

# 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 22 parents who need help raising their 30+ 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 sacrament of baptism 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! We should all 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 pictures you may see of them on Facebook) and we all

## July–August

### Upcoming Events

For more information about any of these events, refer to our website ([www.covenantreformed.net](http://www.covenantreformed.net)), or the church office (828-253-6578; [crpchq@gmail.com](mailto:crpchq@gmail.com)).

#### The Lord’s Supper

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

During Morning Worship:  
July 7, 21  
August 4, 18

#### Shepherding Groups:

July 7, August 4, following morning worship.

#### Veterans’ Restoration Quarters Meals:

Lunch—July 3, August 7  
Dinner—July 18, August 15

**Wednesday Evening Gatherings:** In place of our regular Home Prayer Groups, these two Wednesday gatherings of the whole church are for the purpose of community fellowship.

July 3  
August 7

### Weekly Events

#### Sunday:

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

#### Wednesday Evenings:

Home Prayer Groups	6:00 pm	Except July 3, Aug. 7
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### Bible Study

#### For Men:

Men’s Prayer Breakfast	8:00 am	2nd & 4th Saturdays
ROMEOS (Retired Old Men Eating Out) at J&S Cafeteria, River Ridge	8:00 am	Every Thursday

#### For Women:

Carol Belz’s Home	9:30 am	Every Tuesday
Fellowship Hall	10:30 am	Every Wednesday



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need those 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 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.

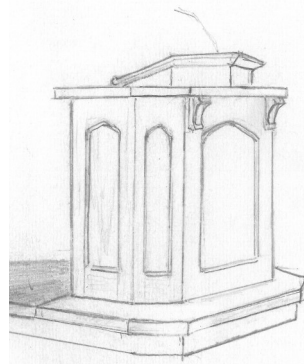
istry. The nursery is a great place to start: I am sure Rebekah Woodard, our new Nursery Director, would love to have the problem of *too many* nursery volunteers! Consider teaching or assisting in a children's class, either on a regular basis or as a substitute, or serving on the Security Team. This 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 baptism vows unto the glory of God.

## The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Sean McCann



The earliest use of the Apostles' Creed in the history of the church is found in the context of baptism. As early as the third century converts to Christianity would recite the Creed as a personal testimony and statement of faith before they were baptized. In fact one liturgy records a three-fold immersion in water, once after affirming each of the three sections of the Creed! While most of us are not preparing for baptism, we are studying the Creed this summer because it is – as Pastor Chris said – a simplified road map to the Christian faith that lays out the precious and vital doctrines of our religion.

In our tour through these magnificent pillars of the faith, we are made to stop three times along the way (when we confess "I believe") to check out our hearts. The statements of objective truth are interspersed with these pauses to look within and see if we really do affirm that we – individually and personally – believe the mighty truths of Scripture. When we say these words from the heart we join our voices with all the saints across the years and throughout the nations in confessing our common faith.

In his wonderful little book on the Creed, Ben Meyers writes: "Who is the 'I' that speaks when we make that confession? It is the body of Christ. It is a community stretched out across history, 'terrible as an army with banners' (Song 6:19). The whole company of Christ's followers goes down in the waters of baptism, crying out the threefold 'I believe!' In baptism nobody is invited to come up with their own personal statement of belief. All are invited to be immersed into a reality beyond themselves and to join their individual voices to a communal voice that transcends them all."

So take time during this series to examine your heart, and consider if you truly do believe the words you confess. Have you unthinkingly recited these words for so long that they have lost their meaning and become a meaningless ritual? This summer we will not only preach the priceless and eternal truths of the faith, but we will pray ceaselessly that the Holy Spirit will work faith in each and every heart. I hope that when we speak our common confession, it is not merely an historic summary, but rather it is a living declaration – to ourselves and to one another – of the truest and most precious things that we can ever believe about our beloved God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Preaching Schedule		
Date	Morning	Evening
July 7	1 Cor. 15:1-28	
July 14	Eph. 1:15-23	1 Sam. 24
July 21	2 Pet. 3:1-13	1 Sam. 25
July 28	John 16:4-15	1 Sam. 26
Aug. 4	1 Pet. 2:1-12	
Aug. 11	John 3:1-5	1 Sam. 27:1-28:2
Aug. 18	1 Cor. 15:35-58	1 Sam. 28:3-25
Aug. 25	2 Cor. 5:1-10	1 Sam. 29

## Gifts and Discipleship

By Rev. Chris Brown

Gifts are good. My oldest daughter loves gifts. Once, when I came home with the groceries, she ran over to them, and looked in, and then looked up at me with a large smile, asking, "For me?" Well, Jesus gives His followers incredible gifts. That's an astounding thought! We often think of these gifts as something for our own benefit—like my daughter thought of our groceries. But the reason Jesus gives His disciples incredible gifts is for the benefit of others.

In Romans 12, Paul moves on from the theologically wondrous and heady description of why the gospel is the power of God unto salvation, and he begins detailing why this transforms the way we live. The turning point is in his use of the word "therefore." He says, "Therefore, present your bodies as living sacrifices." With this line he joins the wonders of salvation in Jesus Christ by faith, with the necessity of taking up the cross and following Jesus as His disciples. What fascinates me, though, is that he details, almost immediately, that the way to be a disciple of Jesus is to use our gifts. In Romans 12:6-8 he argues, "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness."

Notice that Paul's initial point is that spiritual gifts differ in quantity and quality. Christians each have different Spirit-given gifts (qualitative), and different amounts of gifting (quantitative). The gifts "differ according to the grace given to us." The second thing to note is that spiritual gifts are from God. He says, "according to the grace given to us," God gives grace. This does not mean that grace is a substance. Instead, Paul's using a linguistic flare that simply means, "To the extent that God shows undeserved favor to you." He saves all who believe in Jesus with the same salvation, but to some He gives this gift or that gift in this amount or that amount.

But the thing that really struck me about this passage is in Paul's third point, "Let us use them." The point of this is that spiritual gifts are not for the one gifted. Rather than thinking about the abilities of others, he argues, we should study how exactly it is we are using our own God-given abilities to help others grow in faith in Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, I want to ask you all to consider if you are following the call to be Jesus' disciples by using the gifts God has given you. What gifts might you have? There is the gift of age or youth, the gift of marriage, the gift of parenting, the gift of singleness, the gift of vocation. There are additional gifts of service, teaching, exhortation, contribution, leadership, acts of mercy, and gifts of helping (see 1 Cor. 7:6-9; 1 Cor. 12). Ask yourself, "Am I using my spiritual gifts appropriately? Where can I grow the gifts I have been given?" Let's all seek to identify how God has gifted us, and then use our gifts to build up others in their faith in Jesus Christ.

## Let the Children Worship

by Rev. Sean McCann



*Let the Children Worship* by Jason Helopoulos is a wonderfully helpful little book that will bring great encouragement to any parent who has ever struggled with their children during the worship service. The author is Jason Helopoulos, a pastor and father of two, who has a great passion for bringing the whole family of God – including squirmy toddlers and crying babies – together for worship.

In the first three chapters he lays out a brief theology of worship, culminating in the biblical practice of including children in these services:

"the church lives out its theology when it encourages and even expects its children to participate in this central event." After laying down this groundwork, Helopoulos moves on to the meat of the book by encouraging parents – with great pastoral sensitivity – to consider the many blessings of having children in worship, as well as offering some words of parental advice. He knows all too well the struggles that parents face, and tries to bring lots of practical knowledge to bear from his own experience. And he doesn't just speak to parents, he has a whole chapter directed towards church leaders and how they can help, as well as some words to other adults who often need to practice patience and tolerance: "Congregations need to willingly and joyfully join in this great privilege of welcoming covenant children into corporate worship. And that takes some minor adjusting on everyone's part." The book ends with some testimonies from families and children of the great spiritual benefits they gleaned through years in worship. I really would recommend this book to all of our members so that we can learn how to keep our baptism vows to our youngest members.

Personally, I want to address our parents with young children and say that we are thrilled that you are here, and that you are faithfully raising your children as part of our congregation. As a pastor, I love to look out and see little hands trying to hold hymnals and little eyes watching when mom and dad stand up and sit down. Your kids all make some noises – so what? They are joyous noises and wonderful reminders to the rest of us of God's covenant faithfulness and the blessing that children are to our church family. Their noises are music to our ears, and I pray their noises grow more numerous over time! If you are having a hard time with your children in worship, then I'd love to give you a copy of this book for free. I have some extra copies in my study, just let me know and it's yours.