



Beverly Heights  
Presbyterian  
Church

# scattered seeds.

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

*June 2020*



## The Path Forward

THOUGHTS ON  
OUR RETURN  
TO THE  
HOUSE OF GOD

# Closing the Distance

BY NATE  
DEVLIN

The submarine spy-thriller film, “The Hunt for Red October,” is the dramatic story of Capt. Marko Ramius (Sean Connery), who with the help of CIA operative Jack Ryan (Alec Baldwin), is defecting to the U.S. During their escape they encounter another Russian sub that fires two torpedoes at Red October to destroy the Soviet super-weapon submarine.

Capt. Ramius then makes an incredible order that stuns his crew. He orders the nose of Red October to be moved directly in the direction of the oncoming torpedoes. The sonar technician counts down the seconds until impact as the crew prepares for destruction.

But rather than an explosion, the two torpedoes bounce off the hull of the ship. Everyone is in disbelief as the crew realizes what happened. By turning the nose of the submarine into the line of fire, Capt. Ramius closed the distance before the torpedoes could be armed. Capt. Ramius calmly orders “return fire” and saves his crew.

Today, the national dialogue has moved to the theme of return as our leaders consider how to safely reopen our country. The days ahead are ones in which we must now ask not only “How will we reopen?” but also, “What will our ministry look like?” and “Can we return to normal?”

From my perspective, the path forward is clear. As we work to safely reopen our church and return to ministry, we must do so in a way that closes the distance. This is not just my personal conviction. This is a deeply theological principle revealed to us in both the Old and New Testaments.

## JESUS SAVED US BY CLOSING THE DISTANCE BETWEEN HIMSELF AND THE CROSS.

After sin entered the world through disobedience, causing a divide between God and humanity, God began a campaign to close the distance.

God closes the distance by approaching Abraham and giving him a promise; and by appearing to Moses in the burning bush and inviting him to stand in His presence. God closes the distance

through his instruction to build a tabernacle where his presence could be found; and by granting David permission to build God a house in Jerusalem for all the people to gather.

And the greatest of God’s closing the distance between Himself and His creation is the Incarnation of the Son of God. Jesus came to earth to close the distance.

When Jairus’ daughter lay sick, he implored Jesus to heal his daughter. Jesus said, “I will come.” He closes the distance. Finally, in what is called the Johanne Great Commission, Jesus says, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (John 20:21). Jesus commands the church to close the distance.

What does “closing the distance” mean for Beverly Heights Church? It means leaning into potential ministerial opportunities that the Lord is opening up for us, even in the wake of a global pandemic.



### It means worship.

We like to say that worship is job #1 at Beverly Heights. It’s been a tremendous blessing to continue worshipping online during this season of quarantine, but online worship is no substitute for incarnational, embodied, in-person worship in God’s house. It will take time for us all to return, and we will certainly be patient as the church makes the ascent back, but return we must.

### It means discernment.

Before the pandemic, the Session and the staff was discerning whether God was calling us to “go forth” in the expansion of our facilities and advancement of our ministry. The process was put on hold, but the time is coming for us to take up the question again. We may ultimately decide this is not the right season to expand or we may discern that God is indeed calling us in faith to reach out and grow our ministry. Either way, we must close the distance.

### It means development.

In the next few weeks I hope to have a conversation with the leadership of the Presbyterian Church of Mexico to see if a partnership can be developed to plant a church in the South Hills to serve the Spanish speaking communities in our area. Planting a church in a pandemic might sound like a crazy idea and perhaps it is. But I know Jesus has sent us into the world to close the distance and serve our neighbors.

### It means investment.

I am so pleased that the Session has endorsed Peter Chace as a candidate for ordination. You can read more about Peter on page 7. I look forward to walking with Peter as a mentor and friend, investing in his life and ministry just as Rick Wolling invested in mine. The church needs leadership and we must begin the work today to close the distance and make sure good leaders are prepared for the future.

When Capt. Ramius turned the Red October into the path of the torpedo, it looked like the most dangerous decision he could make but in fact it was a decision toward life. Jesus is the Captain of our salvation. He saved us by closing the distance between Himself and the cross. And now our Captain says to His church: “Close the distance. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.”



FOCUS  
ON

# Families, Students, & Children

BY LISA TYGER

These days, it seems almost comical to make plans for two weeks from now much less two months or through the end of the year, and yet I keep right on planning. I have lots of ideas for activities and events, but three principles will guide our children, student and family programming, once conversations about masks and social distance are behind us.

First, flexibility will be key to our programming in the coming months.

The word “pivot” has been frequently tossed about here at the church, by Pastor Nate and others, and I wholeheartedly agree that being able to reimagine an event or program, and pivot accordingly, will be one of the keys to successful programming.

Though churches are exempt from many state-mandated policies, when it comes to protecting our children, we err on the side of their safety.

In addition to the regular policies with which we typically voluntarily comply, we are watching updates to the CDC guidelines to determine how to best proceed.

I also recognize the comfort level and appetite for activities will differ from family to family and their unique circumstances, so attendance at particular events in the past will not be a good gauge for current involvement.

Therefore, my second principle: events need to be easily scalable.

We'll need to be able to accommodate 10 or 50 and we won't



know exact numbers for sure until folks arrive. Initially, I do expect to offer more programs and events to smaller groups of children rather than less frequent larger events. But as the summer progresses, I expect we'll need to be able to easily scale up the event to accommodate larger groups.

Third, we need to think simply.

I'm primarily thinking about programs and events that don't require a lot of prep time, resources or manpower. One way to ensure that we have enough supervision for children is to host family friendly events, preferably outside when we can.

I'm hopeful family programming will allow you to participate at the level your family feels comfortable. Perhaps we'll host a scavenger hunt in the neighborhood around the church and invite families to participate as “teams.” Those that are a bit more comfortable might stick around for refreshments

afterward. Those who are not will take theirs to go. And those who feel very comfortable might stick around and chat while their kids play on the playground. Perhaps a warm summer evening will afford us an opportunity to do an outside movie.

By September, I'm hopeful that beyond excellent hygiene and handwashing, most Covid-19 modifications will be behind us and we'll enjoy being together for Wednesday Night Heights, the Pumpkin Patch and before we know it, Christmas Eve. In the meantime, it's been kind of quiet around here these past few months. I can hardly wait to see you back at Beverly Heights! We are eager and ready for your arrival!

## PRAYER NEEDS

For the Lord to raise up volunteers.  
For our families to confidently return to worship and programs.  
For creative programming ideas this summer.

FOCUS  
ON

# Worship Music

BY ELISSA WINKLER

The saying, “absence makes the heart grow fonder,” has never rung more true for me after enduring 10 weeks of virtual worship.

While my family has worshipped in the sanctuary each week, the lack of our congregation's faithful strains filling the sanctuary has been unsettling, if not deafening. Celebrating Easter Sunday while looking at empty pews broke my heart. Yet this time of separation has not been wasted: my affection for the Church, for Beverly Heights Church in particular, has deepened. It is clear to me now: corporate worship is indeed essential.

Now that the curve is flattening and the risks are reducing, it's time to consider how the various elements of music in worship might be phased back in to our ministry.

The Worship Design team meets weekly to seek wisdom from the Lord and workshop ideas. We anticipate using the summer months to engage smaller ensembles and groups in order to resume full programming by the Fall, calling upon those without high risk factors to lead the way. Because information regarding Covid-19 changes frequently, plans must be fluid and are dependent on many factors.

But one thing is certain: music at Beverly Heights, and corporate singing within the Church at large, will remain.

Last week, I spoke with another church music director in the South Hills. Since his church stopped using music of any kind for their streamed services during the pandemic, he's been watching our live-stream and archived services on our church's website. He was so appreciative of the strong preaching of the word and beautiful music. He especially enjoyed hearing his favorite carol,



“See Amid the Winter Snow,” sung by the choir and played by the string quartet last Christmas Eve.

I, too, have gone back to the archives over the last several weeks.

Watching last November's “He is Worthy” evening of worship brought to mind a favorite quote by the great reformer Martin Luther: “Beautiful music is the art of the prophets that can calm the agitations of the soul; it is one of the most magnificent and delightful presents God has given us.”

The resounding voices: “In Christ Alone, my hope is found; Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation!” There is simply no replacement for corporate worship.

Beverly Heights has been known as the “music church” because of our congregation's remarkable giftedness, but even more so because we uphold the commandments of Scripture.

From the Psalms – “sing to the Lord a new song! Play skillfully!” – to the New Testament – “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, making melody to the Lord with your heart” – our #1 job remains the same: to worship together.

In the coming weeks and months, let us look forward in hope as we remember God's faithfulness to our congregation, and imagine with me how we might offer ourselves in service to the One to whom all praise is due!

*Sing on, ye joyful pilgrims, while here on earth we stay;  
Let songs of home and Jesus beguile each fleeting day;  
Sing on the grand old story of His redeeming love,  
The everlasting chorus that fills the realms above.*  
Fanny Crosby

## PRAYER NEEDS

For wisdom for Pastor Nate, Session and staff moving ahead.  
For protection for our congregation.  
For the Lord to minister to our church family through worship.

FOCUS  
ON

# GROW Living Stones

BY LYNN BELL

GROW Living Stones is God's ministry, founded and built on obedience to His calling and trust for His provision. It has been that way since we answered His call to "feed the hungry." In obedience, we stepped out in faith, with no money and very little food. We held fast to the belief that if the ministry were God's, He would provide. And He did.

We've been blessed by His unflinching faithfulness since we took that first step eight years ago. We've sought to be faithful too, praying, seeking, waiting for His leading so as never to get ahead of Him. That's absolutely essential, but can be challenging when He's silent and the way unclear, which is where we find ourselves today. Fortunately, God does not call us to merely wait. He wants us to "actively wait," to continue exploring options until His will is clear and His plan revealed.

As we pull out of the Covid-19 crisis, it is unclear what our ministry will look like. Will we be able to once again fellowship with our neighbors at sit-down meals? Will we get enough leftover food? Will the format have to change? We don't yet know, but we do know that God has called us to feed the hungry, and He will reveal His perfect plan in His perfect time.

We also know that He wants us to GROW Living Stones, so we have plans to develop and implement programs and services that will help our neighbors identify and meet additional needs and challenges in their lives. Since we want to involve them in the process rather than assume we know what's best for them, we have questionnaires and a process ready to be implemented



when we are able to mingle with them again.

During this time of actively waiting, we are searching for new places to serve meals and offer services in the corridor from Dormont to the Liberty Tunnels. When God called us to make this our primary mission field, He opened a door for us to serve meals in Beechview, and presented us with the possibility of partnering with an interested church in Dormont. We are pursuing that opportunity and believe that God will open other doors, even as He has just closed the door in Mt. Washington.

We are leaving Mt. Washington for good reason. New leadership there wants to grow Vintage Church, and hopes that those who have been attending our meals will join them for worship when they move their Sunday morning service to Sunday evening following a meal they will serve themselves.

While it was difficult leaving neighbors we have come to know and love, many of them will join us at our other locations, and we know that those who can't will still be fed. We see this as part of God's larger plan, and pray His blessings on everyone touched by the change.

We know that He has abundant blessings in store for GROW Living Stones and those He calls us to serve. We are profoundly aware of His unflinching provision for every aspect of His ministry. He has never failed to provide. May we never fail to trust and obey.

*Julie Livingston is executive director of GROW Living Stones. Lynn Bell is on the board.*

## PRAYER NEEDS

For everyone touched by our departure from Mt. Washington.  
For God's guidance as we explore new services and programs.  
For a new place or places from which to serve in the corridor.

FOCUS  
ON

# Peter Chace

BY PETER CHACE

Over the last 18 months, my family and I have come to love Beverly Heights. Though in many ways it's quite different from the Baptist church where I grew up, I knew we were home the moment I stepped through the sanctuary doors.

The Lord has taught me a lot since then. Although I like to think of myself as being rather attuned to what the Lord is saying, if I'm honest, I'm mostly just stubborn: "I've already done this hard part right God? Come on, can we just move on to a less difficult lesson please?" Indeed, I am always happy to learn my lesson as long as it doesn't involve humility or patience!

Enter the fall of 2018. I began sensing a call I had not seriously considered since I was an undergrad at Duquesne over a decade ago: seminary. Ever since my grandfather Rev. Col. Alston Chace (USAF) retired from the pulpit in the early 1990's, I've wondered if I should follow the path to the pastorate. Right out of college I joined the Coalition for Christian Outreach (CCO) in ministry to college students. Over the years I've worked with youth in the city of Pittsburgh, college students at Duquesne University, and now serve in leadership in our home office in East Liberty.

So why go to seminary? I pretty much deserve an honorary M.Div. degree with all the work I've done in ministry, right!? Enter humility.

"Either because men pay too little attention to the training of their mind, or because they think they already know before they learn, the consequence is that they never begin to know."



Okay, Origen (an early Christian scholar whose work I've become acquainted with). Where I come from, those are called fighting words! And yet I knew they were true. They sunk deep in my heart, and over the next few months it became increasingly clear to me that **the Lord was calling me towards pastoral ministry**. So now what?

Well, to use Origen's turn of phrase, I suppose now I embark on the journey of "beginning to know." Seminary is the first step in a series of steps, part of "discernment conversation" between the individual, the Lord and the Church. This June marks the beginning of my second part-time semester at Trinity School for Ministry. It truly is a wonderful and humbling journey, which will be completed in four to five years at the current pace.

You might wonder: How am I dealing with everything on my plate? By seeking to prioritize the spheres of ministry the Lord has entrusted to me: family (I have a wonderful wife, Sarah, and four children); seminary; church; and CCO.

As you might imagine, Pastor Nate has had a few helpful thoughts for me during this period (understatement). I'm grateful to be accepted by the Session of Beverly Heights as a candidate for ordination while in seminary, and I'm enjoying getting involved in ministries where I can serve well: the Missions Committee, His Song youth choir, and Worship Design team.

I look forward with great anticipation to expanding work in the areas of youth ministry over the coming months, especially as we begin to resume activities together as a church. And I genuinely hope to get to know each of you as that happens. Thanks for welcoming us to the Beverly Heights family!

## PRAYER NEEDS

For me in my seminary studies.  
For the family as we adapt to the demands of my schedule.  
For students dealing with school closures.



# Rethinking 'normal' & renewing our call

Today I got a haircut. It's been at least six weeks since I last saw Bri and I was looking a little shaggy. I was glad to get her call to set up an appointment. I happily accepted my appointed day and time. Finally, things were getting back to normal.

What can be more normal than getting a haircut?

In fact, it wasn't normal at all. After texting from my car and waiting in the parking lot, I was instructed to enter the front door which was locked. I needed to wear a mask and wash my hands before I sat down in the chair. The only other person in the shop peered at me over the top of her mask and abruptly stepped back as I passed by.

How, I wondered, does a person get a haircut while wearing a mask? Will scissors cut the elastic ear loop, flinging the mask off my face while exposing all around me to mortal danger?

It was a haircut but it wasn't normal. It's what I'm calling a "Covid Cut." Short on the top and long around the ears.

Over and again, I hear pleas for a return to normalcy. "When will things go back to the way they used to be?"

But is that a good idea? Of course, it will be nice to see everyone's face again. It will be good to have family gatherings and a full sanctuary on Sunday mornings. And I certainly won't miss practicing social



distancing and hearing, "We're all in this together."

I met a dear brother this week in the place where we often spend part of our time together, Rollier's Hardware. When we greeted each other, we heartily shook hands. We did so again when we parted and that felt normal and good.

But what about a return to over-scheduled lives, few if any family dinners, too much spending on eating out and amusements? Should we really return to that part of normal?

In the Bible, there is no greater desire for a return to normal than that expressed by Peter when he said: "I'm going fishing." The other disciples had the same longing and they said, "We'll go with you." The previous three years of ministry was a whirlwind of activity, controversy and emotion, followed by the

cruel trial and crucifixion of the One who called them from their families and occupations with two simple words – "Follow me."

What were they to do now? Return to what was normal, to fishing.

I am struck by Peter's interaction with the risen Christ as he attempts to return to his pre-Jesus life. In our own hope for a return of our lives as they once were, pre-Covid, it may be helpful to read John 21 through a "return to normalcy" lens.

We observe that, post-resurrection (1) Peter gained a renewed appreciation for the majesty and power of Jesus (the nets were filled only after Jesus showed up); (2) Peter was reminded of Jesus' care for him and his daily needs (breakfast was/is the most important meal of the day); (3) Peter was called to restate and recommit his love for Jesus ("Lord, you know I love you!"); and, finally, (4) Peter heard a renewed call to serve Jesus and His kingdom ("Feed my sheep").

As wonderful as it will be to sit in the stands at PNC Park or at a dinner table with friends or on the sidelines of a grandchild's football, lacrosse or softball game – all part of what I know as normal – I'm also looking for a seaside experience like that of Peter whose return to normalcy helped change the world.

*Rick Wolling is pastor emeritus of Beverly Heights Church.*