

OCTOBER 2017

Shepherd's Voice



The monthly parish newsletter of
Good Shepherd
United Church of Christ

WHAT WE BELIEVE...

We believe in God, the Eternal Spirit, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Father, and to his deeds we testify:

He calls the worlds into being, creates man in his own image and sets before him the ways of life and death.

He seeks in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin.

He judges men and nations by his righteous will declared through prophets and apostles.

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Lord, he has come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death and reconciling the world to himself.

He bestows upon us his Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ, binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races.

He calls us into his church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be his servants in the service of men, to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil, to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table, to join him in his passion and victory.

He promises to all who trust him forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, his presence in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life in his kingdom which has no end.

Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto him. Amen.

FROM THE PASTOR'S STUDY

Reformation and Difficult Conversations

At a recent Church Council meeting, I told the Council that having now had the advantage of six full months of full time devotion to the church, I believed I was discovering some areas that are in need of serious consideration. I told them, and I tell you, I believe that there are some difficult conversations that need to be had at Good Shepherd. Now, to be fair, difficult conversations don't necessarily have to mean that horrible circumstances are on the horizon. However, not being willing to have difficult conversations is practically an invitation for horrible circumstances. Why? Because problems that are not identified are problems that cannot be solved.

If you read no further, you may actually be part of the problem that requires identification and resolution. I hope that's not the case. Allow me to return to Good Shepherd in a moment, and walk with me as we turn our attention briefly to the story of difficult conversations that began in the 16th century.

On October 31, 1517, Roman Catholic priest, The Reverend Martin Luther, nailed his now famous 95 theses to the door of his church in Wittenberg, Germany. It was never Luther's plan to create a schism within the Church that would eventually result in his ex-communication from Rome, and it was never his plan to start a movement that would eventually result in thousands of new Christian denominations. But Luther understood that if no one was willing to point out the clearly problematic areas that the Church found herself in, and begin to have the difficult conversations aimed at identifying and solving those problems, the outcome would be catastrophic. This month, as we commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, I believe all Christians should ask themselves "Where are we now?"

While Luther's theses numbered 95, the points he is best known for involve abuses of the Church. These abuses most notably included the selling of indulgences, where Luther theologically challenged the Roman Catholic Church's practice of assuring time off from purgatory in exchange for financial offerings to the Church. He also railed against the selling of bishoprics, whereby members of clergy would advance in position, power, and authority through successful fundraising (often through the sale of indulgences) that resulted in money inappropriately going up the ladder of authority rather than being directly used to support the ministry and missions of local churches.

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There is no doubt that the Reformation that began in the 16th century had a profound influence on the entirety of Christendom and the world. Luther helped put into motion theological and ecclesiastical changes that are still evident today in Protestantism and in the Roman Catholic Church which itself, experienced its own Counter Reformation.

But as Reformed Christians, now 500 years out from Luther's theses, what answer do we arrive at if we ask ourselves if the Christian Church is now any closer to being the Church of Jesus Christ that God would have us be? And what about Good Shepherd? How are we doing at being the local church that God is calling us to be?

Theologically, the Reformation placed great attention on the Word of God as our primary understanding of salvation that comes alone by God's grace, through our faith in Christ Jesus. Yet, a study published in 2016 by the Barna Research Group indicates that more than half (55%) of American Christians believe that "if a person is generally good, or does good enough things for others during their life, they will earn a place in heaven" (Barna, *The State of the Church 2016*). Over half of all American Christians fail to understand the Good News of God's saving grace through faith alone in Christ Jesus and His finished work of the Cross at Calvary!

How does this happen?

When over half of professing Christians in America get such a basic Christian doctrine wrong when surveyed, it should cause the entire Christian Church, across all denominations, to ask: How did we get here? How did we get to a place in time where over half of all Christians in America do not understand the doctrine of salvation well enough to articulate it in a survey?

The answer should point us to the need for a new Christian Reformation. A New Reformation that places responsibility on two sets of people to be obedient to God: clergy and laity.

On the issue of clergy, preachers must preach the Word of God. Period. Too many clergy have let down their flocks by not teaching what the Word of God says. This is a horrible sin and the western church is paying dearly for it as the consequences reverberate throughout our society. It is a truly sad state of affairs when the teaching of the Word of God is so noticeably absent in the pulpit of the American church. Too many pastors and priests seem more comfortable "preaching" messages on personal self-improvement and individual advancement, than on foundational Christo-centric Biblical truths. It is as if some members of clergy believe their calling is to be a regurgitator of the most recent best-selling self-help book.

In yet another camp, there are clergy who do not nurture or nourish their flocks with the Word of God because instead, they seem to believe their calling is that of news analyst and morality commentator. These are the preachers who take every opportunity to preach a sermon on the current news of the world, carefully sprinkled with just a smidgeon of Scriptural reference, and then, contextually skewed to illustrate their own personal, political biases. They see their job as being called to convince the church-goer that Jesus is a card carrying member of the minister's socio-political belief system. Their messages, when they do invoke Scripture, seldom encourage the worshiper to prayerfully wrestle with the tough issues of the day by asking God for wisdom (as in James 1:5), seldom refer to thousands of years of consistent moral teachings from the Judeo-Christian thought tradition (as in Isaiah 40:8), and seldom end without a call for the listener to commit their life to the altar of political activism.

But the need for a New Reformation is not simply a clergy issue. Laity have a part too.

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On the issue of laity, church members must be regular worshippers, frequent Bible readers, and generous givers. Period. In Acts 2:42, we learn the meaning of church membership when it tells us that “the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing...the Lord's Supper, and to prayer” (NLT). You'll notice the word “devoted” is used to describe four activities: the apostles' teachings (or what would be hearing the Bible read aloud), fellowship (being with their family-of-faith), sharing in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, and praying together. Again, the key word in this verse is “devoted”—they devoted themselves to these things. They didn't do them occasionally or out of convenience.

And you'll notice the use of the word “and” and not “or” in the verse. They didn't do just one or two of these things regularly. They did ALL of them—regularly, with devotion. Jesus tells us in John 16:33 that we *will* have times of trial, tribulation, and trouble. We strengthen ourselves in preparation for these times by the spiritual discipline prescribed in Acts 2:42. Likewise, if we aren't devoted to consuming Scripture, fellowshiping with other believers, receiving nourishment from the Lord's Table, and building our corporate prayer lives, then sadly, when the trials and troubles do come, we place ourselves and our families at great risk of missing out on the graces of Christian strength and character that are the inevitable spiritual byproduct of Acts 2:42 devotion.

Laity should be regular readers of God's Word. If the only time you are encountering Scripture is when you hear it read on Sunday morning, you are starving your soul of an essential nutrient. At Good Shepherd, we, almost without exception, follow the Revised Common Lectionary for every Sunday service. That means that if you *really* wanted to, you could find out what Scriptures will be a part of our Sunday service every single week, even before you arrive at church and pick up the bulletin. When you think back to your time in college, or high school, or elementary school, I'm guessing you'll remember that books were used as a part of your education. I'm also guessing that your teachers fully expected that you were going to read the material for a class in advance of the material being taught in the class. Why do teachers insist on this? Because reading the material in advance of class makes learning the material more effective! Think about how your encounter with the Word of God might be different if you spent a few minutes during the week reading and meditating on the upcoming Scripture lessons before coming to church on Sunday. It could turn out to literally be life transforming! But realize, that's also just the Sunday readings. What other sources of God's Word are you availing yourself of?

Finally, laity need to be generous givers. Givers of what? Time? Talent? Money? Yes. Yes. And yes. Through the second half of October and the beginning of November, Good Shepherd will be in a time of our annual stewardship campaign. Christians are called to be givers. While we can never give enough to repay God for what He did for us through the Cross of Jesus Christ, we must be generous with our time, talents, and money so that the local church can continue to be a means by which the message of the Gospel continues to reach each and every soul that God sends to our church. The message of exactly what God offered for us can simply not be propagated if we aren't willing to give in support of that message.

As Reformed Christians, the phrase *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda* (the church reformed, always reforming), is probably familiar to us. My encouragement is that we remain ever mindful that if we are truly to be “new creations in Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:17), then we must faithfully give our lives to God who reforms us.

I stand by this message that I have written to you and commit to uphold my part as your shepherd and servant of Christ and His Church. I need to hear from you, that you will commit to your part.

The Reverend Randall M. Graf, Pastor

SHEEP IN THE NEWS

Well, here we are with only 2 months left in 2017. Where does the time go? Before we know it, Christmas will be here. I hope everyone is enjoying their new teachers and classes and all is going well in school.

I just want to say how nice Rally Day was. I also want to congratulate Lacey and Taylor Verbest for having perfect attendance during the summer quarter of Sunday School. It is quite an accomplishment to be at church every Sunday for 3 straight months. I look forward to more during this quarter. Congratulations are also in order for Madison Verbest and Madison Graf, both of whom earned straight A's at John Curtis Christian School during the first grading period! Well done, ladies!

Please let Debbie Volk or the church office know of any accomplishments by our young people. We are so proud of them and want to acknowledge their successes.

Thanks,
Debbie Volk

THANKSGIVING BASKETS 2017

Last year Good Shepherd partnered with Metairie Baptist Church (MBC) to provide Thanksgiving baskets to families in the community and student families in need at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Good Shepherd provided three baskets. This year we will again partner with MBC to provide this ministry.

If anyone knows of a family in need, please submit the name, address and contact information to Helen Brister at rabrister@bellsouth.net by November 12th. Each basket costs approximately \$125 per basket depending on the size of the family.

If you would like to contribute to the baskets, please mark your gift as "Thanksgiving baskets" and place in the offering plate from now through November 12th. Shopping and delivery of the baskets will take place Saturday Nov 18th. If anyone would like to assist with the shopping and delivery of the baskets please let me know. It will take approximately 4 hours. This community service is in addition to GSUCC's support of Second Harvest Food Bank.

I will be GSUCC's liaison with MBC.

Helen Brister



STAY UP TO DATE

To make sure you're keeping up-to-date with everything that is happening at church, sign-up for our Thursday morning e-newsletter by going to our website at www.gsucc.com. While you're on the website, go to "Calendar" and take advantage of syncing your Google calendar app with ours! You can also follow Good Shepherd on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube!

SERVICES SCHEDULE FOR OCTOBER 2017

Sunday, October 1 @ 8:30 AM & 10:00 AM—Sunday worship with Sacrament of Holy Communion
Thursday, October 5 @ 6:35 PM—Midweek Service of Holy Eucharist
Saturday, October 7 @ 10:30 AM—The Blessing of the Animals
Sunday, October 8 @ 10:00 AM—Sunday worship
Thursday, October 12 @ 6:35 PM—Midweek Service of Holy Eucharist
Saturday, October 14 @ 11:00 AM—Monthly Service of Intercessory Prayer
Sunday, October 15 @ 8:30 AM & 10:00 AM—Sunday Worship
Thursday, October 19 @ 6:35 PM—Midweek Service of Holy Eucharist
Sunday, October 22 @ 10:00 AM—Sunday Worship (Black & Gold party and pot luck after worship)
Thursday, October 26 @ 6:35PM—Midweek Service of Holy Eucharist
Sunday, October 29 @ 10:00 AM—Sunday Worship (Fifth Sunday Music Celebration)



OCTOBER 2017 MUSICAL CALENDAR

Adult Choir Rehearsal: Wednesday evenings at 7:30pm in the Sanctuary.
Youth Choir Rehearsal: Sundays following 10am worship in the Choir Room.
Youth Christmas Musical Rehearsal: Sundays following 10am worship beginning on October 22.
Sunday October 8: Crescendo performance. Meet in the Choir Room at 9:40am for practice.
Sunday, October 15: Youth Choir performance. Meet in the Choir Room at 9:50am for practice.
Sunday, October 29: 5th Sunday Celebration - Raise the Roof!

YOUTH CHRISTMAS MUSICAL REHEARSALS START OCTOBER 22

PERFORMANCE AT 10:00AM ON SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17

It's hard to believe, but weekly rehearsals for this year's youth Christmas musical will begin on Sunday, October 22 following 10:00am worship. 15-20 minute practices will be held each Sunday through December 10. There will be a dress rehearsal at 10:00am on Saturday, December 16 in the Sanctuary and the play will be performed during the 10:00am service on Sunday, December 17. As this newsletter goes to press, Debbie Volk and I are reviewing and still considering titles.

Important Deadline: Please let Debbie or I know by Sunday, October 8 if your child will be participating in the production. We will be meeting shortly after this date to cast parts.

Look for more updates in future newsletters and on our social channels. And, please, start thinking about ways you can become involved with this year's show. It really does take a village and Debbie and I need extra hands.

Jordy Luff

Music Director

HEADLINE: 5TH SUNDAY CELEBRATION: RAISE THE ROOF!

SUB-HEADLINE: OCTOBER 29, 10AM

Have you ever heard of an old fashioned church revival? Better yet, have you ever been to one and experienced the excitement and joy they elicit? Well, we're going to try to evoke this magic via this month's 5th Sunday Celebration service which we're calling Raise The Roof! We'll be singing toe-tapping hymns and songs associated with revivals such as Bringing In The Sheaves, They'll All Know We're Christians, When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder, I'll Fly Away and many others. There also will be special themed performances by our Adult and Bell Choirs plus other surprises.

Hope to see you in church on the 29th! Better yet, invite someone to join you.

Jordy Luff

Music Director

CRESCENDO NEWS

GROUP TO SING ON SUNDAY, OCTOBER 8

Wow, didn't Crescendo sound great on Rally Day Sunday in September? The multi-generational ensemble offered a spirited and uplifting version of Shine, Jesus, Shine, the classic Praise & Worship song. There were lots of big smiles in the pews following their performance. Next up, the group will present a version of the beloved Let There Be On Earth.

It's time for you to join Crescendo Good Shepherd. Please join us at 9:40am on Sunday, October 8 for practice. Hope to see you in the Choir Room then.

Jordy Luff

Music Director

BLACK AND GOLD SUNDAY ON OCTOBER 22

WIN A BIG SCREEN TV OR OTHER PRIZES

Good Shepherd has picked **Sunday, October 22** at our Black and Gold Sunday! Please mark your calendars and plan to participate. The fun will begin after our 10:00 AM worship service that day. We'll have large screen TVs set up in the fellowship hall for viewing and our party food menu will include whatever our faithful Black and Gold Good Shepherd Saints bring to the party.



Thanks to the generous donation of Sandi and Carmel Graci and Graci Real Estate and Appraisal, LLC, we will be raffling off a Big Screen TV at the party! Raffle tickets are currently available and we are asking each member to not just purchase a ticket but to PLEASE help us SELL TICKETS! Tickets are only \$10 per chance and the odds are better than most raffles. To get your tickets, please see Me Aucoin.

BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS

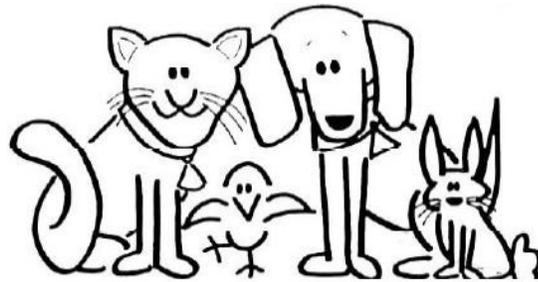
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 7 @ 10:30 AM

On Saturday, October 7, Good Shepherd will hold our annual Blessing of the Animals, marking the Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi. The event is open to the public and will begin at 10:30 AM in the parking lot. Bring your cats, dogs, gold fish, hermit crabs, ferrets, gerbils and other pets to church as we celebrate and honor God's gift to humanity that are our pets!

We are blessed again this year to be partnering with Fluffy Mutt Pet Grooming who have generously donated a \$50 gift certificate for pet grooming services. Each \$1 donation to Good Shepherd on October 7 will entitle the donor to one chance for the \$50 gift certificate raffle! If you would like to donate and receive raffle tickets in advance of the event, please see Sheila Fussell and don't forget to thank her, her daughter Melissa and her son-in-law Jose for their "Fluffy Mutt" generosity!

When attending this event, please park on the eastern side of the parking lot (near the apartments) to allow us to gather with our animals on the west side of our property (near Torah Academy). To assure safety for all pets and humans, please make certain your pet is properly secured on a leash or in a cage.

Check out Fluffy Mutt online at www.FluffyMutt.com.



BLESSING of the ANIMALS

Saturday, October 7, 2017 @ 10:30 AM

SOME UPCOMING DATES

November 23—Thanksgiving Day

November 26—Totenfest

December 2—Hanging of the Greens

December 3—First Sunday of Advent

December 24—Christmas Eve (No 10:00 AM service; Candlelight Service at 5:00 PM)

JASPER

the



CHURCHMOUSE says...

Children's Time at Good Shepherd has always been one of my favorites. A few months ago, or maybe it was a few weeks ago. You know we Churchmice have our own way of keeping track of our ages, just like the dogs do and some people add and subtract years from their birthdays so it's hard to keep track of them.

Anyway, one Sunday I counted the children's arms and legs. There were over a hundred. I probably missed a few. That means there were about twenty-five Good Shepherds there!

I remember back when the group was so small that they could all lean against the Pastor during his presentation. In fact, one Sunday, no children came, so several of the Choir members left their seats and went and sat down beside the Pastor.

God truly has blessed your congregation with so many exciting and lovable children!

And THAT is "Love of the best kind!"

I hope to see you on Saturday, October 7 at 10:30 AM for the Blessing of the Animals!

...With Love of the Best Kind, I am,

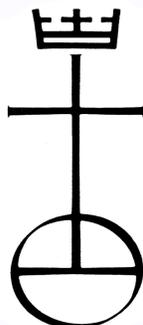
Jasper



Good Shepherd UCC

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The Rev. Dr. Randall M. Graf, Pastor



Sunday Services

10:00 AM every Sunday
8:30 AM 1st & 3rd Sundays

Midweek Services

6:35 PM Thursdays

Intercessory Prayer

11:00 AM
2nd Saturday of the month