

the Quarterly journal



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Confirmation: The Beauty of Our Faith

By Andrea Kantorczyk

If someone were to come up to us and say, "What do you believe in?" some of us might have an answer right away, some might take a minute to answer, and maybe some would really struggle to give an answer at all. Because that is such a simple and yet complicated question. And the reality is, there is no wrong answer. That's the beauty of faith.

On September 24th of 2023, 16 of our youth were asked that same question: "What do you believe?" Not what your parents have told you, or what the Church has told you, but what as an individual do you believe about God, the Church, and faith?

With the leadership of Pastor David Jones, adviser Larry Harkleroad, and 16 church members who so graciously agreed to be their mentors, our youth began their confirmation journey. I also had the honor to lead some of the lessons and have some great and deep conversations with all of them. I couldn't help but to be reminded of my own confirmation process: how fun it was, and yet how overwhelmed I felt. Just like most of our Confirmands, I also grew up in the Church,

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attending all the Vacation Bible Schools, all the summer camps, all the youth activities. But I can't lie by saying that it didn't feel like a routine, something I knew I had to do, but deep down I didn't know for sure why I was doing any of those activities. I had to ask myself that same question: what did I believe? Why was I attending Church? What was my role within the Church? Witnessing our confirmands come to their own reasoning of faith this year was such a beautiful thing.

I have had the privilege of being alongside them since February of last year, attending those same summer camps and all the fun activities. But being with them every Sunday for eight weeks, listening to their questions, hearing their faith struggles, and learning from them was truly a blessing. I believe that our faith evolves, that we grow in knowledge as we get older, and that we as Christians should be changing for good, making good changes within our lives and understanding more about our faith. My hope is that these 16 young men and women will have that same growth. That they can continue shifting their faith, that they get to understand more, and that they never stop wrestling with what they believe.

Part of their confirmation process was writing a Faith Statement, and something that all of them had in common was the love they have felt by being part of Newnan Presbyterian Church. Every single one of them said how proud and happy they are to be part of a church family that they know will always love and support them. And that to me, that's the beauty of our faith.



September 2023 confirmands: Charles Abbott, Elaine Abbott, Clara Black, Charles Caswell, Ian Caswell, Adeline Craver, William Craver, Sara Anne Davis, Lulu Greene, Pippa Greene, Laney Jones, Will Kirby, Dylan Lemons, Will Lemons, Bennett Rice, Kingsley Wimer

NPC Life Events

Births

- Frank Jarrell Berry, Jr., was born September 25, 2023 to Cameron Ann and Frank Berry. The proud grandparents are Matt and Donna Dougherty. The proud great-grandparents are Jane and Bill Berry.
- Florence Elizabeth Fitts was born October 12, 2023 to Mary Rutland and Ford Fitts of Birmingham, AL. Lissa Rand is the proud grandmother.
- Berkeley Webb Burch was born October 13, 2023 to Mollie and Evan Burch. The proud grandparents are Kay and Brad Crosby. The proud great-grandparents are Peggy and Joe Rowland.
- Silas Dombrosky was born December 3, 2023 to Alex and Julieanna Dombrosky. The proud great-grandparents are Jacob and Susan Story.
- Lilliam Michelle Reece was born December 8, 2023 to Ansley and Tate Reece. The proud great-grandparents are Sue and Frank Reece.
- Lily Katherine Polasek was born December 26, 2023 to Hannah (Harkleroad) and Adam Polasek of Dahlonge. The proud grandfather is Larry Harkleroad.

Deaths

- Libby Bermingham's mother, Lois Freeman, died October 4, 2023
- Debbie Webster's mother, Barbara Truex, died October 4, 2023
- Millie Coggin died October 7, 2023
- Roy Barbee died October 9, 2023
- Lane Dugger's brother, Lee Dugger, died November 5, 2023
- NPS Teacher Sheri Duncan's mother, Jackie Murphy, died November 12, 2023
- Walter Krauth's mother, Margie Truesdale, died December 5, 2023

Notes to the Congregation

From the Boesings:

Just want to send lots of love and best wishes to the staff and all NPC members for a very Merry Christmas and a Happy Healthy New Year. Hope this finds you all well. We are settling well here in Spain. We are enjoying having lots of visitors from England and Germany; they just love it here, and it's so good to spend time with family. We are living in a gated community that has 70 homes. It's a pretty area, very flat so we can walk to shops and restaurants and the beach, which has a lovely promenade. We are surrounded by mountains, so we have great views and pretty sunsets. We still can't quite believe we have ended up here, and we feel so blessed. We are in the municipality of Alicante. We have joined a club for expatriates who meet in a hotel every week. It's been great getting to know people who have lived here a long time and can give us good advice — it's made things much easier. My sister is six minutes away by car. We now get to visit the surrounding areas, which are very beautiful. We miss you all and think of you often. ***All our love and best wishes, Hans and Georgina***

From the Coggin Family:

Words cannot express the appreciation we have for NPC. We are so grateful for the love and sincere support you have provided since we lost Millie. And you also made a contribution to the Samaritan Clinic in Millie's honor, in addition to all you have done. A church is a family — the best kind. ***With Love, Bob, Jeff, Cindy, Robby & Mitchell***



Stewardship 2024: Grateful Hearts, Generous Gifts

Dear NPC Congregation,

I hope each of you had a wonderful Christmas and were able to share it with family and friends. With the new year upon us, I want to say thank you for sharing your many gifts in support of Newnan Presbyterian Church in 2023. I am always amazed at the generosity of our congregation! We are estimating monetary giving to come in at \$521,000, which is in line with the annual budget and spending. Through your monetary gifts as well as time and talents, our church is making a difference in the lives of our members and the communities around us. Thank you for all you do!

As we plan for 2024, the finance ministry is proposing an operating budget goal for pledged and unpledged giving of \$570,000, a 9% increase over 2023. This increase is the result of continued higher operating costs in several categories, such as property insurance, repairs and maintenance, employee cost of living to offset a portion of inflation, movement of our Christian Educator position from part to full-time, and increased funding for ministries. During our recent church survey, the congregation shared a desire to increase our outreach in the Newnan community and beyond. This is one area of focus our leadership would like to see expanded this year.

We will have Commitment Sunday on January 28th. As is our custom, you will be invited to come forward to offer your financial pledge as part of the worship service. If you would prefer to mail or email your pledge to the church office, please address it to Karen Geeter, financial secretary (npcfinance@newnanpres.org). The finance ministry and Session will work to finalize the budget by the end of February in preparation of a congregational meeting on March 3rd. At this meeting, we will review 2023 financial results and 2024 final budget based on pledges received.

The theme of our stewardship campaign is “Grateful Hearts, Generous Gifts” based on Luke 12:34 – “For where your treasure is, your heart will be also.” It is my hope that during this season you will prayerfully consider the ways that Newnan Presbyterian Church fills your heart each and every day.

With regards,

Winn Wise
Stewardship Chair

Holy Cow Survey Results

This fall, we asked all church members to complete a survey so we could plan for our future. Thank you for responding so enthusiastically! Over a third of our members completed the survey. That's 80% of our typical Sunday worship attendance. This is a terrific result!

The survey allowed us to measure our congregation's health and identify challenges along with potential growth opportunities. It also helps to identify our members' willingness, capacity and energy for ministry in the future.

We used the same Congregational Assessment Tool (CAT) we have used in the past to allow us to see areas that had and had not changed from our previous answers in 2011 and 2015. It also allowed us to compare our results from 2,800 other churches who'd completed the same survey.

Last Sunday, Holy Cow Consulting's Elizabeth Hamilton led over 30 congregational members and leaders through an in-depth debriefing of our results. The session was recorded, and we are looking at possibly providing an opportunity share it again.

Below are some key highlights from this most recent survey.

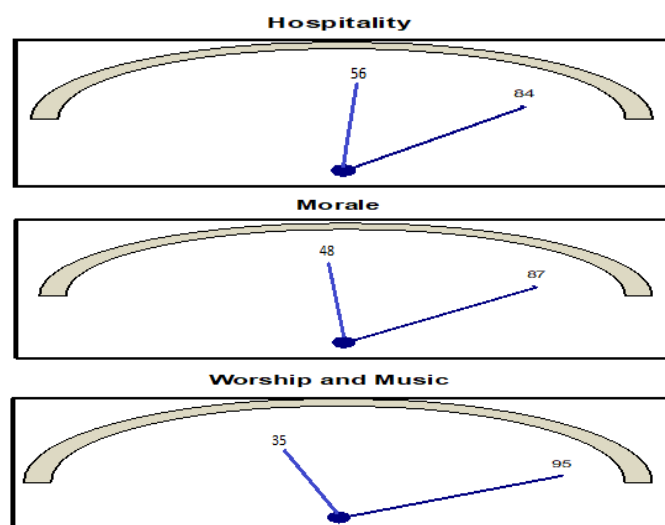
- Following a previous congregational survey, the congregation committed to making worship more "passionate and meaningful." Over 88% of you said our worship and music was outstanding, compared to only 45% in 2015. This ranks us better than 90% of Holy Cow's 2,800 comparison churches.
- There was a similar doubling in the congregation's view of our Hospitality ("members offering themselves and their resources to folks who are different or new") along with Morale ("members' positive, passionate, and persuasive engagement in the mission of the church").

Again, we proved that our church can accomplish great things when we commit ourselves.

The survey results also identified a number of needs and opportunities to better serve our members as well as our community:

- **Christian Education for all ages and stages of life is a clear concern for 51% of our members.** Changing lifestyles, as well as the pandemic, have disrupted traditional forms of Christian education such as Sunday School, and there is a need to explore how to adapt ourselves to meet current needs.
- **The pandemic made connection/relationships difficult, and the survey indicated this is a high priority for many members.** We need to focus on ways to build those connections and feelings of community among members.
- **There is a high readiness for ministry throughout the congregation.** We score in the top 25% of churches in readiness. Despite this high rating, our members want to be better prepared to identify their spiritual gifts and be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world (Matthew 25:34-40).

In 2024, let's challenge ourselves to continue to build on our successes. Together, we can address the congregation's need to support spiritual development through Christian Education, build stronger connections/relationships among NPC members, and equip our members to serve others in need.





8th Annual Newnan Burns Weekend Coming February 3 & 4, 2024: A Celebration of all things Scottish — especially Robert Burns and Scottish Music!

At midnight on New Year's Eve, the world holds hands and sings Auld Lang Syne. Who wrote the lyrics to this global tune? Lovers and romantics the world over look into each other's eyes and whisper, "My luve is like a red, red rose." Who crafted such a well known elegy to love? The answer is the Scottish poet Robert Burns, forever known as the Bard of Scotland.

Robert Burns, affectionately referred to as "Rabbie," was born in Ayr, Scotland, Newnan's sister city! At the end of January each year to honor Burns's birthday, lovers, romantics, musicians, and dancers around the globe hold a rousing good time in his memory. **For the 8th year Newnan will host its own celebration — this year on February 3 and 4, 2023 — and everyone's invited!**

There are two events as part of this year's celebration.

First, the Newnan-Coweta Historical Society will host **"A Bonnie Night at the Museum,"** an immersive Scottish experience that features scotch tasting in a British pub-like setting, Scottish faire, the "Rabbie" Burns cocktail, Scottish games and activities, fashion, line dancing, and live music performed by the Piper Jones Band at the McRitchie-Hollis Museum. Tickets are \$40 for members and \$46 for non-members. Purchase tickets in person

at the museum or over the phone by calling 770-251-0207.

As part of the event at the museum, Kathryn Smith, author of the new book *Methodists and Moonshiners: Another Prohibition Expedition Through the South...with Cocktail Recipes*, presents about the Scots in America and how their tradition of making Scotch whiskey morphed into making bourbon and rye whiskey. She'll team up with local bagpiper and Scottish aficionado Michael Scott to offer tastings of each type for comparison. Copies of Kathryn's book, which has many mentions of Newnan, will be available for purchase.

Then on **Sunday, February 4, at 4:00 p.m.**, experience an enchanted trip through Scotland in music with majestic pipes, string instruments, and drums at Newnan Presbyterian Church as Piper Jones Band performs sacred and non-sacred tunes that are both introspective and inspiring. The event, **"Capturing the Spirit of Scotland,"** is also part 4 of an ongoing music series at NPC. E.J. Jones is a world-renowned piper and a talent not to be missed. NPC is honored to present a musical performance of this level in Newnan! Tickets are just \$20 and may be purchased at newnanpres.org or by stopping by the church office. A limited number of print tickets are also for sale at the McRitchie-Hollis Museum.

For additional event information, please call 770-251-0207, or for more information about the Piper Jones Band, visit <https://piperjones.com>

For the NPC performance, scan and purchase tickets online using this QR code:



Friends of NPC: Meet Samantha

Who is Samantha? Well, I am Samantha, a girl who is very thankful to God for all the things He has blessed me with. When I was given the scholarship from NPC to help with my studies, I acquired new skills and it helped to form me as a daughter of God, because I was in a Christian school.

Before, in the church, I was a teacher's assistant every Saturday to teach the children. And now, I am a teacher of little kids. I love to be their teacher and tell them about the Bible! They are always very friendly, and they are very active. I like to admire the sunsets and sunrises – they are something that reminds me that God is with me everywhere. I like chocolates and spicy chips. I like to go to the beach, but I don't like to go into the sea (although sometimes I do it anyway). I don't really know why I don't like it.

I like flowers, especially red roses, tulips, and sunflowers. I like to watch movies about princesses, and my favorite movies are "Beauty and the Beast" and "The Parent Trap." I like to see how butterflies fly and land on flowers. I like to admire the stars: they are a beautiful scenery that I like to admire when I am alone. My favorite food is sushi, pizza, hamburgers, chilaquiles, hot dogs, donuts, and popcorn, but I also like apples, bananas, and watermelon. What I don't like is pears. I think they taste too sweet, and it's weird. I like to watch soccer games. I don't have any favorite school subject, although this year school is a little different since I started high school.

I like to celebrate Christmas, because it is the time I spend most with my family, and the new year, because it is like a new stage that I will face and learn how to overcome my own obstacles with God's help. I also like to take pictures. I didn't do that before, but it is becoming a routine, because I feel that an image captures a moment and remains a memory.



A beautiful memory for me was my experience when the Newnan group visited. At first, I was embarrassed to translate or talk to them. But I admit it was very funny, because I was trying to translate, although I don't speak English very well, and we went to many places to visit cenotes. On the trip I had a lot of fun. Actually, I thought it was going to be a little frustrating when translating, because I didn't practice much. But it was easier than I thought, and I had a lot of fun with them.

Once there was an activity in which they asked me to translate the prayer. Pastor David said, "Thank you for the dinner." And I translated into Spanish, "Thank you for the money." It was a very painful moment, but I must admit that it was also very funny. At the moment when they were going to leave, I was sad, because I would not see them again for many months. But I am grateful to God, because they could come and be with the children of the church.

About Those Bells

By Lalla McGee

“Wow – the handbells were GREAT today!” “I love it when the bells play!” We hear this every time the bells play, and we love that our music contributes to NPC worship services.

Here’s a bit of background about handbells. Bells have been in existence for thousands of years, but handbells developed in England in the 17th century. The first bells in England were huge and found in church towers. To ring them, ropes hanging from the bells were pulled by several ringers, and the art of changing the order in which the bells ring was called change ringing. Eventually, English towns began practicing change ringing with small, wooden handbells so they wouldn’t disturb neighbors and to avoid the uncomfortable environment in the bell tower.



By the middle of the 18th century, group “tune ringing” – playing songs with the bells – was a favorite diversion in England, and soon nearly every village had its band of bell ringers. English handbells became a permanent part of the American scene in the early 1900s through Boston’s Margaret Shurcliff. She brought eight Whitechapel handbells from England, then continued to expand the set. The Whitechapel Handbell became the model for handbells all over the world.¹

NPC’s instrument is currently a 4-octave set of Whitechapel handbells. Yes, all those bells are one instrument, played by a group of ringers. The church first acquired bells in the 1970s, when we received a 3-octave set as a gift in memory of Mr. J. A. Addy, Sr. The handbells fell silent at some point for several years, and in 2014, I was asked to revive the bell choir. I had no experience with handbells, but luckily a group of seven folks were willing to give it a try – some of whom had played bells before – and we began to occasionally play simple pieces in church.

We became more proficient, grew to 11 ringers, and in 2019 were fortunate that a few generous members helped us expand our capabilities by purchasing 6 lower bells. In 2022, we purchased our 5 highest bells, completing the 4th octave and allowing some of the ringers to play four-in-hand. We also purchased a small used set of hand chimes, which are sometimes used with handbell music, or played by themselves. Each of these additions has helped us expand our skills and repertoire. Furthermore, we owe much gratitude to the NPC endowment funds that have supported both the purchase of instruments and participation in handbell workshops and conferences to help us improve our skills!

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¹ The Whitechapel Bell Foundry began casting bronze bells – what some bellringers call “heavy metal” – in 1570. The Liberty Bell was made there in 1752, and Big Ben was made there in 1858. Over the centuries, bell towers from Whitechapel made their way all over the world. The company began casting handbells in 1740.

Handbells are a big investment and, like any instrument, require care and regular maintenance. For example, our 4-octave set of bells would cost well over \$40,000 if bought today. Maintenance for the entire set of bells is at least \$3,500 every 4-5 years. If parts need to be replaced, the cost goes up, and individual bells sometimes need work between full services. Our original 3-octave set of bells was last serviced in 2020, and will need service during the next 24 months.

We Need You!

We are very fortunate to have dedicated ringers who love to play the bells, some of whom have been active in this choir since 2014. Everyone does their best to attend Wednesday practice at 5:30 and play when we're scheduled, but life sometimes happens. When it does, ringers may miss one or more rehearsals or scheduled services. Right now, because of work-related issues and illness, we need at least two additional ringers who can be regular substitutes.

If you read music, we need you. If you haven't played handbells before, no worries. I am more than happy to meet with individuals or small groups to teach basic handbell ringing technique, which would be helpful if you've never played bells before. Also, there are basic ringing lessons on YouTube; [Basic Handbell Ringing](#) is a good example.

In addition to the sheer enjoyment of making music, playing handbells has other benefits. It can help improve hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills, reduce stress and anxiety, and provide a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Handbell practice always improves my spirits!

Please reach out to me via phone at 404-271-6770 (either call or text) or email (lallagentry@gmail.com) if you are interested in becoming part of our wonderful handbell choir.



Montreat's Treat: Sacred Earth & Soul



By Sharon Eakin Larson

This summer, our granddaughter not only reintroduced me to Disney's joyful *The Little Mermaid*, but also to a 5th century Celtic monk and a contemporary Celtic teacher and his School of Earth and Soul. All of these relate to Montreat Conference Center.

While many of our church members, especially the youth, have delved into spiritual pilgrimage at Montreat, I had never heard of it until listening to NPC online during the pandemic while we were still in Belfast, Maine. Reverend Jones referred to Montreat as a place for spiritual retreat and renewal. Arlin and I had been considering moving closer to our son and his family in Peachtree City. To discover a church nearby that valued spiritual renewal was a comfort that helped us decide to move to Newnan.

Then this past July, while standing in Tyrone's Legacy Theatre awaiting my granddaughter's performance, I noticed a playbill for "Pelagius: The

new musical of perseverance and grace by Legacy's own Mark Smith!" Actually, I was familiar with the monk Pelagius, but who was Mark Smith, and how did he become interested in this relatively unknown Celtic monk, let alone produce a musical about him!? Not only was this surprising, but recently I had been reading John Philip Newell's newest book, *Sacred Earth, Sacred Soul*. Its first chapter is "Sacred Soul: Pelagius." And there on the table below the playbill was this very book! Could it be that Mark Smith not only knew about Pelagius but also knew John Philip Newell?

I had just learned that Newell would be offering several retreats in the US, including one at Montreat. I had always associated him with the Church of Scotland and Iona Abbey. My understanding had always been that if I wanted to meet Newell, I'd have to go to Scotland.

Throughout life's travels I have learned that synchronicities occur which are not meant to be taken as simple coincidences, but as calls. Who had called me to be in this particular lobby at this particular time in order to make these particular connections? My five-year-old granddaughter! So, while being in the moment watching my granddaughter dive into her singing and dancing with *The Little Mermaid*, I was inspired to... dive in too! I registered for the School of Earth and Soul's "Celtic Wisdom: Sacred Earth" to be held at Montreat in Autumn 2023!

At the September 2023 world premiere of *Pelagius*, Mark Smith personally introduced his musical. "This story... concerns the upbringing, life, and death of two very different individuals, the Celtic ascetic Pelagius and St. Augustine... Over the past twenty years, new scholarship has given us more insight... Much of this work has been done by Dr. John Philip Newell whose scholarship was the basis for this musical."

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At the October retreat, I found an opportunity to share with Newell my reflections and experience of Smith's musical. Smith had given him a recording of it just a week prior, but he had not had time to view it. He was interested in hearing my response, not only to the musical, but also to the fact that it had helped me more fully appreciate Newell's teachings and scholarship.

Several times during the retreat, Newell discussed how important it is for ancient truths to be discovered and rediscovered through the avenue of the creative arts. Thus, I was grateful, not only for my granddaughter's discoveries of truth through singing and dancing, but for my own discoveries of truth within the creative synchronicities of sacred moments uniting earth, body, and soul – which included having moved closer to family.

Newell shared that “the first historically recorded writer in the British Celtic world” was Pelagius (360 - 430). He considers him one of the most misrepresented and misunderstood Christian teachers ever. “What is deepest in every human being, he taught, is sacred; we carry within us the dignity of the divine.”

Augustine is well known for his teaching of “imperial Christianity's doctrine of original sin, the belief that at birth we are essentially bereft of God rather than born of God – corrupted, not sacred.” He denounced Pelagius's teachings as heresy and plotted to excommunicate him from the church. Eventually, Pelagius had to flee to his homeland of Wales and to Ireland to be free of Roman control.

A core conviction of the Celtic tradition is that we “need to keep listening to what our soul already knows.” Each contemplative teaching session at Montreat ended with a time for “Shared Reflection.” These were opportunities to identify what had touched our souls. We were encouraged to keep our

hand over our heart as a gesture of sacred focus. In one of my small group encounters, a woman shared her revelation about her newly birthed son. He was now an adult. However, when he was three hours old, he lifted his head so he was literally staring straight into her eyes with his own eyes wide open. She had just now realized that it was not only her son looking straight into her eyes, but the God of the Universe! Resonating tears of joy and thankfulness came to all who heard her.



Montreat is a portmanteau of the words “mountain” and “retreat.” It is an earthly area with spiritual intent. This October, it was a gorgeous sacred space in which to experience Newell's “Autumn Celtic Wisdom: Sacred Earth.” What a treat, Montreat! Thank you.



Meet Your Deacon: Melanie Smith

Earl and I joined Newnan Presbyterian in 1992 and have been active members ever since with our 3 children growing up in this church. Over the many years of being part of this congregation, I have been Outreach elder twice, Moderator of Presbyterian Women, participated in 16 mission trips to Merida, Mexico, and volunteered for countless VBS. Before I started teaching middle school full time, I was a teacher at Newnan Presbyterian Preschool for 3 years. Our children all attended the preschool and kindergarten as well. It was my teaching background and Outreach ministry elder position that led to me to become part of the Newnan Presbyterian School Board 2 years ago.

Having been a member of Newnan Presbyterian for over 30 years, I am excited to once again serve as a Deacon. Although I will not be assigned as a neighborhood deacon, I will be helping to meet the concerns and needs of the NPS staff and families. Now that I have retired from teaching, I am looking forward to getting to know the school teachers, staff, students and their families and helping out as needed.



Meet Your Elder: Bob Coggin

Neither Millie nor I had ever attended a Presbyterian Church prior to moving to Hightstown, NJ in the summer of 1968. Jeff had just celebrated his fifth birthday, and we had already decided to join a church so that Jeff could attend a Sunday School Class and have a clear understanding of the Christian faith. Based on the recommendation of our new neighbors, we started attending and later joined the local Presbyterian church where we attended for the next several years.

In the summer of 1979, Delta promoted me to Regional Sales Manager of the Northeast and Europe, based in Atlanta. Since I had grown up in rural Coweta, Newnan was the only place we considered living. One of my Delta colleagues, Lee Sport, who attended Newnan Presbyterian Church, asked Pastor Swayze to visit us. We were still unpacking boxes when he visited us. Shortly after Pastor Swayze's visit, we began attending worship services at Newnan Presbyterian Church. After a few Sundays, we joined the church. Our decision was influenced by the warm welcome we received and by Jeff's participation in the youth group.

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For more than 42 years, Millie and I have been very involved in the “Life of the Church.” Millie was very involved in Presbyterian Women; she served as a Deacon at least twice; she arranged or hosted dinners for new members; for several years she was very involved in the Confirmation Class program; she served two terms on the Membership Committee; and she was one of the early organizers of the FEAST (Friends Eating and Sharing Together) Group program. She also supported the church in many other ways and was loved by many people in the church. In addition, she was also very supportive of all my church activities. Millie went home to be with the Lord on October 7, 2023.

Like Millie, I have been very involved in the “Life of the Church”:

- I served at least three terms as an Elder.
- I chaired a Capitol Fund Program.
- I co-chaired with Jan Bowyer two “Singing in the Park” events. The event was made special by the participation of David and Debbie Webster and John and Lalla McGee.
- I chaired the Search Committee that brought Dr. Harry Barrow to Newnan Presbyterian.
- I completed an extensive study of the unicameral and bicameral systems of Presbyterian church governance that resulted in Newnan Presbyterian Church choosing the bicameral system (both Elders and Deacons). Following this study, the Newnan Presbyterian Church Session refined the tasks for Elders and Deacons to allow Deacons to focus on congregational care. The study was widely used for guidance by other churches in the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta and throughout the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America.
- With the assistance of Pastor Wayne Smith, Millie and I delivered a significant cash gift, donated by members of NPC, to a Moscow Orphanage at a time when the Russians were not addressing such needs.
- In the early 1990s, we met Pastor Bob Gamble, a friend of Dr. Barrow’s, who was working as a missionary in Odessa, Ukraine and managing an orphanage. Pastor Gamble shared with the congregation information concerning the children he was currently assisting. The congregation was so touched by his story that the NPC congregation made generous donations to support Pastor Gamble’s work. About six months after Pastor Gamble’s visit, Millie and I visited Odessa and presented Pastor Gamble with these gifts. We had the opportunity to visit with several of the children in the orphanage at that time.
- With the assistance of Ginny Chiostergi and Diana Alverson, I compiled an extensive history of Newnan Presbyterian Church.
- I served on the Search Committee that brought Pastor David Jones to Newnan Presbyterian.

John Calvin for Today?

By Arlin Larson

Although my mother was Presbyterian, I grew up a Congregationalist. Having Presbyterian, Congregational, and Lutheran relatives, we attended services of all three denominations. It wasn't until I started studying church history in college that I began to appreciate their distinctiveness.

One surprise was discovering that Congregationalists and Presbyterians are siblings. They were two branches of British Puritans, who nearly came to rule England during its Civil War. Furthermore, they had the same spiritual father, the French reformer John Calvin. They steeped themselves in Calvin's writings, fled to him in Geneva when persecuted, and published the first English-language Bible, the Geneva Bible, under his auspices. In America, they had a common missionary society and a friendly agreement for Congregationalists to focus on New England and Presbyterians on the Middle States.

Calvinism Set Aside

However, something funny was happening to these Puritans in America. They soon began shedding their Calvinism.

This had to do with two ideas that were central to Calvin but incompatible with the colonists' experience of freedom and opportunity. One was **Double Predestination**. It stated that faith couldn't be freely chosen but was determined by God before birth.

"All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death."

The other freedom-denying thought was **Special Providence**. It stated that all events in life are caused by God working behind the scenes, not by our own decisions.



"... all the changes which take place in the world are produced by the secret agency of the hand of God."

In the wilderness of North America, the colonists realized that their fate, prosperity, and faith depended very much on their own efforts. There could be no waiting for God or anyone else to take care of them.

Calvin's ideas were denounced by both the growing evangelical and rationalist (Unitarian) movements. Evangelicals called people to a faith freely chosen. Rationalists believed that a God who would condemn people to damnation was not a God they could believe in. And there was also Calvin's off-putting vision of human nature as "wicked, distorted, foul, impure, and iniquitous."

The result was our founder John Calvin gradually being set aside as ancient history.

Then Why Had He Inspired Them?

For Calvin to have been the primary inspiration for British Protestants, it seemed there must have been something that outshined the negativity. I decided to go to the source and read his daunting magnum opus, Institutes of the Christian Religion, for myself. There, I found five other ideas that remain essential for Protestant faith.

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I. FAITH IS A DIRECT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD & THE INDIVIDUAL.

Let me begin with the central insight that proved revolutionary. It involved Calvin completely re-writing the book on Christian faith. In the inherited view, one's relationship to God depended on one's relationship to the institution of the Church. The Church, as represented by the papacy, was thought of as God's essential stand-in on earth, "the Reign of Christ already present in mystery." Calvin demotes the Church to a secondary position as a "help" in facilitating a divine-human relationship.

"God, in accommodation to our [post-Adam's Fall] infirmity, has added such helps, and secured the effectual preaching of the gospel, by depositing this treasure with the Church."

II. A CHURCH IS WHERE TWO OR THREE PEOPLE GATHER IN CHRIST'S NAME

The view of the Church Calvin opposed was that, as an earthly phenomenon, it was a monolithic society originating in Christ's call and continuing under the leadership of Christ's chosen successors, beginning with Peter. Local churches had validity only as subunits of the Universal Church and were in every way subject to its authority.

Calvin's idea was that a church is formed whenever believers gather in Christ's name, recognizing him as the only true leader through preaching and sacrament.

"Wherever we see the word of God sincerely preached and heard, wherever we see the sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, there we cannot have any doubt that the Church of God has some existence, since his promise cannot fail, 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them' (Mt. 18:20)."

III. SCRIPTURE IS THE ULTIMATE AUTHORITY.

Having dethroned the Church, Calvin elevates Scripture, no longer thought of as a product of the Church (and therefore subject to emendation) but as a heaven-sent embodiment of the divine Word.

"But since no daily responses are [now] given from heaven, and the Scriptures are the only records in which God has been pleased to consign his truth to perpetual remembrance, the full authority which they ought to possess with the faithful is not recognized, unless they are believed to have come from heaven, as directly as if God had been heard giving utterance to them."

IV. THE CONSCIENCE IS THE VERY HEART OF SPIRITUALITY & FAITH.

Calvin builds his idea of faith around the observation that "the sum of the Gospel is, not without good reason, made to consist in repentance and forgiveness of sins," with repentance consisting of both admission of guilt and a change of behavior.

He describes the conscience as "a kind of middle place between God and man." Its aim is "to bring the life of believers into concord and harmony with the righteousness of God." Calvin shows little interest in other aspects of faith — intellectual, mystical, devotional — and is contemptuous of the contemplative life, which he derides as "idleness." He writes that a changed heart demonstrates itself in good deeds.

V. PREACHING IS PRIMARY IN WORSHIP.

One of the most dramatic changes of Reformed Protestantism was the removal of the Lord's Supper, the Catholic Mass, from the center of worship. Pride of place was instead awarded to the written Word as explicated in the sermon. The sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper were now understood mainly as concessions to our earthly weakness — the one as initiation, the other as ongoing spiritual nourishment.

"[A] sacrament consists of the word and the external sign. By the word we ought to understand not one which, muttered without meaning and without faith, by

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its sound merely, as by a magical incantation, has the effect of consecrating the element, but one which, preached, makes us understand what the visible sign means.”

Conclusion

The revolutionary paradigm of Protestantism truly was given its clearest and fullest expression by John Calvin.

He had other good ideas, too. He rehabilitates Paul as being at least the equal of Peter. He is keenly attuned to the immense suffering meted out by nature, society, and human wickedness. While supportive of government, he speaks of a right and duty to resist when it contravenes God’s will. He respects the value of Judaism as a genuine work of redemption. He celebrates the wonders of humankind’s intellectual and moral powers. He derives positive duties from negative commandments — for example, the commandment not to kill implies a duty to enhance human life. While morally strenuous, he recognizes the universality of human weakness and the consequent need to give people a break.

The 2023 Christmas Tour of Homes Supports ELEVATE



The Christmas Tour of Homes was another success with a profit of \$18,913.86! The 2023 tour was the 8th year Newnan Presbyterian School has hosted the tour. Each year we chose a local non-profit to receive 10% of the proceeds. Recipients of past years have been Can’t Never Could, Coweta Samaritan Clinic, Angel’s House, Newnan-Coweta Humane Society, Backstreet Arts, Bridging the Gap, and Children Connect Museum. This year we chose ELEVATE Coweta Students as the recipient, because we want to support education of all children in our community.

ELEVATE serves the students of Coweta County with a mission to “elevate our students to success in school, our community, and in life.” They work directly with students on campus to provide the necessary resources and tools to stay in school, advance, and ultimately graduate. Through various school-wide initiatives, group efforts, and one-on-one case management, the organization is committed to removing obstacles and barriers to student success. This effort begins with Site Coordinators who serve as advocates for our students focusing on attendance, behavior, and course work. ELEVATE Coweta Students assistance includes mentoring, basic needs, mental health, life skills, and college & career readiness. For more information about ELEVATE Coweta Students visit

www.elevatecowetastudents.org