



Beverly Heights  
Presbyterian  
Church

# scattered seeds.

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

September 2020



## What Heights of Love

REFLECTIONS  
ON WHAT MAKES  
BEVERLY HEIGHTS  
SO SPECIAL.

# Drink some Pepto.

BY NATE DEVLIN

My mother-in-law, Zona Burns, is a wonderful woman of faith who raised five children to love and serve the Lord. As much as I love her, an empathetic and patient caregiver she was not.

At every Burns holiday gathering, I wait for the retelling of the story of Dr. Zona and her bedside manner. After dinner, when everyone has eaten to the point of near discomfort, each of the five Burns siblings take turns telling stories of the time they went to mom with a stomach ache.

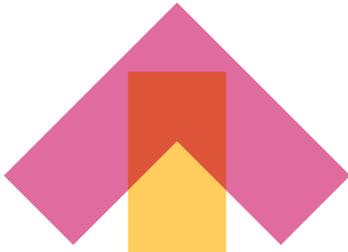
This childhood moment usually took place sometime in the middle of the night, as the sick child walked into mom's bedroom in order to inform her that their stomach hurt. Zona would always dispense the same slumberous yet clear remedy to the ailing child: "Take some Pepto-Bismol and rebuke it in Jesus' name."

My mother-in-law didn't come to faith until later in life. It was through the charismatic renewal of the 1970s that Zona was introduced to Jesus, but also to charismatic theology that tended to believe that adversity (even stomach ailments) were as much the result of unholy supernatural powers as they were of natural causes. And so, the remedy for a stomach ache was to drink a dose of Pepto but also to rebuke the dark spiritual power that was the root cause of the sickness.

Though both Holly and I left the charismatic tradition as adults, I cannot help but recall Dr. Zona's distinctive remedy as I consider the question before us: What makes Beverly Heights distinctive?

The Devlin family came to Beverly Heights for the first time in February of 2004. When we came, Rick Wolling – then senior pastor who would later become my pastoral mentor and good friend – was nearing the end of a season of difficult leadership, mending the church from a painful separation caused by leaders who left the ministry with some 60 families in order to start another church nearby.





Those days were difficult, for both Rick and the congregation, but the more I observed the more I saw a pastor and a congregation who were drinking their Pepto and rebuking it in Jesus' name. What do I mean by that?

Dr. Zona's prescription has, for me, come to mean two things. First, when you are in distress, do the obvious, right thing that will help alleviate the pain but second, push against the underlying cause of the disruption as you push toward the state of peace and well-being that God has in mind (what the Bible refers to as Shalom).

After the congregational exodus in 2003, Rick, the staff and Session were committed to taking the practical yet necessary steps to alleviate the pain. The congregation also pushed against the temptation toward anger and embitterment while continuing to push toward the vision God gave to this church. Programs were retooled or reimagined; new leadership was developed or recruited; forgiveness and longsuffering were modeled, all while remaining committed to job #1, gathering for worship and scattering for mission.

Not every congregation would have responded this way. The temptation toward bitterness, retaliation or distraction is very real but leads to a broken church. But, by God's grace, this congregation weathered the storm and remained faithful to the call.

Surviving a disruption of this magnitude might be an exception to the rule, but doing it twice reveals a

pattern of exceptionalism. And it did happen again, just a few years later when, in 2007, Beverly Heights left the denomination that had been its home for generations, the Presbyterian Church (USA).

When the PCUSA finally rejected orthodox, Trinitarian theology, our church had a decision to make. Would we remain within the PCUSA or would we realign ourselves with another Presbyterian body? What did this congregation decide to do? We decided to drink our Pepto and rebuke it in Jesus' name.

Practical steps were taken to evaluate our options and weigh the risks. Information was shared with the congregation, possible dangers were identified, a lawyer was retained and negotiations commenced. But as these things were taking place our congregation not only pushed against the disordered theological identity of the PCUSA, but we pushed toward a positive vision of what God was calling our church to do and be. So, we paid the \$250,000 negotiated settlement that allowed us to leave with our building. We drank our Pepto and got to work on being the church, loving Jesus and proclaiming His gospel to our world.

During these days of Covid, I have seen this pattern continue in our church. We've done the necessary work to address the presenting problems, but we've never lost sight of the main thing to which God has called His church. And I have every confidence that this pattern will continue in the days ahead. I am proud to be part of such a church, and hope you are too.

# Ye who are weary, come home.

BY LISA TYGER

Years ago, in a Bible study I attended, we considered Jesus' baptism and how Jesus felt as Heaven opened, the Spirit descended and God said: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

Jesus gets a quick glimpse of home. It's a home he's been away from for more than 30 years, before he "officially" begins His ministry, which leads to separation from His heavenly Father and punishment on the cross for every sin ever committed.

Was there overwhelming joy? Did he gasp in sheer delight? Did tears fill his eyes? Were these feelings replaced with anguish as the curtain closed, the dove flew off and God's voice faded away. Was the longing and aching for his home and his Father intensified by that brief glimpse?

Our own separation since Covid began has magnified these thoughts in me. Home is a place our hearts long for.

Beverly Heights is my home, where we learn, through fellowship together and worship together and life together, to love our neighbors as ourselves.

At Beverly Heights, neighbors become family. We sing together. We serve together. We laugh together. And when sorrow or difficulty comes knocking on the door of one, we grieve together and lift each other up. Together, together, together.

Beverly Heights is an embodiment of the word together. We are simply not well suited for being apart. We've had glimpses of home in our worship together this summer, but it only intensifies

the longing to be fully back, to be together as the church that God has established us to be.

In early March, I assumed I'd hear voices all summer of Beverly Heights children floating up to my window. It's easy to take family for granted because they are the people you do life with, the people you count on, the people who are always there ... except now they aren't.



I rarely ask people I meet for the first time if they have a church. I ask, "Do you have a church family?" Attending church and being part of a church family aren't the same thing at all.

When I heard Breanne Makatche's voice on the parking lot two weeks ago, I gasped. A family I used to see every single day!

I hadn't heard those little voices or Bre's laughter out my window since before Covid hit. I raced to the parking lot, tears filling my eyes. I chatted with Bre, watched the boys race, and Lucy totter down the curb. For a moment, heaven opened ... my family was here to visit!

The yearning for my family to come home is always there these days. As I walked away sobbing, I was overcome with grief. Like my mom on Christmas day, I want the family to come home. The whole family. Every single one.

For that day and time, I wait with eagerness and longing ... with anticipation like the season of Advent ... but no definitive date to celebrate ... though I'm confident it will come ... as surely as I know that one day Jesus will come again to take me and my family home.

# Miracles.

BY SCOTT MOORE

I am 10 years old in a Sunday school class at Beverly Heights. While this was more than a half century ago, I still remember it like yesterday.

The teacher shouted out a verse and the whole class raced to see who could find it first, boys vs. girls. The boys are getting their clock cleaned, especially by this fiercely competitive girl named Ruth Paine. I was no help since I do not recall ever having opened a Bible.

But then it happened: “The Sunday School Miracle!” The teacher called out a verse in Acts. I opened up my Bible to that exact page. “Got it!” I screamed. Once the teacher’s hearing came back, he was as shocked as I was.

Fast forward 15 years, I am at Beverly Heights on a Fall Sunday in the early 1980s and Barb Ingram, the assistant pastor’s wife, asks: “Would you like to attend a Christian education opportunity next Saturday?”

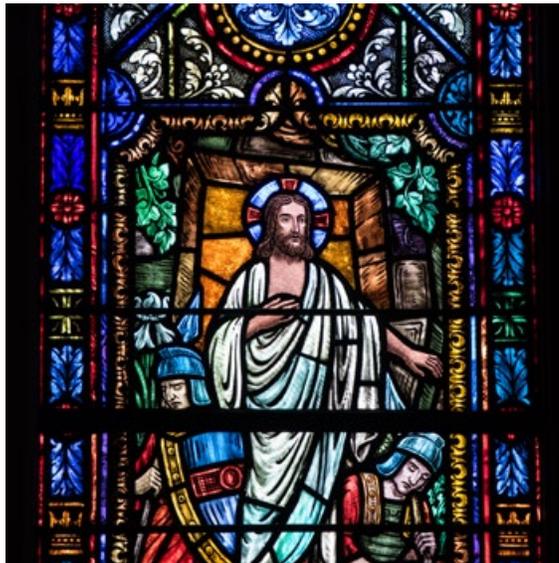
It was an all morning seminar on understanding the Bible. This was back in my single days when I had urgent duties on Saturday morning in the Fall: my touch football game. I thought to myself: “Yeah right – I am going to give up my football glory for a Bible seminar.”

I woke up Saturday morning to a downpour. I took it as a sign that I should go to the seminar. It was probably my best Christian education experience I have ever had.

Fast forward another 10 years and a fairly new white-haired pastor suggested I teach a theology survey course for Adult

Sunday School. I remember looking at this new guy questioning his judgment and thinking to myself, “Hey guy – isn’t that your job?” Well, I taught the class and it was another great growth opportunity for me. (The white-haired pastor also worked out; that would be Rick Wolling. He had white hair even back then.)

What do these three stories have to do with what makes Beverly Heights unique? Just this:



*The far-right panel from the “Life of Jesus Window” where Scott proposed to Nancy.*

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” 2 Timothy 2:15

Under the Session and pastors Dave Dorst, Dave Ingram and Rick Wolling, we have always kept our focus on the Bible and rightly handling the word of truth. I am happy to note Pastor Nate has continued the trend. Sadly, many churches have taken their eye off the ball; man’s thoughts have usurped God’s word. I am thankful for our past and remain vigilant in our future that God’s word reigns!

Lastly, when Tom O’Boyle asked me to write this, he told me I had to include this story: I proposed marriage to Nancy Pichert in front of our church’s big stained-glass window at the rear of the church, with a setting sun shining through. She said yes, another “Miracle.” This makes Beverly Heights unique to Nancy and me.

P.S. For those who are interested, I am teaching an Adult Sunday School starting Sept. 13 based on the above seminar that made such an impact on my life. The title of the class is “Rightly Handling God’s Word.” I hope you can make it.

# The path that led to Ethiopia.

BY PAT TEMPLIN

We moved to Mt. Lebanon in the spring of my sixth-grade year. My parents bought a modest house in Mt. Lebanon because its schools had such a good reputation.

Our family had “attended” the church of another denomination in Cleveland, and I had never heard the gospel.

“Attend church” is what nice, middle-class families did back then! By God’s grace, a neighbor girl who, to the best of my knowledge, was not a believer but an “attender,” invited us to worship here at Beverly Heights.

I found many students my age who were participating in the junior high youth group called “Pioneers.” I jumped at the opportunity, for the sake of getting to know some kids.

Our youth group leader was Rev. Dr. Robert L. Kelley Jr. – the “other Bob Kelley.” He was the person who introduced me to Jesus as my Savior and the book written about Him and God’s people – the Bible.

Our pastor then, Rev. Dr. William McLeister, preached that same word every Sunday, and brought me out of my biblical illiteracy.

Bob Kelley challenged us weekly to think about how the Bible related to our lives and called us to follow Christ. It was that teaching which led me into the mission field in Ethiopia with my husband Carl and back to the mission field right here in Pittsburgh. (And 67 years later I’m still here and still at it.)

For that steady, faithful leadership and teaching through the years, I thank God.



# Dad, I want to be a missionary.

BY JULIA PIECKA



Growing up in Beverly Heights, I remember missionaries coming to our Sunday school classes to talk about the work they were doing in other countries. I would leave fascinated by the stories they shared, and the way God was using them. I recall one Sunday afternoon telling my dad that I was going to be a missionary some day and tell people about Jesus. Little did I know then my statement would actually occur.

A milestone in that journey came while reading the bulletin one Sunday morning: "Sign-up for WV Mission Trip this summer!" It never occurred to me that mission trips were something young people do. I told my mom about it, and I insisted that instead of going to camp that summer I wanted to go to West Virginia.

In the summer of 2009, I gave my life to Christ while I was on that trip. I was only 13 then, but I knew at the time that the Lord had placed a calling on my life. I went on the mission trip four more times after my first time. I loved the Storehouse of God and the surrounding community in West Virginia.

After high school, I attended West Virginia University to get a Bachelor's degree in Social Work. During my junior year, I began asking what I might do after graduation. I had worked with Urban Impact Foundation in the summer as a camp counselor for their Summer Day Camp program, and I was hooked!

The students and the mission that Urban Impact had for the North Side of Pittsburgh had captured my heart, and I knew I wanted to join them in ministry. While serving at camp, I met one of their Urban Missionaries who told me about a trip she did called the World Race. She traveled to 11 countries in 11 months while serving the Lord. Immediately I knew I had to apply.

I went on the World Race in August of 2018 after graduation with the support of Beverly Heights. Coming back to the states, I found myself back at Summer Day Camp with Urban Impact realizing that this is where the Lord had called me to be. I now serve as the Tutoring Center Urban Missionary.



The Tutoring Center is our after-school program. I oversee the program, which helps to provide our students with academic resources and tutoring outside of school. I help make sure our students receive extra literacy and math tutoring, Christian Education and a hot meal. Although Covid has made all situations more complicated, we are able to meet with students, mostly one-on-one.

This church has a long history of sending missionaries out into the world so they might proclaim the gospel. I am so very blessed – and grateful – for your encouragement and support in helping me realize my dreams!

*Urban Impact is doing a program this Fall called Learning Lab. You may reach Julia at this email – [julia.piecka@uifpgh.org](mailto:julia.piecka@uifpgh.org) – if you are interested in volunteering.*



# The red door church.

BY ART FLICKINGER

When my wife Tracey and I were expecting our first child 36 years ago, we felt it necessary to find a church so we could have our baby baptized.

We both had faith backgrounds. Mine was Roman Catholic and Tracey's Mennonite. We agreed not to consider the Catholic church and went looking for a Protestant church. Neither of us went to church except for Christmas and Easter after college. Sundays were for reading the paper, brunch and football.

We started our church search on Washington Road and spent several months visiting various congregations. We really didn't know what we were looking for, nothing seemed to click. Beverly Heights was the last church we visited.

While I was used to keeping a low profile in the very back row during this church-search phase, people here seemed to notice us as visitors. They were very friendly and interested in making our acquaintance.

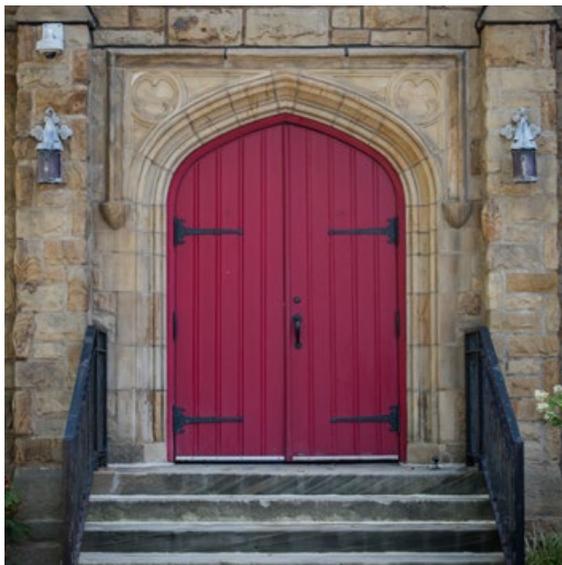
The sermon topic that day was Christ's blood sacrifice on the cross for our sins. I knew from my Catholic catechism that Christ died on the cross for my sins, but I never understood it.

The message hit me like a slap in the face! It was the first time I had heard the gospel preached in a church in my life and I finally understood the significance of it.

We had found a church and we were both very excited about it. I couldn't wait to hear more about the gospel the following week. Now, 36 years later, four children have been baptized and confirmed here. We have all been blessed by this church where

the gospel is preached, the word of God honored and worshipping God is the top priority.

Beverly Heights is an oasis in a world gone dry which has turned away from God's word and allowed the world's values to creep into the church. Ours is a church which has a long history of preaching the word from the pulpit. That makes us unique in today's culture. We take worship seriously and do so with music, preaching, tithes and offerings.



Fellowship is fostered and is a big part of church life. Sunday school teaching for both children and adults is another priority, as is passing on the faith to the next generation.

But what truly makes us unique in my mind is we have red doors out front. It's not that they're painted red - it's what the color red symbolizes. Several Bible verses come to mind:

Ephesians 2:13: "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the **blood** of Christ."

Ephesians 1:7: "... in him we have redemption through his **blood**, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,"

1 Peter 1:18-19: "... knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious **blood** of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."

We are a "Red Door Church." We enter the door washed by the **blood** of the lamb of God for our salvation. We are preached to by a "Red Door" pastor, taught "Red Door" lessons, for we are a "Red Door" people. That's why we come here.

# This church has preached a masterpiece.

BY TEMPLE MEEK

When asked about what makes Beverly Heights distinctive, my mind immediately recalled John 13:35, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another.”

The members of Beverly Heights epitomized this verse recently when my wife Annie passed away. While we have never been members, we have visited often when we were visiting my mom, Marilyn Meek, and my sister Micki Cantine.

We have become acquainted with some of you, but to most we are not well known. In spite of this near anonymity, the church members responded with great love toward me and my children when she was admitted to the hospital.

One aspect of the love spoken of in John 13 is that it is a love that cannot be reciprocated in kind. The love shown to us was overwhelming. It was not deserved or earned but was given to us without any thought of, or demand of being returned.

Your response to our tragedy demonstrated, in ways that mere words could not, the love of Christ. The outpouring of love, exhibited in acts of service, spoke loudly about the character of the congregation of Beverly Heights.

I believe one of the most important ways for the gospel to be preached is through the actions of “ordinary” Christians. Much honor is given to men who preach eloquent sermons but little is said of the everyday lives of church members. This church has preached a masterpiece. Eternity will no doubt record the everlasting effects of your outpouring of Christ-like love. Your actions commend you as true disciples of Jesus Christ. On behalf of my family, thank you.

*Temple Meek is an instructor at Emmaus Baptist College in Brandon, Florida.*



*Annie and Temple.*

# Do you love the building— or me?

BY SAS ARGENTINE



My husband Arge and I joined Beverly Heights Church almost 40 years ago. Back then what made it distinct to us, as newcomers, was how welcoming and friendly it was.

We had visited several churches in the South Hills with nary an acknowledgement of our coming or going. When we came here on the first Sunday, Mel Bickel greeted us warmly. He welcomed us back a week later. We had found our church home.

As I've discovered over the years, however, there is a lot more to a church home than having a welcoming committee, offering great programs or occupying a beautiful building.

We've been through a lot together, enduring not one but two monumental exits in the past 20 years.

The first of these was when the associate pastor and many members decided to leave our body. It was a painful blow in the life of Beverly Heights at the time.

Yet it prepared us for OUR exit a few years later from one denomination to another.

On both occasions, Rick Wolling was resolute and steady. His leadership was an immense help to us. Years before, when he was studying for his Doctorate of Ministry, Rick devised the "gathered/scattered" mission blueprint that you see as symbols on the side entrance doors, on our church literature and even on our choir robes! There's been a strong intentional emphasis ever since, as we seek to honor the Lord in the 97% of our time when we are scattered.

This gave us a clear sense of direction and purpose, which carries

through to this day in our worship and all aspects of our ministry.

In the midst of our departure from the denomination, I remember sitting in the choir loft during that time, enjoying the best view in the house, our stained-glass windows that look out onto Washington Road. I recall thinking: How sad it would be to leave a building of such splendor.

Then the Lord Jesus seemingly whispered in my ear: "Do you love the building more than you love Me?" I realized that Beverly Heights was far more than the handsome building we worshiped in - Beverly Heights Church is the PEOPLE who worship and work and grow in our faith together.

Little did I know then, but God was knitting me to a community and offering me lessons for the adversity I would later encounter in my own life, when my beloved husband Arge died last year.

This body of Christ prays continually for the people on our prayer request list. The Lord is at work as a result.

The "prayer warriors" are a busy group. They're just one of the many ministries this church conducts, through which we pay tribute to Christ. We serve meals to

the poor in our community; knit prayer shawls; play and sing music; teach children, teens and adults.

We also support one another and share each other's heavy burdens. I've been a beneficiary of that.

You have loved me with your words of comfort and encouragement. The Lord's love is in action through the people of Beverly Heights Church. That's the most blessed distinction to have!



# Sisters in life & in Christ.

BY LINDA BRENTIN  
& SUE BURDITT

Beverly Heights Church is a very caring community of believers who pray for one another as well as meeting their physical, spiritual and emotional needs.

The meal, card and prayer shawl ministries are examples of how the congregation helps take care of those in need. So are the K groups, Bible studies, and welcome ministry, which help to build community.

We have so many gifted teachers and musicians in our congregation that help to enrich our worship. We also have an emphasis on caring for and teaching our children and youth.

The sermons are biblically based and the messages don't change with society's changing values. Rick Wolling's 33-year longevity as senior pastor was unique in this day and age.

Our mother, Vernette Gaylord, gave him baked goods virtually every week until her passing in 2002. He was the son she never had!

Growing up at Beverly Heights was an important part of our lives: church school and worship services on Sunday; youth club on Wednesdays; confirmation classes in junior high; choir starting in kindergarten; Christmas caroling in the neighborhood; and youth

retreats. Many of our friends attended Beverly Heights, too.

Both of us were confirmed and married here. In fact, Sue and her husband-to-be Frank first met at the Wednesday afternoon youth club while in elementary school. He was a troublemaker during choir practice. As was Linda, on occasion. Sue was the obedient child, Linda the scamp.

Frank's family moved to Indiana. He met Sue again in 10th grade English class, after they had moved back, and started dating. They were married at the church in 1969.

As adults we've been deacons, VBS leaders, participated in Bible studies and served on many committees.

Our presence here has helped us to understand the Bible and what it means to be a Christian.

It has been our anchor through difficult times such as when our parents passed. Our dad died hours after remarking to Linda, as they entered church, that he felt tired and needed a vacation. He died that afternoon while working on the car.

Beverly Heights has been a fixture for both of us throughout our lives. It helped us build a foundation for raising our children and grandchildren. The fellowship is amazing here. Our lives wouldn't be the same without our church home, Beverly Heights.



*Linda (on the left, looking for trouble, which she usually found) and sister Sue, center, in front of their home on Vermont Drive, across from Foster School.*

# Church Gypsies find a home.



BY TOM O'BOYLE

When we came to Beverly Heights Church in 1993, we had just left a Baptist church down on Washington Road in Upper St. Clair.

Leaving a church is never easy, but in this instance we made the right call for our family. It was a very small church and there were virtually no programs for our children (other than those Louise and I ran).

Our young son Brendan had an expression when we'd search for a new place of worship – he called us “church Gypsies.” But our Gypsie-hood ended when we visited Beverly Heights at the invitation of Bruce and Debbie Thomas.

On that first day, I encountered after the service a handsome man with jet-black hair standing outside near the playground.

“I’m Joe Williams,” the man said, sticking out his hand (back in the days when people shook hands). He stood straight, looked smart and greeted me with the warmth of a long-lost friend.

“Welcome to Beverly Heights,” Joe said.

If you were to hire a paid ambassador to greet newcomers, you'd be hard pressed to find a better job candidate than Joe Williams.

You immediately had the sense, upon meeting him, that even though we'd just met, you had known him for a long time. It was as if I was being welcomed by someone who'd been patiently waiting for me. Hard to explain, but easy to identify when you sense it. Not unlike the feeling that overcomes a person when they are born-again. It's the pervasiveness of the spirit of Christ and something I sense often when I speak to people in this congregation.

I'd like to say that Louise and I, with our three children in tow, stayed happily ever after, but that was not the case.

The storms and valleys soon came, as is often the circumstance in the fallen world we inhabit. Louise writes eloquently about that in her piece on the opposite page.

There were valleys to come even for the church. Years later, just after our marriage almost split apart, this church did split. Then there was a denominational schism. We're in another valley right now, the third in my time here.

But through it all, the spirit of Christ has reigned. Scripture says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

Our leaders – our elders, staff and senior pastors, then and now – didn't just blithely mouth assent to that proposition. They have lived it, relentlessly. Over hill and dale, valleys and mountaintops and every conceivable terrain in between.

The Bible doesn't promise us a life free of heartache or travail. Far from it. Instead, we are told to die to ourselves. Scripture teaches us to trust in His sovereignty over all things. God's plans are NOT, nor

will they ever be, the plans of man, we are told.

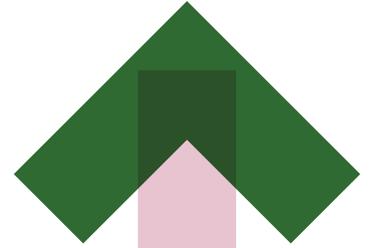
My companions on this journey – pastors Rick and Nate and many others – always, always, steadfastly and courageously, pointed me in the direction of the One who did, does and will guide us through the valleys of the shadow of darkness. They never lost sight of this life-altering, game-changing proposition.

And for that, I give the greatest of thanks that any person could ever offer up.



# Steadfast love amid valleys.

BY LOUISE O'BOYLE



When I began writing about what draws me to worship at Beverly Heights, I naturally thought of the open and welcoming arms of the congregation. That's what brought us to make our home at Beverly Heights 27 years ago. Not only had we found a church that taught and lived the gospel, but we became part of a community to live out the love that Jesus calls us to in the scriptures.

But as I more deeply reflected on why our family is here at Beverly Heights, more than "warm, and welcoming" came to my mind. We've experienced the cliffs and valleys that characterize pilgrims' lives. And, as we did, we walked alongside brothers and sisters in Christ who loved us through and helped us back onto firm ground. And in return, we were encouraged and able to share what we had learned with others. A beautiful circle joined in Christ.

When Tom and I experienced marriage difficulties, our church family leaned in to help us. They held us up in prayer and sustained us as we broke and began to rebuild. Most lovely of all, they accepted us in our sin and shared their own stories of failure. Our pastor counseled us and we simply felt the love we needed to reset and put our eyes back on the one who loves us best. That is Beverly Heights.

Another time, our son experienced health problems that brought him back to live with us for an extended time. Even in churches,

people feel the need to be cautious about how much they share their troubles. But, at our church, people lean in. They comfort, share and show concern for what a family is experiencing. Possibly, it is mostly the work of small groups and how we get to know our fellow brothers and sisters when we meet on a regular basis. For sure, it is about our prayer chain and how so many are praying for their brothers and sisters on a regular basis. That is Beverly Heights.



*Louise holds Sommer Louise Westgate, born Aug. 12 in Bethlehem, Pa., to parents Erin (O'Boyle) Westgate and husband Scott.*

Another of our valleys involved the premature birth of a grandson at 20 weeks of pregnancy. God sent the word through his pastors as they gently pushed to know what was happening so they could serve those who were hurting. The love and comfort that was given by the leadership of our church was like a salve on a terrible wound. At a time when nothing could help, their love got us through. That is Beverly Heights.

As we look forward to the reopening of our church programs after this time of Covid, I am thrilled to know that we will again be able to be in "close" physical proximity to our brothers and sisters in Christ. But, in another way, I have been aware this entire time that we have been together even while apart. We are the accumulated threads that make the fabric of God's church.

And, honestly, all I had to do is pick up the phone and call, or drop off Ugandan Gold coffee at someone's door, or read one of many emailed prayer requests to know that our love was strong and we were in this life together in Him! That is Beverly Heights to me!

# It's the people.



BY BOB THOMSON

What distinguishes Beverly Heights from all other Bible believing and teaching churches? I believe it is the people. To illustrate I will show how our family has been impacted by them.

Then Senior Pastor Rick Wolling actually came to visit me in the hospital even though it had been several years since I was a member of Beverly Heights, having left for another local church because I didn't like what our denomination then was doing.

Our children were taught by Sunday School teachers and youth leaders like Dave Clarke, Tom and Judy Robinson, Dick Swanson, Dave Ingram, Brian Tome, Dick Staaf, Scott Cunningham, Randy and Beth Duncan and Joe Williams.

Heather still remembers some of the things Dick Swanson taught her in the sixth-grade class. Scott Moore was the Young Life leader when our two oldest boys were in high school. He attended their soccer games. One was influenced to become a campus minister.

Bette worked for 20 years in the preschool, first under Mrs. Metzger and then under Louise O'Boyle. At the time, Jubilee Christian School also was housed in Beverly Heights. Natalie Thomas was the principal. Eventually, because of that connection, we adopted one of the Jubilee students as our son.

John Ferguson was one of the organizers of the Saturday morning Men's Prayer Breakfast and Bible Study. He was also the Treasurer of Mt. Lebanon and got me involved in local politics, eventually persuading me to run for Commissioner.

Eric John and I would meet in the early morning to run at the Mt. Lebanon High School track. He was 6-foot-5 so we looked like Mutt and Jeff. Later we hiked together for three days down to the bottom of the Grand Canyon. Eric and Vici would annually invite

us to their home on New Year's Eve.

The Templins, Heindels, O'Boyles, Rheinharts, Doyles and Thomas' have for years joined us annually on Valentine's Day to celebrate marriage.

For years, one of Bette's best friends was Ginny Adams – a member of Beverly Heights, a neighbor, prayer partner and piano teacher to two of our children. She has gone home to be with the Lord, but her spirit lives on in her daughter Amy Gaither who attends Beverly Heights with her husband and children.



No other church has symphony-caliber musicians playing to the glory of God week after week, all influenced by long time members Joe and Anne Williams.

How can one church have two men with the gift of greeting who know everyone in the congregation, both with the same first name and a last name that starts with the letter B? Dave Barker and Dave Brueggemann.

Some people are institutions all by themselves. Marilyn Meek is one of those. It has been rumored that before she retired she was the one actually running the church, and there are some who claim she secretly continues to do so.

Best of all is watching children grow up in the church who continue to worship here. I have already mentioned Amy Gaither. I have been able to see Josh Cantine overcome tragedy and grow into a fine young man.

When Bette first started teaching at the pre-school, one of the 3-year-olds was Amy Barron, now the church's administrative assistant. Chris Fisher has returned after an absence and now serves on the Security and Tech Support teams. I could cite many others but Tom gave me a word limit.

# Our prayer warriors take on Covid.

BY NORM HARGRAVES

When I think back on the 13 years my family and I have spent worshipping at Beverly Heights, I find many examples that confirm we made the correct decision to walk through these doors.

The things that stick out in my mind are the caring, loving and strong sense of Jesus' call to be the "light salt and leaven" in a world that needs His love. A recent example reminds me of this more than anything I can remember.

On Thursday, July 23, my sister Angela texted me that she had tested positive for the Covid virus. My head was spinning but when I gathered my wits, I told her I would be praying for her. I then asked if I could get the "prayer warriors" from my church involved. She said sure.

As a Christian woman, my sister knows people pray for you when asked; however, at Beverly Heights I knew it meant much more.

Within days, the prayer shawl team asked if she would like to have a shawl sent to her. She quickly said yes but I could sense she did not yet grasp the full extent of the BHC warriors.

By the end of the next week, she texted me to let me know about

all of the cards and letters she had received. She said, "I cannot believe that a bunch of people who do not know me would care enough to send me cards, letters, etc."

None of this surprised me. I texted back, "We are all brothers and sisters in Christ. Some of us meet here in person while others we only meet once we get to our Father's house."

This struck her for a moment. She said, "That is so true."

She asked that I convey this message to everyone: "The prayers had such an impact. I am thankful to have found such an amazing church family." She has never seen anything like this, she says - and our parents were both pastors! She also asked me to relay this message: she loves us all and is very grateful.

Angela is almost fully recovered now.

None of this strikes me as odd. This experience speaks to the essence of the people here at this church. A body of followers of Jesus Christ which takes its job seriously and will do, say or go anywhere and to anyone to share His love.

Thank you for the profound difference you are making in the lives of others.



*Angela Hargraves with her middle daughter, Amanda.*

## BETWEEN | SUNDAYS

BY RICK WOLLING

# Why did you come— and come back?

The most difficult part of being a pastor is saying goodbye when members leave due to job transfer or personal reasons. The emotional wrench is softened, however, when asked to help people identify a “good church” in their new locale.

“What should I look for in a new church?” I was often asked. My list includes a church where Christ is central; where the Bible is held high; where the gospel is proclaimed in its fullness; where worship is vibrant; where missions is strong; and where one’s gifts can be recognized and used to advance the kingdom of God. That’s not to say these are always the sole reasons one comes to a church.

A former member of Beverly Heights from long ago promised his family that when they moved out into the suburbs, they would attend the church closest to their new home. Beverly Heights was the second closest; St. Anne’s (Roman Catholic) was the first.

More recently a newly arrived couple put a 20-minute limit on their drive to church. They drew a circle around their home on a map and Beverly Heights fell within the line. They attended once and never left until they were transferred again, years later.

During 30 years of teaching Inquirers’ classes, I regularly asked potential new members two questions: Why did you come to Beverly Heights the first time? And why did you come back? The answers I received proved to be consistent over the years.

People first came to Beverly Heights, not because of an advertisement in the newspaper, not due to a neighborhood mass-mailing campaign or through social media presence but because a Beverly Heights member, excited about the ministry, invited them to visit.

But why did first-time attenders return? I confess that my ego wanted to hear that it was the preaching that brought people back or the worship or Bible teaching. Though these things were high on the list,

invariably they were not the number one reason. What topped the list was “the people.”

People returned to Beverly Heights because of our people. It was our friendliness, our welcoming spirit, the readily observed sense of family, the relationships.

The idea of exceptionalism makes me queasy, especially in reference to the church. It smacks of pride, superiority and exclusion, both of which are antithetical to the One in whose name we gather. But if we think biblically, exceptional is precisely how the Body of Christ is described.

In the Old Testament the people of God were called and special people and were, therefore, to be separate from unbelievers in worldview and in lifestyle. In the New Testament, the Apostle Peter said of the church: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.”

Indeed, the word “church” (ecclesia) means “the called-out ones.” We are, therefore, the exception to those who are not the church, not the called-out ones. Exceptional is an accurate way of describing the church, but without the exclusiveness, pride and superiority the term so often connotes.

Back to what makes Beverly Heights an exceptional church – the people. It is a delight to observe that throughout the years of regular change – denominational, pastoral, missional – one thing has remained constant. It is our love for one another, our love for the lost, our love for the hurting and our love for our neighbor, whether we know him or not.

It is no innate goodness in ourselves that makes us exceptional but our Lord Jesus Christ who has changed us as individuals and who, by His Spirit, lives among us and enables us to love one another as He has loved us. May this be the part of Beverly Heights that never changes.

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

