



central conference of the evangelical covenant church

MARCH 2016

From the Superintendent: THE LORD'S PRAYER (Part 1)



I was recently asked by a young man, why do people at church recite what they call the Lord's prayer every Sunday. They do it every Sunday at the same time every Sunday. Eventually, I realized that his real concern was whether they realized or even meant what they were saying. He is one of many who are cynical about Christians and churches. Non-authentic Christianity.

I tried to assure him that Jesus was well aware of the problem. And that his desire is for us to bring back authenticity to our piety, sincerity to our service and integrity to our Commitment. And that He provided His Prayer to be a resource for us, for how to live our Christian life. The prayer is not simply a string of words on our lips, a ritual incantation repeated Sunday after Sunday or a desperate plea in times of trouble. It is suppose to be a way of life.

The prayer begins "**Our Father.**" Our father is someone with whom we commune, who shed mercy, offers forgiveness, send us, receives us, waits for us and welcomes us. We don't pray to some abstract divine principle or mystic object hidden in the depths of a bottomless cosmic hole. Communion, intimacy, tenderness, says Jesus, enables us to address our God as "Father." We confess mutuality and solidarity. This allows us to recognize one another as sisters and brothers in a universal human family.

"**Who art in heaven.**" In this prayer heaven signifies the dynamic source of God's activity. God acts on the Creation, on our world, on you and me, from a context of healing and reconciliation. Heaven is God's home. From there, God seeks to make all of creation an extension of that home. Finally to that home, God call us.

"**Hallowed be thy name.**" God is Holy and should be revered as such. We have managed to trivialize God's holiness, abuse it and employ it for our own self-interest. We've tried to get God on our side for sporting events, presidential elections, beauty pageants, locker-room pep talks and military escapades. It is a travesty that we use God's name in vain. We hallow God's names by illuminating God's character as seen through His son Jesus. We hallow God's name by treating others with grace and compassion and by joining the pilgrimage for peace with justice."

"**Thy kingdom come.**" It is a reference to God's spiritual reign. Here our Lord's presence among us and hope for our future converge. It is here where we ask God, to intervene into the wicked doings of this world in which we live.

"**Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**" In this petition, we seek harmonization of our will with God's. We are praying that God's perfect purpose will be accomplished in this world, as well as, in the next. This is where we ask God to allow us to offer ourselves as doers of God's will, asking him to guide, lead and give us the means to accomplish his purpose.

THE LORD'S PRAYER (Conclusion)

The first thing to remember about the Lord's Prayer is that it is a prayer which only a disciple can pray; it is a prayer which only one who is pledged and committed to Jesus Christ can take upon his lips with any meaning. The Lord's Prayer is not a child's prayer, as it is so often regarded; it is, in fact, not meaningful for a child. The Lord's Prayer is not the Family Prayer as it is sometimes called, unless by the word *family* we mean *the family of the Church*. The Lord's Prayer is specifically and definitely stated to be the *disciple's* prayer; and only on the lips of a disciple has the prayer its full meaning. - *William Barclay*

"Give us this day our daily bread," We pray for bread not only for our own survival but so we might be enabled to offer others bread. We pray for bread in a hungry world anticipating and working toward the kingdom where bread exists for everyone in abundance. When we pray this, we are acknowledging that God is our sustainer and provider. It helps us to realize that we must trust God daily to provide what He Knows we need.

"And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." Our attitude toward others is an indication of our attitude toward God. We know well, the damage we do to one another: the slights, the wounds, the betrayals, the words of encouragement that we keep to ourselves, the kindnesses that we leave undone. We cannot affirm openness to God and His will and then pervert the communication of God's grace to others. The grace of forgiveness is to care more about a person than about what they have done. Forgiveness means to release another, to give up our power-play by keeping something we can hold over another. The mystery of forgiveness includes moving towards a fresh beginning, the bearing of a wound, the embracing of one who has let us down or did something to us. If we receive forgiveness from our Father then we should be able to extend forgiveness to others.

"And lead us not into temptation." God knows that we are tempted to grasp for our full humanity in status, titles, income, or achievement. Our ambition for ourselves, our families, our children, and our vocation puts us at risk of our readiness to witness to what God wants for human life. We pray this because we need protection from the weakness and frailty hindering us from making the joys of the kingdom available to a desperate and yearning world.

"And deliver us from evil." Finally, we pray for deliverance from the powers diminishing and effecting human life. These familiar powers finally succeeded in nailing our Lord to the cross; they haunt us, they confront us, they co-op us no less today. We need assurance that God never abandons us to them; that nothing, finally, separates us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

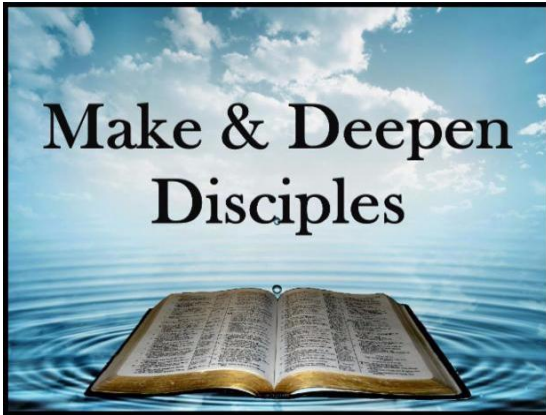
"For thine is the kingdom and power forever." Amen

By: Rev. Jerome Nelson



130th Annual Meeting of the Central Conference of the Evangelical Covenant Church

April 29-30, 2016



The Central Conference Annual Meeting is designed to incorporate the business of the Annual Meeting and to celebrate the ministries that God is doing through the churches in the Central Conference.

First Covenant Church in Iron Mountain, MI will be hosting the Central Conference Annual meeting.

Registration brochures for the 2016 Central Conference Annual Meeting have been mailed out to the churches and online registration is now available.

First Covenant Church in Iron Mountain, MI will be hosting the Central Conference Annual meeting. Registration brochures for the 2016 Central Conference Annual Meeting have been mailed to the churches. Visit www.centralconf.org/annual-meeting/ to obtain detailed information in regards to Annual Meeting's registration, schedule, breakout sessions, materials and hotels around the area.

Please remember to select delegates. The number of delegates is based on the number of members in your congregation. Member congregations shall be entitled to representation as follows:

Delegates per Church	
Church Members	Delegates
Up to 99	2
100 to 224	3
225 to 449	4
450 to 699	5
700 to 999	6
1000 or more	7

Each association recognized by the Central Conference shall be entitled to 1 delegate. Each affiliated corporation and institution shall be entitled to 1 delegate. A church plant within the Central Conference that is not yet a member congregation may send 2 advisors to the Annual Meeting.

Please join us as we seek to continue our ministry and pray for salvation of those who are in need of Jesus. Bring your prayer cards **"Ask the Lord of the Harvest"**. The prayer cards & brochures are free to our churches. Visit <http://covbooks.com/products/ask-brochure> and order. You can designate a Sunday to have the prayer cards turned in. You can bring them to our Annual Meeting or send/bring them to the conference office. We will gather all of the prayer cards and pray over them on Friday evening at the worship service at the Annual Meeting.

Please contact the Central Conference office at (773) 267-3060 if you have any questions or concerns.



central conference of the evangelical covenant church

MARCH 2016

The Central Conference Compassion Mercy and Justice Award

February 22, 2016

Dear Pastor,

As you know each year the Commission on Compassion Mercy and Justice has invited you to nominate a member of a Central Conference Covenant Church who has given outstanding Christian service in the area of compassion, mercy and justice for the J. William Fredrickson Urban Ministry Award or the David A. Larson Town and Country Award. These awards were presented on a rotating basis.

The Commission has decided to combine the J. William Fredrickson Urban Ministry Award and the David A. Larson Town and Country Award to be presented every year and will now be called:

The Central Conference Compassion Mercy and Justice Award

In honor of

J. William Fredrickson and David A. Larson

Below are the guidelines for nominating a member from a Central Conference Church. Please submit your nominations to the Conference office no later than March 17, 2016.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Rev. Debbie Griffith Samuels at the Central Conference (773) 267-3060.

Peace and Blessings,

The Compassion Mercy and Justice Commission

Central Conference Compassion Mercy and Justice Award Guidelines

- Someone who has played a major role in initiating, supporting or carrying out a ministry which deals with compassion or justice.
- Someone who has shown outstanding leadership in a long term or short term Compassion Mercy Justice Ministry.
- Someone who works either in the church or in the community to assist people in need.
- Someone who inspires and encourages others to participate in Compassion Mercy or Justice Ministries.
- Nominations should include illustrations of outstanding Christian service
- Candidate may be laity or clergy.

This award represents the J. William Fredrickson Urban Ministry Award and the David A. Larson Town and Country Award that have been given out since 1996.



central conference of the evangelical covenant church

MARCH 2016

Community Covenant Church, Kirkwood, MO



On Sunday, February 7, 2016, Rev. Donald "Chad" Wible was installed as senior pastor. The congregation is excited and looking forward to the future. They welcomed, celebrated and thanked God for Pastor Chad coming. He recently relocated from California with his wife, Allison, and son Alvin and daughter Olivia. Pastor Chad stated, the move went smoothly. It was a four day journey. He is looking forward to this adventure with the church. He said it is an exciting and humbling beginning. But days filled with joy!

By: Joanne Nelson



central conference of the evangelical covenant church

MARCH 2016

Part 4: We affirm the church as a fellowship of believers.

Min Song is currently serving as a bi-vocational tent-making associate pastor at New Life Covenant Church in Palatine, IL.

“One Church... One Family.” Our youth group in recent years has adopted this phrase as our rallying cry. We’ve declared it at sports tournaments as a youth group team, at the close of corporate prayer time, when wrapping up retreats and preparing to return home, and even made it a shirt theme. “One Church... One Family” captures the heartbeat of the Evangelical Covenant Church’s affirmation that the church is a fellowship of believers. In “Living Faith” published by the denomination, Phil Anderson reflecting on the historical roots of this affirmation wrote, “those who have found the Covenant Church to be their spiritual home have consistently responded to the call not only to believe but to belong.”

Our history going back as Mission Friends and meeting in conventicles to the present day diverse growth of the denomination shows the importance and vitality of the local church. From our historical roots to present day, the pressing call remains that we not only go to church, but to be the church as we do life together through all the complexities that accompany it.

The local congregation is of crucial importance in God’s redemptive work in the world. While God is at work elsewhere, it is particularly in the close personal relationships of the fellowship that people are opened to the healing, convicting, and life-giving ministry of the Holy Spirit. Here, biblical nurture and discipline occur in the context of love and concern. (Living Faith, 105)

Having roots connected to the Korean immigrant church, I’ve seen how vital youth and young adult ministry can be for second-generation Korean-Americans. With a different heart language, culture, and life-context than our immigrant parents, it can be struggle to find a place of understanding and care.

I personally grew up in a non-Christian home, as an only child-latch key kid since second-grade since my parents at that time worked seven days a week and often ten to twelve hour days. I knew my parents did what they had to do to survive and support our small family. My aunt was the first Christ-follower in my extended family, and through her invitation and my parents approval, I started attending church since childhood.

The local church and God working through the personal relationships with Sunday School teachers and youth pastors has been key to my testimony and call to ministry. Through the local church, I heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ, grew to love the Word, and found a spiritual family that went deeper in unique ways than my biological family could.

In doing youth ministry, I’ve seen the importance of the local congregation being used in God’s redemptive work. Through peer ministry and through older people reaching out to the youth, Christ’s love was embodied. For second-generation youth and young adults, the local church provided a place to believe and belong, a family redefined, and a place for discipleship and growth.

Church is where we discover our most basic, fundamental community. We can say “we” of our family, city or region, ethnic group, or country. Each of these communities may shape who we are. Yet, only one of them shows and shapes our true identity as God’s blessed creatures (Genesis 1:28) and beloved children (Ephesians 5:1; cf. Romans 1:7). (Living Faith, 109)

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. (1 John 4:9-12)

The world is hungry for authentic connection and relationship beyond the virtual world, desiring real community, and seeking a true anchor in the midst of life. The church as the fellowship of believers is the means through which God can reach the world. The church is the gathering place of God's children, God's love lived out and in motion, and God's love in mission. One church, one family may we be.

Bible Study

Philippians 1:1-11

Philippians is an intimate letter written by Paul to a church that he dearly loved. Paul's prayers, affection, tears, and nearness in his heart reveal that care he had for the church he established in Europe (Acts 16). While the themes of fellowship, Gospel, and joy shine throughout the letter, the context in which Paul was writing from was a prison view in Rome. There were no guarantees if Paul would receive freedom or death. When the Philippian church heard of Paul's predicament, they sent Epaphroditus to Paul with gifts, support, and encouragement. In light of this correspondence, Paul penned this letter to the Philippian church.

Questions:

1. What do you think about when you hear the word fellowship? What images, activities, and memories come to mind?
2. In verse 3, Paul prays with joy because of the partnership the church had with him in the gospel. The word partnership is connected to the word, fellowship, so that it could read, because of your fellowship in the gospel. Fellowship here is understood and rooted to the gospel. How does that affect our understanding of fellowship and gospel?
3. In verse 7, "all of you share in God's grace with me" also connects to the word fellowship; all of you are 'fellowshippers' in God's grace with me. What emotions and heart does Paul convey when he thinks about the Philippians?
4. How does Paul pray for the Philippian church? How can we pray for the fellowship of believers in our midst?
5. What missional aspects come to mind with fellowship in this passage? What encouragement comes from fellowship in this passage? What challenges come from fellowship in this passage?



central conference of the evangelical covenant church

MARCH 2016

Evangelical Covenant Church Partners with GuideStone Financial Resources

We are pleased to announce a new partnership with GuideStone Financial Resources to provide a supplemental retirement plan option to churches within the ECC network. In the same way ministers and church employees have dedicated their lives to ministry, for nearly 100 years GuideStone has been committed to serving those who serve the Lord as they journey to and through retirement. As the leader in church retirement plans, they are uniquely qualified to provide your church with a competitive, personalized retirement plan.

If a church chooses to participate, employees will have the opportunity to invest with GuideStone Funds - the nation's largest Christian-screened mutual fund family - which allows them to invest in a diversified offering of award-winning funds that also align with their values.

GuideStone considers it a privilege to serve ECC. To discover more and start planning for retirement today, contact GuideStone's Holly Taylor at (214) 720-6453. Please go to www.GuideStone.org for important information.



central conference of the evangelical covenant church

MARCH 2016

Anxious - ***characterized by extreme uneasiness of mind or brooding fear about some contingency: worried***

Philippians 4:5-7 *Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Our world is in transition. The church is in transition. Your church is in transition. I remember a meeting several years back with the chair of a church who would not accept the word “change” in our conversation. I tried to introduce other words which would move the conversation forward while trying to avoid the rejected concept of change. Let’s see, “transformation”? How about, “transition”? You get the picture.

Each time that knowing smile would cross his face, “I know what you’re trying to do”.

William Bridges, in his book “Managing Transitions” suggests that it isn’t change, that people fear, its loss. Change is a part of life. We must accept it. We acknowledge change day by day. Bridges states that *change is situational* where *transition*, on the other hand, *is psychological*.

We know change is happening all around us. But the emotional processes unleashed in a changing environment often create anxiety. Anxiety is natural and normal and even motivational to a point. We’ve all been saved at one point or another by anxiety.

But chronic anxiety can be crippling. It enhances the need for certainty. It can seize our imaginations individually and collectively. Anxiety inhibits creativity.

Paul is suggesting that the church in Philippi should resist being paralyzed by chronic anxiety. He doesn’t suggest this simply by offering a mind over matter solution (i.e. meditation, increased exercise, yoga, though these processes can assist us). He is offering the Lord Jesus as the center of our environment through rejoicing and thanksgiving. This can help us as individuals in confronting every day challenges and also help us collectively as we seek the vitality of our congregations.

As we move forward in engaging change and vitality in our own congregations, let’s not lead with anxiety. Rather the minds which are set on Jesus are the foundation for life and peace.

Question: How is Jesus at the center of your congregations’ experience?

Peace to you,
Peter Sjoblom – Director of Congregational Vitality