

# THE MESSENGER JULY 2025

## TWO BIRDS: THE STONE (PART 3 OF 3)

For the last couple months' newsletter articles, I've posed to you two different issues currently facing Christians in the modern day. In May, we talked about the seemingly-stark outlook of the Church, given current circumstances and downward trends. Then, last month, we talked about the issue of "us vs. them" that we're unfortunately seeing become seemingly normalized in our culture. I think we can all agree that neither of these problems will be easily or expediently resolved, just as we might agree that these problems nonetheless pose seemingly-existential threats to "life as we know it." However, I come bearing "words of good cheer." What if I were to tell you that there is, in fact, a "stone" for the "two birds" before us (and a stone that would potentially work for more than just these two birds)? And what if I were to tell you that this stone is far simpler than we are making it out to be or might even realize?

The Church is hemorrhaging membership both from deaths across the generations and from younger generations leaving.

Now, granted, I by no means claim to be "the proprietor of the only solution" (far from it). I'm sure that there are other solutions out there that are just as "potent" (in keeping with the analogy), but the solution to the problems we presently face (among others) that I wish to present to you all for consideration lies within a word that has become

something of a cliché based on just how much it gets tossed around in church settings: repentance. More often than not, when we hear this word, it's specifically in reference to turning away from sinfulness and turning back towards a more righteous lifestyle, and it's used in situations where we can easily distinguish between the "sinful" and "righteous" actions, words, thoughts, etc. In the case of "us vs. them," it's fairly  
*(Two Birds continued on page 2)*

## NEW COVENANT COMMUNITY CHURCH

1587 W. Exchange St.  
Akron, OH 44313  
330.253.6989

[office@covenantakron.org](mailto:office@covenantakron.org)  
**COVENANTAKRON.ORG**

*(Two Birds continued from page 1)*

obvious that what we are facing is “sinful” and that we need to move towards “righteousness.” So, I won’t spend too much time prattling on about that. However, going back to May’s article about the outlook of the Church, this “sinful vs. righteous” dichotomy isn’t as easily recognized. So first, let me begin by saying something I as a pastor and a younger person absolutely loathe hearing but that I must confess actually proves to have more validity than not in this case: the answer lies with young people.

We’ve all heard complaints about those “young folk” who are frequently criticized for leaving the Church, which, there is some truth to that. The Church is hemorrhaging membership both from deaths across the generations and from younger generations leaving. Unfortunately, the common conception is that “young people are losing their faith,” which is a reason in desperate need of fleshing out. Numerous polls exploring this very subject actually found that those younger folks who are leaving churches are largely not leaving because they’ve lost faith in God. While some have lost faith and no longer believe in God in light of major catastrophes (e.g. 9/11, January 6th, one of the all-too-frequent mass shootings) or even personal catastrophes (e.g. a loved one dies of cancer or is murdered), the rate of younger folk leaving for that reason is actually comparable to the rate of those in the older generations who are leaving for that reason. In all truth, the percentage of Christians in the younger generations who still pray, read the Bible, do community service, and/or practice their

faith/spirituality in another way far exceeds those who don’t. In other words, they’re still practicing Christians. What they’ve claimed to have lost (largely) is actually trust in a hypocritical establishment that preaches “God is Love” while acting out these deep-seeded beliefs that God hates the LGBTQIA+ community, Republicans, Democrats, immigrants, whomever. So, it’s true, the younger generations have “lost faith,” but not in God. What they’ve lost faith in is the Church as an establishment. As such,

*...younger folks who are leaving churches are largely not leaving because they’ve lost faith in God.*

it appears that God is at work through them in calling out this hypocrisy and inviting us to “turn back” towards the command to “love as I have loved you.” However, this thought of “turning back” holds more promise than just here. Looking at the other issues the Church is presently facing, “turning back” would not be such a bad thing. For example, many churches are closing their doors, but you know what? The first churches didn’t have official buildings. They met in people’s homes, and “being a church” wasn’t so tied into “four walls and a steeple that such-and-such a person’s (insert appropriate number of “greats”) grandfather built with his own two hands.” If we returned to this way of being the Church and weren’t so vain about our buildings anymore, if we returned to a mentality where our identity as Christians was tied far more into the community with whom we meet than in the place where we meet, would this really be such a bad thing?

*(Two Birds continued on page 3)*

*(Two Birds continued from page 2)*

Along a similar line, many pastors are either moving towards serving more than one congregation (e.g. yoking) or towards becoming bi-vocational for one reason or another, but you know what? The model of every church having their own full-time pastor really didn't gain steam and become the norm until the late 1950s/early 1960s (yes, that recently) when we started to see a boom in Christianity. Before that, pastors frequently served more than one congregation, and that was if they were anchored to a particular congregation at all. Some pastors "rode the circuits" and travelled around to deliver God's Word. Still other pastors worked both in a church part-time and out in the community as teachers, lawyers, doctors, wherever else God may have called them. This model created more space for laypersons to have more responsibility in the areas of pastoral care, administration, teaching, and (yes) even preaching. If the Church returned to this model, charging laypersons to be more involved both in the life of their individual church and of the community outside the church's walls, would this or would this not help the Church to be more effective?

Now, granted, these won't work for all churches. Some churches have a legitimate need for a full-time pastor all their own (Katie's home church of 1,200 members being a prime example of this), and that's okay. Some churches have a ministry that requires they have a physical building (e.g. if they run a soup kitchen, food/clothing pantry, or a preschool out of their building), and that's okay, too. So, every church must decide for themselves what they need to do to meet their

church's and community's needs.

However, what has happened is that churches have become so internally focused that they've lost sight of the bigger mission. The Church was never supposed to be about whose church "is bigger," "has more members," or "has more/better programs."

The Church was never supposed to be about attendance, budgets, programs, and rosters. The Church has become so divided along denominational and sub-denominational lines, everyone fighting for being "right" while proving everyone else "wrong," that it has lost its ability to find common ground, compromise, and love the beauty of God's Creation as expressed in the simple fact that there are so many different thoughts. The big reason the Church is so shaky right now is because it has lost sight of what God initially intended it to be, and the big reason issues like racism and xenophobia keep reeling their ugly heads (even if under a different mask than before) is because we have commodified God's Love.

So, you might be asking, what is "the stone" I'm pushing for us all to take up against these "birds of a feather"? In short, Love. Now, I realize this sounds overly-simplistic, and perhaps it is. However, the simplicity of the answer doesn't negate its validity or its power. Think about it: Racism, xenophobia, and all these other "us/them" mentalities have no ground in which to take root in an environment where we (the Church) truly follow the command to "love as we have been loved." If the Church lets go of its pointing fingers at "who God hates," lets

*(Two Birds continued on page 5)*





## *From the President's Pen*

With summer in full swing and hot weather upon us, I think we need to look back to our activity-filled late spring and see what has kept our small church busy.

On May 4<sup>th</sup>, we set a record with our 16th annual Hunger Walk sponsored by AAIC. In terms of donations received and our good fortune the middle of the month to be included in the timely Harvest for Hunger Match, we exceeded all expectations. With over \$20,000 collected in Akron and \$13,000 in Stark Co., including the match and some funds that were not matched, we saw a whopping total of \$63,878.03 that the Akron-Canton Foodbank received. These funds translated into 161,634.09 meals. Additional funds were donated after the middle of May, which were turned in but will be included with next year's total. Once again, NCCC led the way with our congregation and friends donating over \$5200.

Next, on May 6<sup>th</sup>, a successful book fair was held at Portage Path School. Over \$1,500 was donated from our church that was used to purchase approximately 245 books that were happily given to the students.

On May 17<sup>th</sup>, eight of us attended the ICCC Lake Erie Conference of Community Churches in Aurora while others worked on the rain-soaked grounds of the Hospice Center on Ridgewood with Presbyterian churches in the area.

Turning to the beginning of June, the newly-formed Book Club delved into WHAT MADE JESUS MAD at the Williams' house, and concluded the

discussion June 16<sup>th</sup> at Nancy Clem's

The beginning of June gave some of us the chance to participate in Mitzvah Day. Three of us packed frozen meat at the Foodbank, and one assisted at St. Paul's in sewing sun dresses for young girls around the globe. That first Sunday afternoon in June, we had the unique opportunity to hear an amazing panel of young people, part of the Always Climbing Youth Panel, discuss how they have coped with violence in their lives. They then turned around the discussion to give us, the older audience, things that we can do. The word "Love" came up frequently as did the phrase, "Pay it Forward."

This year, New Covenant once again donated \$192 from our Pentecost Offering to Harmony House, a Mitzvah Day project several of us worked on last year.

Not to be outdone by our in-church activities, a lively group of us participated in the No Kings March on June 14, a gathering that was not only peaceful, but eye-opening as a few of us reunited with people we had not seen in years.

Finally, toward the end of June, several members cooked their own meat (Jim Strandberg reported that no one came with steak), enjoyed picnic-style food, and then embarked on a rousing game of Bible Jeopardy led by Brad.

As we move full speed ahead into summer, take vacations, participate in the ICCC Conference in late July, we also turn to more serious matters: focusing on several members who are ill and their caregivers, the first steps in a possible *(President continued on page 5)*

*(Two Birds continued from page 3)*

go of all these unnecessary “bells and whistles” of what “being a church” has become and “practices what it preaches,” which is summarily that “God is love,” we can all but guarantee it will get the new life it is so desperately searching for right now. If we go back to the communal identity that God’s People had from time immemorial; learned to love each other despite our differences in culture, language, beliefs, whatever; and decided to see these differences as an expression of the image in which God made all of us and love each other all the more for that very reason; how much better would the world be?

- Pastor Brad

*(President continued from page 4)*

yoking with Northminster Presbyterian Church, and the Presbyterian Church of Ghana Emmanuel Congregation renting space from us on Sunday mornings in Fellowship Hall. We will see how that turns out.

Love and support to all our members, to Pastor Brad & Katie, to Reesa for her diligent work, and to the Rader family on the passing of Charlie and the remembrance service taking place at the church on July 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Yes, as we recall our many spring activities and obligations, let us not lose sight of God’s guiding hand in everything we have done and His strength going forward in each of our lives.

- Nancy Williams  
Governing Board President

## WORSHIP OPPORTUNITY

Want to play a role in our worship experience? You can now sign up to serve communion (during Sunday service or during a home visitation) and/or with reading the liturgy. If you are interested in either of these opportunities, please see Pastor Brad.



## Upcoming Meetings Governing Board

July 28 - 6:00 PM

### Worship Committee

July 7 – 4:30 PM

### Finance Committee

July 15 – 11:00 AM

### Mission Committee

July 15 - 1:30 PM

## OUT OF THE OFFICE

Pastor Brad will be out of the office for the ICCC Annual Conference which will be in Lake Forest, IL



## **COMBO AUGUST/SEPTEMBER** **NEWSLETTER**

At our most recent Governing Board meeting, it was decided that next month's newsletter will be released later in the month than usual and will serve as both August's and September's newsletters. This is being done for a few reasons.

1. The August newsletter would otherwise have been sent out the week after the Annual ICCC Conference, which would be a really quick turnaround for those attending the ICCC Conference to send in their reflections. So, to allow those participating to digest what's said and done at the Conference, the date of both turning in articles and for the release of the newsletter has been pushed out a couple weeks.
2. Because of the later release date in August, we felt it wouldn't make sense to release a newsletter mid-August to then release another one two weeks later when there isn't really much that will be happening in regards to fellowship events, FIT activities, and other events.
3. On the whole, there isn't much really happening between August 1<sup>st</sup> and September 30<sup>th</sup> in terms of fellowship events, FIT activities, and other events and much of what would go in a newsletter for August alone would just be copied and pasted over into the September newsletter.

In short, this is being done to cut down on paper usage, eliminate redundancy, and to allow ICCC Conference attendees time to reflect on their experience. We apologize for any inconvenience this might cause, but we thank you all for understanding and being flexible in this matter.

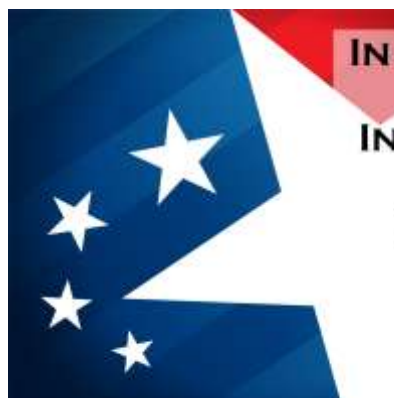
## **NEW FACES**

Starting Sunday, members of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana Emmanuel Congregation will worship in Fellowship Hall. They anticipate 5-10 people each Sunday, with 3-5 cars in the parking lot. Their planned worship time is from 10:00 – Noon.



## **SUMMER SERIES**

Pastor Brad will begin his annual "Summer Sermon Series" starting July 13<sup>th</sup> and running through August 3<sup>rd</sup>. This year, his series will focus on "The Parable of the Good Samaritan" and the lessons we can learn from each of the characters in the story.



**IN OBSERVATION  
OF  
INDEPENDENCE  
DAY,  
WE WILL BE  
CLOSED  
MONDAY,  
JULY 7TH**



## WHAT A FELLOWSHIP

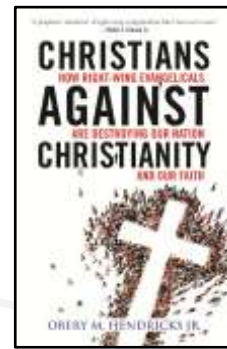
Okay, that's not in the form of a question, but the answer is, "An evening of grilled food, potluck sides and Bible Jeopardy."

The question? "What is BYOB(BQ) & Family Game Night?"

Nearly a dozen people attended the June 20<sup>th</sup> event. Katie, Ken H., and Jim did the grilling. Pastor Brad put together the Bible Jeopardy. Everyone seemed to have a great time. Thank you to everyone who pitched to make the evening a success.

The next event the Fellowship Committee will host is the Barley House & Baseball, which is scheduled for August 7<sup>th</sup>. Tickets to the game have already been purchased. If you're not into baseball and you just want to enjoy an evening of friendship, fellowship and food, then let Heidi know, so you will have a seat at the table.

Fellowship's next meeting is September 9<sup>th</sup> at 10:30 a.m.



Would you like to talk about Obrey Hendricks,

Jr.' take on what Evangelical leaders are doing to our country and the Church in Christians Against Christianity: How Right-Wing Evangelicals Are Destroying Our Nation and Our Faith ? Obrey has an interview on C-SPAN. You can find it by searching for the book title at c-span.org. If you agree or disagree with what you heard, come to the meeting, and find some common ground with your friends. The next meeting is scheduled for August 11<sup>th</sup> at Nancy C.'s home.



Nancy Williams recently received an email from Dan Flowers stating that with Gov. Mike DeWine signing into law the 2026-27 state budget, that funding for Ohio's foodbanks has been cut by \$7.5 million, a nearly 25% loss compared to the previous budget. That translates to a loss of approximately 2.5 million pounds of food to the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank. On July 3<sup>rd</sup>, the ACRF put a call to action on their website, asking people to contact their U.S. Representatives. The current bill before them will cut funding for SNAP. *(Food continued on page 8)*

## GENNESARET

Please see Betsy Davis if you can help with food distribution at Gennesaret. NCCC has a long-standing commitment to serve those in need on the second Saturday of each month from 10:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.



## *Poland Presbyterian Church*

### *Reverse Glass Painting Class*



Save the date and join us!

When: **Saturday, July 26**

Time: **2:00-4:00 p.m.**

**Skill: None**, no painting experience needed



Trace the design, add color placement, and blend!

*Bring an 8x10 picture frame (clean the glass!). All other supplies  
and complete instructions included at no cost.*

Have you always wanted to learn to paint, but never knew where to start? Come and learn an easy special technique using oil paints on glass that will impress your family & friends!

The background using watercolor is also demonstrated.

PLEASE call Tammy in the office (330-757-1547) to RSVP!

*As always, friends are welcome!*

*(Food continued from page 7)*

If this bill becomes law, Ohio could be responsible for nearly \$400 million a year in new administrative costs. That would force our state to either raise taxes, cut other essential services or reduce food assistance for every vulnerable Ohioan. Cuts to Medicaid would leave even more families without the care they need. Reducing funding for these programs hurts our communities and costs us all more in the long run.

You can go to [House.gov](http://House.gov) and put your zip code into the “Look Up” box in the upper right-hand corner. (You may need to put in your street address.) Then click on the link for your representative. That link will lead you to their site, which may have multiple ways to contact them.