

THE SALTSHAKER

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

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Membership Vow #4

By Rev. Sean McCann

As we move down the list of the membership questions, they may get shorter and shorter, but they certainly don't get any easier to fulfill. Question four is short, sweet, and to the point:

“Do you promise to support the church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?”

In answering this question we vow to do one thing – support the church – that is focused in two specific areas: the worship and the work of the church.

How to Support the Church in its Worship

The first and most basic way we keep this promise is to gather with God's people for worship: “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” (Hebrews 10:24-25). There is no more basic expression of keeping this promise than showing up for church. There is no more formative discipline in the Christian life than showing up for church. And there is no more countercultural activity in the world today than keeping a weekly sabbath and showing up at your local church on a weekly basis. Make this the number one priority on your calendar, and everything else will naturally fall into place.

After we gather, the second way we support the worship is by *receiving* what God has for us in worship. Like the Israelites in Ezra's day, we are attentive to the reading of the law (Nehemiah 8:3); like the Bereans, we receive the word with all eagerness (Acts 17:11); and like the Thessalonians, we receive the word of God not as the word of men, “but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers” (1 Thessalonians 2:13). We also “wait for one another” to receive the Lord's Supper so that we might eat and drink together (1 Corinthians 11:33).

A third way we participate is by *returning* the word back to God and to our neighbors. Pray and confess sincerely.

Sing, and sing loudly. Return to God, with joy and awe, the thanksgiving and praise due his name. The introduction to our *Psalter Hymnal* is helpful here: “The Lord commands us to sing to him in worship, so whether or not we enjoy singing, we must do it to the glory of God...don't worry about what others may think of your singing. Whether you are classically trained or consider yourself monotone, God wants you to sing. Your voice will blend with all the voices now and through eternity to bring praise to our God.”

How to Support the Church in its Work

In order to support the church in her work, we must first understand the nature of the work itself. Our church has a simple mission statement: to gather and grow disciples in Asheville and around the world. We break Jesus' command to “make disciples” into two parts – “gather and grow” – which we get from the Confession of Faith's teaching on the ministry of the church “for the *gathering and perfecting* of the saints in this life” (WCF 20.3). In our goal to accomplish this mission, we have also adopted a strategy (or method): We depend on the Spirit's power to gather and grow disciples by embracing the Ordinary Means of Grace in our worship, nurture, and witness. The work of the church is the work of the Holy Spirit, and we understand him to work in and through these three avenues of ministry: worship, nurture (shepherding, fellowship, discipleship), and witness (evangelism and missions).

This work of the church is then accomplished through her ministries, in which her members play a vital role. Paul gives clear marching orders in 1 Corinthians 14: “strive to excel in building up the church.” It is our aim as Christians to strengthen our local church and to serve her with the gifts God has entrusted to us, gifts given to us “of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7). We have not been gifted to hoard our gifts to ourselves, but to pour them out for the good of the body of Christ. This means that we should not start

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November–December

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, during morning worship.
November 5, 19
December 3, 17

Shepherding Groups:

November 5 following morning worship.

Women's Christmas Brunch:

December 2, 10:00 am, in the Fellowship Hall.

Youth—Giving and Games:

December 2, 6:00 pm, in the Fellowship Hall

Holiday Schedule:

- November 22 through January 3 – no Wednesday evening activities.
- December 24 and 31—No Sunday School classes.
- December 24—Christmas Eve Service, 5:00 pm.
- December 31—No evening worship.

Weekly Events

Sunday:

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

Wednesday Evenings:

(Through November 15)
Supper 6:00 pm
Bible Study/Prayer 6:45 pm

Bible Study

For Men:

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

For Women:

Gail Albee's Home	9:30 am	Every Tuesday
Fellowship Hall	10:00 am	Every Thursday through November 16
Fellowship Hall	6:30 pm	Every Thursday through November 16

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by looking within to see what gifts we have and how we like to serve in order to find a need in the church (or in a different church) that matches our self-assessment. Instead, we should start by looking without at the church where God has placed us, in order to discern her needs and ask God to show us how we have been gifted by him to serve her.

A helpful analogy is found in Colin Marshall and Tony Payne’s book, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift that Changes Everything*. The authors describe a wooden trellis that holds up and supports a growing plant. Tim Challies explains: “A trellis, of course, is a structure that is used to support, to hold up, a vine. In this metaphor the trellis refers to the administrative work within a church, those tasks that, though important, are not actually directly related to discipling people. Vine work, on the other hand, is those tasks of working with the vine, drawing people into the kingdom through evangelism and then training them to grow in their knowledge of God and their obedience to him. As the authors say, “The basic work of any Christian ministry is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of God’s Spirit, and to see people converted, changed and grow to maturity in that gospel.” The problem, though, is that trellis work tends to take over from vine work. Perhaps it’s because trellis work is easier and less threatening; perhaps the trellis work looks more impressive. But for one reason or another, many Christians, and pastors in particular,

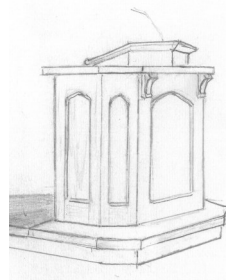
soon find themselves consumed with trellis work, leaving them little time and attention for the vine. “Whatever the reason, there is no doubt that in many churches, maintaining and improving the trellis constantly takes over from tending the vine.”

We will always have a long list of ways for members to support the trellis work of the church (e.g., serve in the nursery, volunteer for security, assist the deacons, help in the hospitality ministry, etc.), but we never want these structures to replace our ministry to people. What is needed more than any of this is the vine work. As we invest in the vine work of the church - encouraging, comforting, discipling, evangelizing, mentoring, praying, loving one another - we will see the vine flourish and grow along the trellis designed to support it’s weight. As Pastor Brian Habig has written, “At the heart of believers’ responsibilities in a church must be intentionality in building relationships.”

Finally, don’t forget the qualifier at the end of this question: “to the best of your ability.” It is not our job to gather and grow the church, to build and protect the church, to purify and glorify the church. That all belongs to God. Our promise is to support the work, relying on grace of the Holy Spirit, using our strengths and, yes, our weaknesses, and trusting God to give the growth.

The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Sean McCann



Ending One Series

We began the Matthew series together back on Sunday, December 19, 2021. In lieu of an advent series that year we jumped from Genesis right into Matthew, and Jesus’ birth narrative served as our advent focus. This month we will end a series that - apart from last summer in Esther - has been going nonstop for a grand total of 87 sermons. Since I began at CRPC in 2016 I have been building from shorter sermon series to longer ones. We have moved from some short series early on in Philippians (13 sermons), Jonah (4), and Titus (7), to some medium length series in Exodus (41), Acts (46), and Genesis (41), to

now completing multiple year sermon series together. That is quite an achievement, and I am especially grateful for your patience and perseverance!

As we cover the final chapter of Matthew in the coming month, we will have the unique experience of combining holidays - Good Friday and Easter with Thanksgiving. While this may feel a bit out-of-order, what better way to celebrate Thanksgiving than to give thanks for the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ! May our prayers this month echo Peter’s: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3).

Beginning Another Series

For the month of December, we will be in a series entitled “Veiled in Flesh.” Over a stretch of six sermons (including Christmas Eve) we will study some of great passages in Paul’s letters that focus on the incarnation of our Lord. Paul has some of the richest writings in all of Scripture that reflect on the meaning and implications of the Son of God taking on human flesh: How is he the “firstborn of all creation” (Colossians 1)? What does it mean that he “emptied himself” (Philippians 2)? When was the “fulness of time” (Galatians 4)? How does the “fulness of deity dwell bodily” (Colossians 2)? These questions and more we hope to answer in this series.

Next Year?

Prayers are much appreciated, because my tentative plan is to spend the coming year preaching through Isaiah. Details - and confirmation - to come.

Preaching Schedule		
Date	Morning	Evening
Nov. 5	Matt. 27:45-61	
Nov. 12	Matt. 27:62-28:10	Prov. 6:1-19
Nov. 19	Matt. 28:11-15	Prov. 6:20-35
Nov. 26	Matt. 28:16-20	Prov. 7:1-27
Dec. 3	Col. 1:15-17	
Dec. 10	Phil. 2:5-8	Prov. 8:1-36
Dec. 17	Rom. 1:1-6	Prov. 9:1-18
Dec. 24	Gal. 4:4-7	Col. 2:9-10
Dec. 31	1 Tim 3:16	

Preaching Workshop

By Mr. Wilson Goins

In September, the CRPC pastoral staff had the privilege of attending a *Charles Simeon Trust* preaching workshop. *The Charles Simeon Trust* is named after a persistent preacher many of you may be familiar with. Despite intense opposition to the exposition of the scriptures from his own congregation, Charles Simeon continued to preach Christ in the same pulpit for fifty-four years! Similarly, the workshop’s purpose is to further equip preachers of many Protestant evangelical traditions to faithfully preach the biblical text. Prior to the workshop, we were assigned two sections from Romans and tasked with studying and preparing thorough sermon outlines. Rather than each attendee preaching these sermons, they split us into small groups where we had five minutes to present our work and then received feedback from others in our groups. It is always refreshing and encouraging to be in the company of co-laborers in the gospel and learn how to improve.

Additionally, the workshop included several lectures on the process of sermon preparation. If you have been in the James Sunday school class, you know that when we read our bibles, we are tempted to make all kinds of applications of the text, sometimes without considering the historical and cultural context and authorial purpose first. However, there is so much to be done before we get to application if we desire to preach and teach faithfully. Firstly, preachers of the gospel are called to pray for the Spirit’s help in grasping the text, because it is the Spirit who searches the deep things of God. Then, it is necessary to do the research. How does said passage fit into the literary context of the book? What is the overarching theme? Who were the recipients? What is the author seeking to convey? Then we can move to the text, identify its structure, draw out its meaning, and apply it to the situations of our congregation. As one of our instructors put it, expository preaching is: “Exposing the word of God in its context to the people in my context.”

Perhaps the most significant and helpful lecture during the workshop was on identifying Christ connections in every passage. The Apostle Paul tells us that the content of biblical preaching is Christ and Him crucified. So, this lecture was purposed to teach us how to identify where and when the preacher can smoothly and faithfully present Jesus and His gospel in our sermons. These organic jumping points are often found in allusions to Christ’s life and ministry in the text like: humiliation, death, exaltation, reign, as well as the mention of titles or offices which He executes, such as: prophet, priest, king, servant, savior, etc. Finally, another connection opportunity would be attributes. If a given text speaks to goodness, justice, patience, or other attributes, that is always a clear bridge to Jesus Christ who is the exemplary figure of all of those things.

We gleaned much from this workshop, and it is our prayer that what we learned will work itself out in preaching and teaching which continues to equip the body at CRPC.

Book Review

By Rev. Jim Curtis



Once again at Covenant Reformed elections for new officers are soon upon us. The time ripens, therefore, for me to review a book on church government! If you cannot quite tell, I quite like this topic. This time, I want to briefly review and ultimately recommend Guy Waters’ book, *How Jesus Runs the Church*. In this work, Waters spends a good deal more time getting into the details of government in the Church than his smaller book *Well Ordered, Living Well* (reviewed Nov 2022), but is no less clear nor persuasive.

Initially, Waters takes two chapters to show the Bible’s definition of “The Church” and defend the general idea that a church ought to have a government. Only after he lays down that foundation does he move to more specifics of Church governance. For the sake of this review, however, I want to limit my comments to his chapter on the *Power of the Church*—an often misunderstood category, as many either misuse it or conversely claim the Church has no power at all.

What power does the Church have, then? And how does she exercise it? Waters elucidates in showing us the *source* and the *delegation* of power. Waters begins by reminding us that the Great Commission begins with the words, “All authority in heaven and on earth have been given to me...” The *source* of the Church’s power resides in the person of Jesus Christ. Waters writes that acts like church teaching and discipline “carry their weight only as they carry the sanction and smile of Jesus.” The Church’s power, in other words, is not original to the Church—she does not have the right to act unilaterally. Everything she does is subject, as it were, to the review and control of Christ.

Nevertheless, Christ has truly *delegated* power to the Church; that is, the *entire body of the Church*, not just the officers. Here lies another misconception about Presbyterianism: that church members are *powerless*. The PCA rightly proclaims the opposite in *BCO* 3-1: “The power which Christ has committed to His Church vests in the whole body, the rulers and those ruled...” Both the *BCO* and Waters go on to say that the people exercise this power in their *election* of officers, who then exercise the power of the Church *severally* (in preaching, teaching, administration of the sacraments, etc.) and *jointly* (i.e., with other elders, rendering judgment on certain matters).

Of course, there is much more to say—indeed, he says it, so go pick up the book!—but I want to return briefly to life here at Covenant Reformed: as we look to the upcoming election of elders and deacons, Waters’ *How Jesus Runs the Church* becomes instructive to how you, the members of the body, should view your actions there: *as exercising the power given to you by Christ*. So come and show off your power; come and elect your officers and charge them to lead you in Christ’s name.