SJC is vital for ensuring the PCA's ministry and life can go on smoothly.

Ministry

The second part of each GA concerns the ministry of the Permanent Committees and Agencies. Each of them must give a report on their previous year, and they are permitted to make recommendations for the General Assembly's action. This year, for example, RUF requested that the GA approve and adopt a new "Affiliation Agreement," which serves as a definition of the relationship between RUF and each Presbytery if they want to start an RUF campus ministry. The Agreement details the expectations and responsibilities of both RUF and the Presbytery when overseeing an RUF Campus Ministry.

Oversight & Overtures

The final part of the meeting can be summarized as the GA's oversight of Presbyteries and overtures submitted to the GA. As Presbyterians, we affirm a two-way street between Presbyteries and the GA. On one side of the road, the GA oversees Presbyteries and their work by reviewing their records (by the Committee on Review of Presbytery Records, or "RPR") and asks them to give information regarding irregularities in their records. On the other side, Presbyteries can send "Overtures" to the GA requesting action. Most commonly, Presbyteries request amendments to our *Book of Church Order* to keep it as up-to-date and helpful as possible. In the past, some have requested Study Committees for various topics. All of these parts can make for a hectic week! However, the effort is worth it, as there is a fourth part to each GA meeting: we always open with the worship of our Savior Jesus and come around the Lord's Table to ensure all we do is for his glory.

Lord's Supper Bread

By Rev. Sean McCann



I am writing on behalf of the session to let you know that we will soon be changing the type of bread we use for the Lord's Supper. In place of the hard matzah we have used for the past few years, we will move to a soft pita bread, which is also gluten-free.

The primary reason for this change is to reduce the crunching sound that fills the sanctuary during the observance of the Supper. As many of you have noticed, when one hundred people simultaneously chew on a hard piece of matzah, it makes a rather loud crunching sound that tends to be distracting. You may have been here long enough that you no longer hear or take note of the noise, but as we have been tuned to this discussion over the past few months, we can assure you that there is a significant noise of crunching matzah! We hope this change will reduce this minor distraction, resulting in a more focused, reverent, and joyful observation of the sacrament.

As we have considered this change, we reviewed the arguments for and against using unleavened bread. With respect to those who believe that unleavened bread is proper, we side with the majority of the historic Reformed church in considering it a matter of indifference. One scholar puts the Biblical case succinctly: "While there are several uses of the word *azumos* (unleavened bread) in the NT, none of them refer to the bread used in the Lord's Supper. In all other places that the word "bread" occurs in the NT, it is the Greek word *artos* meaning a loaf of common leavened bread." Some may also wonder about the NT's use of the term "leaven" in passages like 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 and Galatians 5:9, where Paul uses leaven to teach about sin. Of course, this is a useful metaphor! Yet, Jesus also employs leaven as a word picture to instruct us about the Kingdom of God (Luke 13:20-21).

As one scholar concludes, "While this doesn't necessarily mean that Jesus was using leavened bread after the Last Supper (this is highly unlikely), it means that all the gospel writers didn't regard the use of unleavened bread to be important enough to record." John Calvin concurs: "whether the bread is leavened or unleavened; the wine red or white it makes no difference. These things are indifferent and left at the church's discretion."

So, the next time we gather to observe the sacrament, you will experience a slightly different sign. Yet, the thing signified - Jesus Christ - will be the same. Join us in praying for his word and sacrament to continue to feed and nourish his flock until the Good Shepherd returns.