



Beverly Heights
Presbyterian
Church

scattered seeds.

THE NEWSLETTER

April 2019

KNIT TOGETHER WITH COMPASSION

BY KATIE DOYLE

When Margaret Flowers died, the grieving family decided to bury her wrapped in a favorite prayer shawl.

A friend of Beverly Heights through Johnny Whitehair's "Storehouse of God" ministry in West Virginia, Margaret lived near Morgantown. Her family wrote: "She loved [the shawl] so much that we laid it to rest with her."

Since Margaret's passing, a second person was buried with a hand-knit shawl made by members of our Prayer Shawl ministry team. In its five years of existence, as many as 20 women have produced more than 230 shawls, each one a gentle reminder of God's all-encompassing love.

The soft shawls provide comfort to those experiencing grief, pain and despair, as have the prayers offered by those who have knit them:

- One teenager in our midst slept with a prayer shawl while coping with life's deepest pains.
- A child, missing her father deployed halfway around the world, found solace during his absence while wrapping herself in a prayer shawl.
- And one elderly member of Beverly Heights, aged and unsure of her world, is so attached to her shawl that she must be coaxed to relinquish it for the hour or two while it's laundered.

This source of solace began in 2013 when church members Judy Ross and Sondra Furedy each saw the encouragement that a prayer shawl could provide.

Never having knitted, the right-handed Sondra learned how to knit from left-handed Judy (teacher-pupil ambidexterity only a knitter can fully appreciate). After months of prayerful consideration and the sharing of shawls, they received approval as a sanctioned ministry of the church. They then publicized the ministry's first meeting and were delighted when 16 women turned out.

Sondra wrote the group's mission statement, which reads: We are "knit together by compassion, prayer, and fellowship, to wrap the hurting of our extended church family in prayer shawls, as reminders of the Lord's loving arms and care and our prayers and concern."

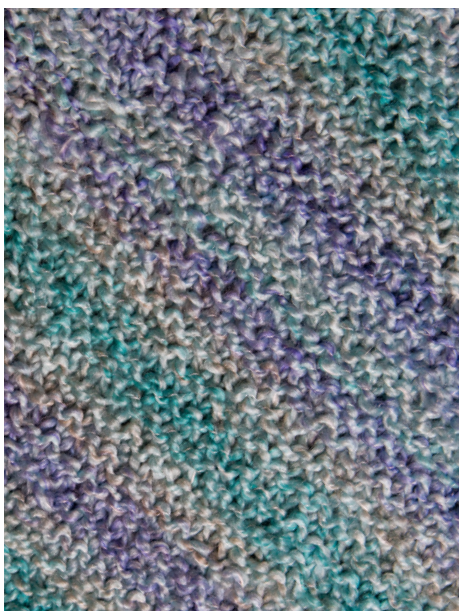
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Each shawl is accompanied by a personal note of encouragement, referencing God and His compassionate love, healing and peace.

Now under the leadership of Sondra and Beth Duncan, Judy's daughter, about a dozen women meet on the third Tuesday evening each month to make prayer shawls, squares and lap robes. The terms "shawls," "squares" and "lap robes" refer to different sizes. A shawl is usually 20 to 28 inches wide and about 60 inches long; it enfolds its wearer. A lap robe is about 36 inches by 36 inches and warms its seated user. Children who receive squares (somewhat smaller than a lap robe) use them in play and cuddle with them in bed.

The monthly meetings are part prayer, part improving upon craft and part fellowship. A visitor overhears conversations about potential recipients and who might benefit from receipt of a shawl. Who is hurting in our midst? Who might be comforted by a prayer shawl? They search the prayer list from Sunday's bulletin for potential recipients. The staff and congregation also advance suggestions.



Once someone has been identified, the conversation then centers on the pile of undesignated prayer shawls that have not been distributed, jumbled on the table in the middle of the room. Would this shawl, with its color and design, be suitable for this person? Or does it better suit someone else? Sometimes a shawl is still on the knitting needles of a member and she's encouraged to finish quickly (there are no men knitting – not yet).

When a match is made between shawl and its designated recipient, one of the members sews a small cross onto it in an inconspicuous place. The placement is so inconspicuous that often recipients do not discover the cross until weeks later.

Although some ministry members are whizzes at both knitting and crocheting and others are hesitant beginners, they all work at their own pace. Encouragement is dispensed as much as yarn. Oohs and aahs fill the room – over the workmanship, design or color of everyone's work. There

are appreciative comments about projects completed quickly and heartening comments about those still in progress.

For both novice and experienced knitters, it's a good place to get answers to problematic subjects: How to join a new ball of yarn? How to pick up a dropped stitch? How to deal with what sound like sailing terms (to a man, at least), such as casting on and casting off? What size of needle is best for this particular yarn? Should the project be done with one strand of yarn or two? Is this yarn soft enough?

They follow trusted patterns or design their own. They choose soft yarns and their standard for "soft" is very hard. Colors are from every part of the rainbow. When keeping track of a pattern with three designs in it, they've found a useful memory device is thinking "Father," for the first design; "Son," for the second; and "Holy Spirit," for the third.

Members know that the presence of a prayer shawl may trigger conversations about faith among family and friends who may

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be reticent to discuss such matters. Prayer is offered up for opportunities for those conversations.

Given that more than 230 members and friends of Beverly Heights have received shawls to date, the prayer life of the shawl team is as busy as their fingers. Indeed, every meeting ends with a long time of prayer, offered for those who have received a shawl or will shortly.

For each recipient, it is a physical reminder of God's arms gently enfolding us all. The members of this ministry are well aware that shawls are symbolic of God's all-encompassing comfort and love.

Anyone with an interest is encouraged to attend the next meeting – school-age to retirees, men and women. Meetings are the third Tuesday of each month at 7 p.m. in the A-level choir room. If you have questions, contact Sondra at sondrafuredy@gmail.com or 724-747-2217.



Coming soon!

The Scattered Seeds Podcast

Where every life has a story.

BY TOM O'BOYLE

Starting in May, our church will begin producing "The Scattered Seeds Podcast," which will be co-hosted by pastor Nate and me.

Each month, two new episodes of the hour-long podcast will be released. It will be produced by Beverly Heights Church in possible collaboration with several Christian organizations which may join with us.

For those unacquainted with podcasting, it's 21st century radio but on demand. It's downloadable to your device and therefore accessible whenever and wherever you want the audio content.

The podcast's subtitle—"Where every life has a story"—explains the format of the program. It will be interview based but unlike those you may be familiar with in secular programming, ours will focus on the nexus between a person's life and his or her faith.

Subjects will reveal how faith in Jesus Christ changed their lives. We will explore, in other words, the backstory of life-altering events which God used to remake them into the persons they are today. Nate is pumped about it and so am I.

"This show has so much potential," says Kate Kuzko, the third member of our team who will serve as the show's producer. "I can feel it with a certainty that I could never really explain to anyone who didn't know the Lord. It's a way to give others a gift by the simple act of sharing their stories. We're going to be facilitating that, and that's something I'm humbled and honored to be part of."

How this idea originated is a perfect illustration of the sovereignty of God, which should never be underestimated, as He has connected many dots to make this happen. When circumstances align perfectly, non-believers say, "What a coincidence!" Believers know better.

The first of these so-called coincidences is that I had known Kate Kuzko 20 years before. She had attended Jubilee Christian School then, as had our daughter Erin, when Mary Wolling ran it and taught there.

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It turned out Kate had gotten an art degree from Carnegie Mellon in 2010, where I taught until taking this job (coincidence No. 2).

Curiously (coincidence No. 3), among the multimedia topics I taught was podcasting; and among the art classes she took was audio editing (but not from me).

Kate and I were reacquainted one evening in February when coincidence No. 4 occurred. She served me my meal at Wednesday Night

Heights. Kate was there, along with her sister Mary Beth and mom Laurita, at the invitation of Mary Wolling and Lisa Tyger.

"Is there any work Kate might do for you?" Louise, my wife, asked after talking to her and getting caught up. I then asked the Lord for guidance. Coincidentally (No. 5), I had been mulling an audio storytelling project. After exchanging emails, Kate and I established that (coincidence No. 6) she not only was a skilled audio editor—she'd produced a prior podcast.

Then, on March 2, coincidence No. 7 occurred two days later. Listening to one speaker's riveting testimony during the presbytery meeting we hosted that Saturday morning, Nate and I had a simultaneous Eureka moment. During a hallway exchange we wondered aloud: What about a podcast which explores the faith journeys of its subjects in an interview format?

About 30 minutes later, I typed an email to Kate: "I have a podcast idea I would like to run past you."

Seven so-called coincidences (there are more, but space does not permit further elaboration), all perfectly aligned and orchestrated, convince me with 100% certainty that this is not at all coincidental. Rather, God is encouraging us to pursue this idea. We'll see what He has in store.

Tom O'Boyle may be reached at tom@beverlyheights.org. Your prayers are appreciated as we embark on this exciting and challenging adventure.

The church as Giant Eagle?

Reflections on 'staying put,' from Rick Wolling

My dear friend, Dick Swanson, the first anniversary of whose death I noted last week, was not a prideful man.

I never heard a boastful word cross his lips but, in private, he expressed delight in a few things. First and foremost, Dick was proud of his family, his wife, Marcia, and his two children, David and Sherry. He was proud of the company he built and, justifiably so, of his support efforts for the Leukemia Society and the Pitt Golden Panthers.

Additionally, Dick never tired of reminding me of this: for the 85 years of his life he was a member of only one church, Beverly Heights. Dick was born, baptized and confirmed at Beverly Heights. He returned to Beverly Heights after university and a tour in the Navy, and for all of his adult life he served Beverly Heights as a deacon, elder, Sunday School teacher and pastoral confidant. One church. Eighty-five years. If Dick wasn't such a modest man, that would have been something to brag about!

A modern, mobile population now precludes such stability. Gone are the days when the availability of jobs encouraged Pittsburghers to stay here for life. But there's something else at work here. Too often the church is viewed by Christians as if they were shopping for groceries.

What makes a store like Giant Eagle so popular among consumers? My personal list includes a "top five": convenience, variety, quality, service and parking. Giant Eagle was close to my home, the store had everything I needed in abundance and variety, and the best brands with the highest quality were always available. There were pleasant people to help me locate what I needed and I could always find a place to park, except on the day before Thanksgiving!

I know people, my wife included, who don't share my enthusiasm for one-store loyalty and, consequently, shop in multiple stores. That's what being a "consumer" is all about, right? Regrettably, it's what we observe in the church, too.

People approach the life, ministry, people and Person of the church as consumers. They demand satisfactory answers to such questions as these:

- Does the church meet my needs?
- Does the church have all the ministries I want?
- Is every sermon inspiring or Sunday School class practical?
- Are my kids happy and are they with their friends?
- Is the style of worship to my liking?
- Does the church make me feel proud to be a member?

We are witnessing the commoditization of the divine. The profile of a church worthy of attendance by some folks is endless. When all the boxes are not ticked on the checklist, and every need of every family member is not met, then other churches exist to satisfy one's

shopping needs.

Why not? There's also Whole Foods, Trader Joe's, Shop 'N Save and Fresh Market, not to mention Costco and Sam's Club and plenty of other churches in the area with better parking, more convenient schedules, greater variety of programs and friendlier people. Why not switch? Isn't that what competition is all about?

Such a view from below, which sees the church solely from a human point of view, is unholy and wrong. A view from above begins by asking: "What is God's view of the church? What is God's role for the church? What was God's cost for the church? What is God's purpose for the church?"

Only then are we positioned to ask the more personal question: "What would God have me do about this church, imperfect though it is?" For 85 years, His answer to Dick was, "Stay!"

Pastor Emeritus Rick Wolling served as senior pastor of Beverly Heights for 33 years until his retirement last November. He can be reached at rick@beverlyheights.org.

