



Beverly Heights
Presbyterian
Church

scattered seeds.

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

January 2020



Relentlessly Relational



That's the phrase Pastor Nate uses to describe our new model for Student Ministries. But it's an apt descriptor of this church as well. The photos displayed here and inside, as part of the Year in Review timeline, testify that ours is a relentlessly relational congregation – in our pursuit of God, in our service to His people. May that continue to be our focus in 2020 and beyond.

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FOR THE PEOPLE OF BEVERLY HEIGHTS CHURCH

My Spiritual Quest

BY TOM O'BOYLE

A 37-YEAR JOURNEY FROM THE WSJ TO BHC

On Dec. 10, I spoke to the ruling Elders of this church, at Pastor Nate's request, summarizing my first year as director of communications. I began my remarks as follows.

Communications is about storytelling so that's how I'd like to begin, by telling you a story.

The story spans 37 years and its full arc was not entirely clear to me until a conversation Nate and I had recently.

The story begins in 1982 when I was a reporter for The Wall Street Journal. I was a baby Christian back then, 26 years old, married to Louise with one infant son Brendan, and attending a small Methodist church in Jefferson Hills. Our minister was an affable fellow by the name of Jim Davis.

Before becoming our pastor, Jim had been an accountant with the United States Steel Corp., but his heart was never in accounting. He'd done it to satisfy his mother's desire that he find a steady income and reliable career. After 21 years, he decided that shekels, and the counting of them, didn't matter.

The Lord was speaking to him and he listened, heeding the call to enter the ministry, at great personal cost and hardship. He suddenly had no income and tuition for three people – himself and two sons in college.

Jim blew through \$100,000 in savings but never regretted it. Based on the testimonies I heard at his funeral a few years ago, plenty of people felt he'd made the right choice.

Nowadays, the trend of men and women leaving their careers to pursue seminary degrees is commonplace but back then, when Jim entered Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in 1976 to get his MDiv degree, it was rare. Virtually no one left the security of the corporate world for what many would view as a crazy whim.

Though Jim's story was ordinary to him because he'd lived it, I came to realize it was in fact unusual and quite remarkable. I investigated further and found other professionals who'd done the same – executives, doctors, dentists – which led to an extensive story The Journal published on its front page in 1982.

Louise O'Boyle with Jean and Jim Davis at their home in Florida in 2003. Rev. Davis performed the marriage ceremony of Debbie and Bruce Thomas. ↓



Spiritual Quest

The Ministry Attracts Professionals Seeking A More Fulfilling Life

A Dentist Turns Seminarian, Psychiatrist Is Chaplain; Money Can Be a Problem

From U.S. Steel to the Pulpit

By THOMAS F. O'BOYLE
Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
By usual measures of success, Robert Amon had made it.
His oral-surgery practice earned him a six-figure income that amply supported his wife and six children. Dr. Amon owned a 14-

Rev. Jim Davis holds Cara O'Boyle (now Webster) on her baptismal day in 1985. She's wearing the same gown her daughter Mae Louise Webster wore when she was baptized at this church last November. It's been worn by 23 descendants of the Hammond family since 1896. ↓



The story, under the headline “Spiritual Quest,” described the trend which I had identified, that of businessmen (and a few women) who were leaving lucrative careers in increasingly larger numbers to pursue careers in ministry and exploring why they had done this. To a man, they had found greater fulfillment and contentment serving Jesus Christ than in the relentless pursuit of fortune and worldly success which had formerly employed and occupied them.

The story got a big reaction and it struck a nerve. As the years passed, I began to realize that the headline “Spiritual Quest” described my spiritual quest as much as anyone else's. I returned to the memory of that story so regularly that it became a recurrent theme. It resurfaced in a book I later wrote.

The question I asked myself was this: I knew the Lord had gifted me with communications skills but was I using them to fully serve the kingdom of God? Yet each time that thought resurfaced, I beat it back.

The timing wasn't right, I'd tell myself, or we hadn't saved enough, or we weren't secure

enough, or a plan hadn't fully presented itself, for me to truly step out in faith. What needed to occur was the death of self, the death of my worldly, career ambitions. It's the same message Jesus delivered to his disciples in Matthew 16:24-25 when he said, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

Being a selfish person, that death of my worldly ambitions took 36 years, a lot longer than it took Jim Davis.

Ultimately, the trigger point was another death when, in May of 2018, our daughter Cara and husband Ben Webster lost their child Amos 20 weeks into her pregnancy. That's when the Lord whacked me across the head and engineered my passage to a second-career vocation working here.

One year ago, I embarked on that journey, after 40 years in the news media, when I started this job. Pastor Nate was a pivotal figure in this transition, as was his prior instruction to “not waste my pain,” in

helping me reframe my thinking.

I've learned many lessons along the way. God is clearly persistent and faithful. He also rewards those who follow Him. But my biggest takeaway is the message I have repeated often over the past year: never underestimate the sovereignty of God. The matrix of events I have attempted to describe over this 37-year span is so intricate that even though I lived it, I cannot begin to fathom its complexity.

All I know for sure is when I say I believe in God's sovereignty “down to my socks,” a phrase Nate has said he likes, it's because those are the shoes I've walked in and the socks I have worn. And they are well worn.

I cannot fully express my gratitude for what a privilege working here over the past year has been for me personally and, more importantly, for the eternal consequences of my salvation in Christ and the work I am doing here on His behalf.

My “Spiritual Quest” has finally come full circle. After 37 years, all I can say is, “Hallelujah and Amen.” And that I need new socks.

2019 TIMELINE

january

Pastor Nate starts first year as senior pastor; ESV Bibles introduced. ↓



Hosted EPC Presbytery of Alleghenies meeting.

april

Men's event throwing axes; no one harmed. ↓



2019 TIMELINE

june



"Shepherd's Shout," week-long Vacation Bible School and picnic. ↑



Apples of Gold, women's mentoring program, restarts. ↑

march

Pastor Emeritus Rick Wolling teaches Lenten class and authors devotional.



may

Podcast debuts; 18 episodes released by year's end net 4,000 plays. ↑



Julie Livingston commissioned as head of GROW Living Stones. ↑

august

New piano delivered; pulpit flips to right. ↑
Reserve Fund established; organ rebuild approved.
Manse sold; replenishes Reserve Fund to \$300,000.



september



Stained-glass history published, as 7-year window restoration ends. ↓

Carl and Pat Templin honored at weekend missionary celebration. ↑
Redesigned bulletin and weekly Gathered Seeds debut.
Mom's Day Out expands to two days.
New church management system introduced.



october

Wednesday Night Heights attracts more than 75 children.



november

Church celebrates 90th birthday; Mt. Lebanon history exhibit opens.
Inaugural Celebration of Worship service, "He Is Worthy."
Women's event arranging flowers; no one harmed. ↓



GROW Living Stones distributes 175 Christmas toiletry gift bags to its meal recipients. ↓

december

Advent Family celebration; Vespers service; Congregational Carol Sing; Christmas Eve services. ↑



2019 TIMELINE

2019 TIMELINE

Losing property but holding fast

During the Advent and Christmas season, I was guest preacher at the Peter's Creek Evangelical Presbyterian Church whose pastor was unexpectedly hospitalized for triple bypass and heart valve replacement surgery. Thankfully, Pastor Brandt is recovering well and will be back to his pastoral duties soon.

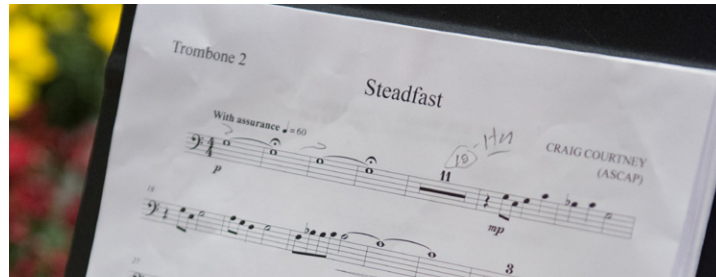
The folks at Peter's Creek are dear brothers and sisters in Christ who are paying dearly for their commitment to His Word and lordship over the church.

Like us, Peter's Creek asked to be dismissed to the EPC denomination. Unlike us, they lost their property.

The Washington Presbytery (PCUSA) sued for ownership of the church, won and designated a small minority as the "true church," leaving the majority of the Peter's Creek congregation bereft of a place to worship. After many years, the court battles continue, most recently with two church members being sued for mishandling church funds, a battle over appropriate accounting methods.

Undaunted, this mighty band of 75 believers gather each Lord's Day for worship in the fellowship hall of St. David's Episcopal Church, where they meet each week and I preached.

Each week I arrived early because of what I observed prior to worship. As people entered from the parking lot, they greeted one another as if they'd been separated for months when, in fact, it was no more than a week. They embraced, knelt down to speak to children and made genuine inquiries about those in need.



The anthem "Steadfast" was commissioned and performed to honor Rick's 33 years of steadfast service to the Lord, and this congregation, as senior pastor.

These folks love the Lord and love each other and I love them for it.

My time at Peter's Creek prompted me to give praise and thanksgiving for how the Lord graciously led Beverly Heights through our own transition from the PCUSA to the EPC, which we navigated in 2007. It wasn't easy but we got through it while growing stronger in faith and love because of it. I've been reflecting on three themes as we traveled through that difficult period in our congregation's history. They are as true and helpful today as were then.

Pastor Nate mentioned the first theme in a recent sermon. "Don't forget to fly the plane," he said, which reminds us that, whatever the legal and ecclesiastical issues buzzing around, we needed our attention fixed on our primary purpose of being the church, called out by God for worship and the advancement of Christ's kingdom.

The second theme is like the first and flows from it: "Keep first things first ... and THIS [dismissal] isn't a first thing!"

During that time, keeping first things first wasn't always easy.

There was worry about losing our property; potential lawsuits; our theological mandate

for separation; and the very real possibility of losing my pension. But of greatest concern was what a separation might do to the harmony of our congregation. Would our folks hold together or would the church split up like a tin drill bit hitting steel?

These sundry concerns occupied our thoughts, prayers and emotions. We needed to

continually remind ourselves that worshipping our Lord, proclaiming His Word, teaching the scriptures, caring for the congregation, reaching out to the lost and being reliable mission partners was our "core business."

These were the "first things," not transitioning from the denomination. They still are and are represented by the banner that continues to fly over Beverly Heights: "Worship is Job #1"

Our third theme is universally, yet wrongly, attributed to St. Francis of Assisi. "At all times preach the Gospel and when necessary, use words" may not be found in any of Francis' writings but it is a truth well attested in the teaching of Jesus.

With reading, hearing and preaching the Word, we must also be doers of the Word. We withdrew from our former denomination because of violation of biblical truth. We needed to ensure that what we knew about biblical principles was being displayed in how we acted as individuals and as a church. Three simple themes, learned and refined in the white heat of congregational challenges, helped us through a milestone moment in our church's history. May they continue to guide us in the days ahead.

Rick Wolling is pastor emeritus of Beverly Heights.