



Beverly Heights
Presbyterian
Church

scattered seeds.

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2022



Defining the culture of Beverly Heights.

WRITTEN BY
NATE DEVLIN

LIVING *by* faith

A number of weeks ago I had the opportunity to preach a sermon about culture in a sermon series I titled, "That Holy City." In the series I suggested that the church is a city, which means it is also a community, and every community necessarily shares a culture.

Culture is a challenging word to define, but it always includes a few essential features. First, all cultures include things like knowledge, artifacts, beliefs and values, which help to form the community. Secondly, culture is sustained by the community through common practices and shared institutions and memories. Thirdly, a culture must be passed on to successive generations if the community is to survive. Finally, good cultures sustain a community while bad cultures eventually erode a community.

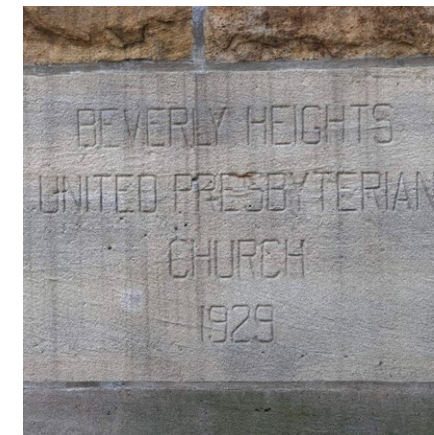
Let me give you an example. Israel was a community of people that shared a unique culture. That culture was not primarily defined by things like kosher law; rather the distinguishing feature for Israel was faith. Israel was formed by faith when Abraham believed God and His promise. When the culture of Israel practiced a shared commitment to faithfulness and passed their faith on to their children, then the community thrived and enjoyed peace and blessings in the land.

But when Israel's culture adopted the cultural practices around them by committing idolatry, they passed their idolatry on to their children. This new cultural commitment was unable to sustain the community and Israel began to suffer oppression, defeat and ultimately exile. As Moses said to the Israelites before entering the land, there are two ways to live: a culture of faith, which leads to life; or a culture of idolatry leading to death (Deuteronomy 31:11-20).

Recently, I've been asking myself: what are some of the defining cultural features of Beverly Heights Church? Many things could be identified, as you'll see in the pages of this newsletter,

but I'd like to suggest what I believe is the chief cultural commitment that both defines and sustains our church, and that is **faith**. At Beverly Heights Church, we have a culture of faith. We learn faith, we value faith, we practice faith, we pass faith on to our kids and our ministry is sustained by faith. All that we do as a church is by faith.

To say that our church has a culture of faith is to say something rather abstract. What does faith mean, exactly?



What I want to suggest is that faith is a type of vision. It is a way of seeing things. Now you might be thinking, this definition of seeing things is at odds with faith, which in Hebrews is defined as "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things **not seen**" (Hebrews 11:1). Or it runs counter to the apostle Paul's instruction when he said, "We walk by faith and **not by sight**" (2 Corinthians 5:6).

Isn't faith supposed to be blind? Actually, no, faith is a type of sight.

To be a community of faith means that in our church we strive to see the world in a particular way. We want to see the world

as God has made it, as he describes it in his Word.

We want to see our lives in light of God. We want to be like Elisha's servant, whose eyes were opened to see the angel army (2 Kings 6:6). C.S. Lewis famously said, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." Likewise, faith is something that illuminates everything else so that we can actually see things as they really are and live accordingly.

A number of years ago, our congregation had to make a decision whether or not to leave the PCUSA denomination, which meant that we could possibly lose our building. We had to decide as a church what to do and where to go.

The natural eye quickly saw the risk and potential losses in the situation, but our leadership looked at things with the eyes of faith and saw what needed to be done. We made our decision by faith and determined to leave.

Years later, our church faced another challenge when we were confronted with the Covid-19 pandemic. Again, our leadership evaluated the situation with the eyes of faith and every decision of the Session was determined by faith. Paul said, "The righteous shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11), which is exactly what we try to do each and every day as a community of faith. It is our culture.

In seven years, Beverly Heights Church will celebrate its centennial anniversary. If the Lord tarries and we find our church still open in 2029, it will be because our church kept the faith and passed the torch on to the next generation. I believe the Lord blesses faith.

WRITTEN BY
TOM O'BOYLE

the red DOOR church

While Beverly Heights is not a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, any examination of our worship life here would surely establish that ours is an “orthodox” church in character if not name.

That is, we adhere to certain fundamental truths about God, Jesus and the Bible.

So visible is our orthodox identity that when Elder Art Flickinger wrote a story for this publication in September 2020, he nicknamed us the *Red Door Church*. It was an accurate and even poetic description. Our red doors out front are indeed notable but not because “they’re painted red – it’s what the color red symbolizes.” It symbolizes the **blood** of Jesus Christ.

That we are a *Red Door Church* may be the most important aspect of our culture. There are many reasons we gather here in this place, and many things which make us distinctive, but above them all is why we gather and scatter – by Him and for Him, as it says in our church credo.

During this Lenten season, I have been considering our *Red Door* identity, which was brought home to me in our recent worship service on March 20.

That morning before worship I’d read Pastor Emeritus Rick Wolling’s Lenten devotional entry for the day. “There is a penalty for sin,” it read. “Our only hope is that our alienation [from God] can be transformed into reconciliation. And that is what God accomplished on the cross.”

A little while later, confirmand Caroline Reed gave a public proclamation of her faith. “I am a junior in high school and notwithstanding the pressures of a public school, I am a devout Christian and my friends know this,” she said.

Pastor Nate then preached as follows: “If we were to summarize our text for this morning, the idea that we’re trying to get at is this: Sin is an evil power that darkens the mind.” The title of Nate’s sermon was “The Sin That Deceives,” from his Lenten series, *Go & Sin No More* (with the S in Sin shown by a black snake on the bulletin cover).

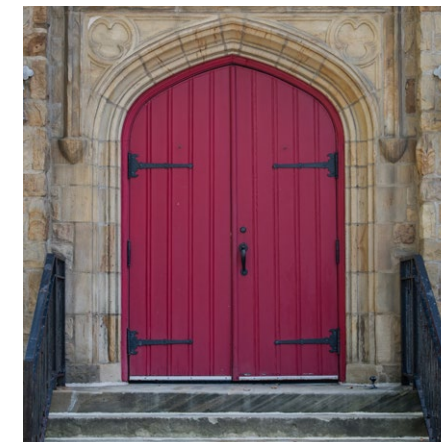
Preaching on sin identifies a church as orthodox. In his classic book *Christianity and Liberalism*, author and biblical scholar John Gresham Machen (1881-1937; pronounced MAY-chen) noted that if your church doesn’t preach on sin, then it has

fallen victim to liberalism.

“At the very root of the modern liberal movement is the loss of the consciousness of sin,” he wrote.

At a time when other churches in Mt. Lebanon happily embrace any variety of new theological fashions, but surely wouldn’t dare offend congregants by preaching on sin, Beverly Heights remains defiantly orthodox.

Dr. Machen’s book was published in 1923 and in the intervening 99 years, the gulf between Christian orthodoxy and heterodoxy has grown as wide as the Grand Canyon. But back then, he was prescient. The provocative thesis he put forth in his



book was this: *liberalism is not a legitimate form of historic Christianity but rather a different religion altogether.*

In other words, not all buildings with steeples qualify as churches. For a church to be truly Christian, it must observe a trio of faith essentials: orthodoxy (right beliefs), orthopraxy (right practices) and orthopathy (right loves).

When a new edition of his book was published in 2009, Dr. Carl Trueman, the distinguished theologian at Grove City College who spoke at our inaugural Scattered Seeds Symposium last October, wrote in the Foreword: “... liberalism is totally different from Christianity, for the foundation is different. Christianity is

founded upon the Bible. It bases upon the Bible both its thinking and its life. Liberalism on the other hand is founded upon the shifting emotions of sinful men.”

In the so-called “modernist controversy” in which Dr. Machen was embroiled during the 1920s, he held his ground. He formed the Orthodox Presbyterian Church after he left the liberal Northern Presbyterian Church (which eventually merged into our predecessor denomination, the PCUSA). Dr. Machen also quit Princeton Theological Seminary, where he was a New Testament and Greek professor, to found, in 1929, the conservative Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

That same year the cornerstone for our building was laid on Washington Road. Beverly Heights did not have an especially orthodox character in its early years. Our embrace of biblical orthodoxy began in the late 1970s, as skirmishes within mainline Christianity grew fiercer. But it wasn’t until the arrival in 1985 of Rick Wolling as senior pastor that we made the hard choices which came to define us as truly orthodox.

About 20 years into his pastorate here, after laboring hard for renewal within the PCUSA, Rick attended the denomination’s General Assembly conference. There, he heard words spoken that made his head spin. A report recommended changing terms such as the Holy Spirit to “life giving womb.”

The time had finally come to leave the PCUSA. When we were dismissed from the denomination in 2007, with Rick leading the way, the congregation voted 195-to-4 to leave. We departed for the Evangelical Presbyterian Church with the full ownership of our property, no less.

And that’s the takeaway from this story. God affirmed a faithful decision which affirmed Him. What might have been the greatest catastrophe in the long history of Beverly Heights turned out to be our defining moment – all because we embraced our identity as the *Red Door Church*.

WRITTEN BY
LISA TYGER

RELENTLESS relationships

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. 1 John 4:7-12

As a child, my family attended the same small rural country church in central Pennsylvania that my parents still attend today. It's in a farming community where everyone knows everyone and folks look out for each other.

Since joining the staff leadership team at Beverly Heights, I hadn't had an opportunity to visit that church. However, last August, to celebrate mom's birthday, my sisters and I attended church with my parents. My parents were elated to have us beside them in the same pew we sat in every Sunday as children.

After the service, the fellowship was like a family reunion. Generations of families are represented there. Although it had been many years, I knew nearly everyone. And they knew me. Not just my name, but my husband's name. My kids' names, too, and where they were going to school. They knew where I lived and what I do.

I never heard the term "relentlessly relational" growing up at Salem United Church of Christ in Martinsburg, Pa. But looking back, I recognize that the community there lived out the term every day. They love and serve each other year after year, decade after decade, in relentless relationship, even loving those no longer in membership there anymore.

The same is true here at Beverly Heights. We value people because God values us. We pursue relentless relationship with the individuals God has called to our church. We can think about and discuss practices to pursue relationships with the people here, but the best model is the one God gave us for being relentless in relationship.

At the heart of relentless relationship is love. When we truly love, we delight in ways to express and demonstrate that love.

It isn't a checklist of things we can do.

In our church, relentless relationship means expressing and demonstrating the heartfelt love of Jesus through the conversations we have when we are the church gathered; through the phone calls we make; or the email we send to someone who was missing on a Sunday morning; or the follow-up conversation to express concern or support for something we learned when we were together. Relentless relationship is a meal to a family with a new baby, or someone battling sickness, recovering from surgery or returning home from a hospital stay.



Lisa Tyger, among friends.

It's a card that says, "Remembering your mom. I know this must be a hard day for you on the first anniversary of her death." Relentless relationship is the newspaper clipping of a student's accomplishment sent in the mail with "Congratulations!" scrawled across the bottom.

Relentless relationship is the text that says, "Praying for you today," as that person faces an important interview or challenging test.

Relentless relationship is a hug and vase of daffodils at the doorstep of a

young mom, grieving the infant that she won't be meeting after all. Relentless relationship is celebrating the joys of our church family when the sun is shining and skies are blue. It's also sitting beside them in the ashes when a blow has been dealt that hurts too much for words.

Relentless relationship is a heart full of joy for those in our midst when they rejoice and a broken heart for those when they mourn.

Relentlessly relational means loving one another as Jesus loves us. It's kindness, compassion, tenderheartedness, forgiveness and empathy.

Relentlessly relational welcomes with no partiality. It shows hospitality to strangers and looks to the interest of others. Sometimes that means feasting at the banquet table, providing the loaves and fishes, or taking up our cross and denying ourselves so that the object of our love might thrive.

On Sunday evenings at Fusion, our students are asked to share places where they saw God at work in the prior week. Our students are encouraged and trained to look for people who act as the hands and feet of Jesus so that when the opportunities present themselves, they might bring the Kingdom of God near through their own thoughts, words and deeds.

In our own pursuit of relentless relationships, I believe the encounters we have with the people God sovereignly places in our paths are opportunities to do His work and give Him glory and recognition by loving and serving others in His name.

And in doing that, we relentlessly pursue eternal relationship with Him, and our brothers and sisters in Christ.

WRITTEN BY
LOUISE O'BOYLE

What is our legacy?

The word “legacy” often relates to the money that is left behind when a person dies. I will not use that meaning for the purposes of this story but refer instead to the second definition: “a thing handed down by a predecessor.” In the case of our church community, this “thing” is far more precious than earthly riches.

During Covid, Tom and I became graveyard walkers. We often headed to the Mt. Lebanon Cemetery on a pleasant day for exercise and conversation. As we walked past many headstones, it forced us to consider what we hoped to pass on before our own deaths.

We passed the gravestones of beloved friends from Beverly Heights. What joy to consider the riches Dave and Marilyn Skelly; Dick Swanson; Glenn Rheinhart; Ginny Adams; Helen Burch; Bob Skillen and others had passed down to us.



How does that happen? It got me thinking. In 2 Corinthians 2:14, Paul thanks “God, who in Christ leads us [Beverly Heights folks] in triumphal procession and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.”

A few Sundays ago, I observed our congregation to consider our Beverly Heights legacy – its pleasant aroma.

When Tom and I arrived, I saw friends talking happily in the parking lot. Then I entered the sanctuary, and took my seat next to my family. What a blessing to be greeted with hugs and hellos – and not just from them. There were children in front of and behind me that I waved to and greeted! Is this our legacy?

During the service, two confirmands read their statements of faith. Mary McElhattan said, “I have recognized that everyone who is a member here at Beverly Heights has the same goal – to grow closer to God and help others do so as

well.” (Mary seemed to understand this question of legacy.)

The next confirmand, Torah Simonds, said, “It feels like every time you meet a new person at Beverly Heights, you love them.” She also mentioned that a church without children is a sad church indeed.

After the service, on the way to Sunday School, I saw people from church – young and old – visiting and catching up with each other, giving birthday greetings and asking about the health of our loved ones. Our legacy?

I even observed people who have had disagreements in the past heartily hugging and sharing their news.

I passed the office where lots of children were excitedly eating snacks and enjoying being together for their Sunday School. Wow, kids happy to be in church!! Is this our legacy?

You see a bit of what I saw. You probably know EXACTLY what I am talking about. When you see people who have been at our church for many years fellowshiping with people who are new,

smiling and greeting with this fragrance of love – it makes you wonder. Why here? Why not everywhere?

I saw a vision of what is coming next. The people of Beverly Heights Church following Christ in the triumphal procession with brothers and sisters into eternity. What is the priceless gift we pass on? As Pastor Nate asked in the sermon that day, “What brings us together?” He then answered, “We love God and we do what He wants. We come to the cross.”

That is our legacy – our surrender to our Lord Jesus that produces a pleasing aroma that pulls others to Him.

This is the gift the Skellys, Dick Swanson, Bob Skillen and others left for us: their love of Jesus. It calls us to follow them to where they have already gone before us.

WRITTEN BY
BOB THOMSON

Those here before us

When Tom O’Boyle asked me to write on “longevity” for this issue, I wondered why he picked me. True, I am an octogenarian, but the article was supposed to be about the long life of Beverly Heights Church, not my long life. I have only been a member since 1979 and many have been here longer. Then I thought that one way to document the longevity of the church is to tell of my family’s relationships with those who have been here longer. There is an unbroken chain of torch-passing, spiritual fellowship, and love. Here are some examples:

Our daughter, Heather, was taught in her seventh grade Sunday School class by Dick Swanson. She still remembers some of the things he taught. He joined Beverly Heights in 1933.

When our son, Rob, and Debbie Templin were in the Beverly Heights Youth Group and in the same class at Mt. Lebanon High School, we compared parenting notes with Carl and Pat Templin. They were interns here in 1960.

We hosted in our house Greg and Sally Livingstone. I attended Wheaton College the same time Greg did. They were commissioned to the mission field by Beverly Heights in 1963.

My son, Dan, delivered newspapers to Mareta McKinney who joined the church in 1960. She would always talk with him on the days he came to collect.

I enjoyed the fellowship and study of the Word at the Saturday morning men’s breakfast and Bible study led by John Ferguson, who joined the church in 1950.

Bette worked in the Beverly Heights preschool for more than 20 years. She started there when it was led by Ruth Metzger who took the position in 1974.

In 1983, our whole family participated in the church-wide Bible memorization program called Memory Marathon. It was led by Sally Richards. I don’t know when Sally joined Beverly Heights, but she and her husband, Dave, were long-time members when we arrived.

There used to be an annual event at Beverly Heights called the William Taylor Pie Social starting back in the Sixties. My kids really loved it. They called it the “Pie Pig-out.”

Okay, maybe that last one doesn’t count, but I think you get the idea that my family and I have been so blessed to benefit from the wisdom, mentoring and guidance of so many saints, many of whom are now enjoying the presence of their Lord and Savior.

I had the great experience of serving on the Session with long-time members like Mel Bickel, Bill Mehaffey, Maynard Wright, Warfield Garson and Connie Holben. Bette and I grew by being in K-groups with long-timers like Vernetta Gaylord, Joanne McFeaters, Glenn and Wilma Rheinhart and Keith Thornberry.



Marcia Swanson, a member of Beverly Heights for more than 60 years, between Rick and Mary Wolling, at Rick’s retirement banquet.

Everywhere we have participated in the ministry of Beverly Heights from Session, Board of Deacons, committees, teaching, youth groups, or choir, we have learned from those who were here before us. No wonder God tells us in Hebrews “to consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.”

WRITTEN BY
ELISSA WINKLER

MUSIC that. worships GOD

“We’re called The Music Church,” you heard me declare a few Sundays ago.

If you’ve been around long enough, you know this to be true.

Each Sunday, music is integrated into the order of worship in our services through the band, choir, or musical soloist or ensemble. Several times a year we are led in worship by our children and youth choirs and tone chimes. We are “church home” to several professional musicians, some of whom play with the Pittsburgh Symphony and other ensembles or teach music; it is an embarrassment of riches! At last count, there are over 150 members in our church body who contribute to providing music in our church.

When I joined the staff in 2018, it was a gift to walk into a job where high-level, God-honoring music was offered in worship each Sunday.

It hasn’t always been this way.

Prior to my predecessor Mary Wolling’s tenure as choir director, music in worship at Beverly Heights lacked quality and theological depth. Over her 25 years in that role, Mary devoted her efforts to developing the Beverly Heights culture of music you hear each week. She and Rick (our pastor emeritus) chose music to complement the sermons, aiding in corporate worship. The children’s choirs took on new shape and sound, too, along with the creation of the tone chimes choir.

These endeavors made a dramatic difference in the design of the worship service, and as musicians such as Joe and PSO Principal Cellist Anne Williams joined the church family and offered to share their gifts, the Beverly Heights music culture was established.

When the contemporary *New Worship* service began (now *Early Morning Worship*), a team of musicians, including Joe Williams and Cindy Egeland, was established. Working with Pastor Nate, this team’s purpose was to gather weekly to pray, plan and read about worship, liturgy and theology. Pouring over chord

sheets, listening to worship music, the team would discern whether a song was worshipful, congregational, and if the text demonstrated a “view from above” or a “view from below.”

But Beverly Heights is more than just a “music church.”

Pastor Nate’s recent sermon, *Culture in the Holy City*, helped to give me language to describe how our music culture is distinct from other music spheres.

He stated that the Church itself is a culture (*a system of knowledge, artifacts, beliefs and values that creates a*



Elissa Winkler gives Mary Wolling a hug after the choir sang Steadfast, composed by Craig Courtney. The original anthem was published by Beckenhurst with the following inscription: “Commissioned by Beverly Heights Presbyterian Church in Mt. Lebanon, PA, October 21, 2018, in celebration and thankfulness for 33 years of steadfast ministry from Rev. Dr. Richard G. and Mary Wolling.”

community and is identified by it through common practices and institutions), and that culture is meant to be beautiful. The Church is a reflection of God, and beauty is the character of God made material. This means that as a church, the practice (or liturgy) of our worship must reflect

what is true, good and beautiful.

What makes our culture different is that we are using music for *worship*.

It is said that “all good music is sacred music.” This is true, because all good and beautiful music reflects our Creator, and He is the source of all good. Yet when God’s people gather together in a particular place, invoke His presence, dialogue with Him, and use music to lift hearts and voices in a sacrifice of praise, we engage in the transcendent for a higher purpose: to glorify God. We enter into communion with the Triune God, Creator of the Universe, Father to the Son who gave His life for us, and in partnership with the Spirit, dwells among and within us.

The musical culture here at Beverly Heights is first and foremost *worship-focused*. We invest in the development of **knowledge**: training the children of this church through First Song, New Song, Tone Chimes and Youth Choir about yes, notes and rhythms, but also about leading our church family in *worship*.

We also value certain **artifacts**: our beautiful Steinway piano, the new organ, and as Pastor Nate pointed out, our *people*, who gather together as the Church. Our **beliefs** and **values** are rooted in Scripture, so that we might rightly honor the Lord in our worship. And because worship is corporate, we **practice** the call to offer sacrifices of praise when we enter the sanctuary together on Sundays.

This musical culture of Beverly Heights has developed over decades through the Spirit working within His people to return to God the gifts they were given. In order to honor the tradition of music at Beverly Heights, foster it for today’s congregation and preserve it for future generations, I want Beverly Heights to be known for music excellence that lifts hearts to the Lord, brings feet to the Cross, and blends voices together in harmonious worship and praise to our Lord and King.

language

the linchpin of culture

I thought my mother's head was going to explode. One night at the dinner table, I used a word that was increasingly popular among my junior high friends; so when the opportunity presented itself I said it ... "fink."

I wasn't sure what it meant other than it was a term of derision strengthened by preceding it with "rat." I didn't think it was a curse word. But to see the expression on my mother's face, it was clear that my use of the term was as verboten as it was inappropriate.

Rat-fink was a term embraced (briefly) by the culture in which I lived as a seventh grader. To use the term was to belong, to be relevant, and to be identified as one of the kids who lived on the tip of what was happening in the youth culture of Long Island in 1963.

Language and culture are inextricably intertwined. The use of certain terms and phrases creates a unity between people and a sense of belonging. They also reveal what is important to the group and they serve to identify who they are.

Language also serves to pinpoint who is not part of a culture. I remember attending seminars at a well-known megachurch at which the church leaders referred to the practices and policies of the church with the phrase "around here," as in: **Around here we think or do or say ...** In that case, the use of language specific to the culture made me feel like an outsider; they were in and I was out.

Though there may be some individual terms that are a regular part of "Beverly Heights-speak," the iconic words that close each worship service do as much as any to represent our congregation's life and culture.

I began pronouncing what some refer to as "Rick's Benediction" when I first arrived in Pittsburgh and, with very few exceptions, closed our worship services in the same way for over 30 years. When I retired,



Passing the baton ... and the benediction. Rick and Nate, at Rick's retirement banquet in October 2018.

Pastor Nate continued the practice.

When asked why he didn't change to a new benediction, he replied that *Go out into the world in peace and be of good courage ...* was part of the Beverly Heights culture.

This benediction, which is not mine but taken from Paul's practical exhortations

to the church in Thessalonica (I Thessalonians 5.14, 15), serves at least three important functions. As I have often said, the first word of these last words, *Go!*, is one of the most important words I would utter in a worship service. It punctuates for the congregation that, having been in the presence of the living God to worship Him, it is now time to move out into the world to serve Him.

The second important function of these last words is to italicize the Beverly Heights vision (also an important cultural element) which identifies members of the congregation as spending 97% of their time as the church scattered in the world.

Finally, taken in its entirety, the iconic Beverly Heights benediction sends us into the world to live out the two great commandments of loving God and loving our neighbor.

The memories of a 33-year-long pastorate are many and all but a notable few are warm and endearing. However, none can compare with the joy of walking down the aisle of the nave, pronouncing these familiar cultural words and watching beloved members of the congregation, some as young as 5 and others as old as 75, mouthing the words with me, most with smiles of recognition and some with tears of comfort and belonging.

Pastor Nate was correct. The Beverly Heights benediction is part of our culture.

Rick Wolling is pastor emeritus of Beverly Heights Church.