

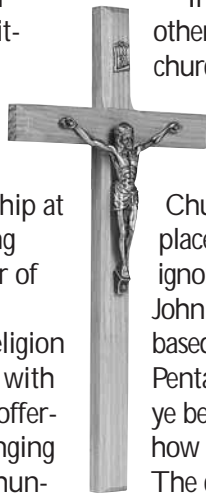
Selecting a church: A Christian-only user's guide

By Don Lein

If you are one of those who agree with the scientists quoted in the *New York Times* last month who looked upon "outspoken religious commitment as a mild form of dementia" or adhere to environmentalism, which Michael Crichton characterized as the "religion of the urban atheist," and who worship at the throne of scarcity in everything except government, the remainder of this article will be of little value.

Many who are interested in religion today view the religious offerings with dismay. We have mega churches offering all sorts of secular services ranging from theaters to pedicures, with hundreds of affiliated smaller remote churches and more MBAs than a typical Fortune 500 company. However, they are popular with millions of adherents. We also have institutions that are centuries if not millennia old with atherosclerotic tendencies where a worshipper has a difficult time differentiating whether they are worshipping

God/Jesus or the institution and its trappings and icons. Again, these churches gather millions of adherents, whether by tradition or inertia.



In a search for authenticity many other worshippers and some churches are trying to go back to Pentecost and start over. Let's explore what a First Century/New Testament Church would look like. In the first place these churches should not ignore their roots since Jesus in John indicated that His Laws were based upon the Mosaic laws in the Pentateuch when he indicated "'if ye believe not his (Moses') writings, how shall you believe my words?'" The claim that there is a pure New Testament theology is highly problematic. One thing is clearly different between the Old and New and that is that in the New Testament every believer is a priest and the Old Testament laity/clergy differentiation was abolished, as well as the priestly hierarchy.

The early church as described in Acts went from Apostolic leadership to

Apostolic/Elders to Elders. There was no Pastor/Deacons form of leadership, it was simply Elders leading the ekklesia. The Elders chose one or more moderators who would lead meetings/worship. There was no democracy/Roberts Rules of Order, it was simply the Elders achieving consensus with other male members. What of females? They were to remain silent and keep their heads covered. However, everyone was greeted with a kiss. There was singing, but no instruments, which would not appear until six centuries later.

What of their ordinances? Baptism was total immersion, but it was intended for expiation of sins, so that sprinkling the newborn, who are essentially sinless was not done. Repentance and change of habits was sought rather than the sin-absolution-sin-absolution cycle which evolved. Communion was held weekly rather than whenever. The first century church was ecumenical rather than differentiating themselves from other churches, as we do today with different labels, rituals, etc.

The fairly simple rule that Paul gave his adherents was "imitate me."

So there you have it. In Chatham County we have a variety of choices. Although there are no mega churches in the county there are several that are nearby who might fulfill your spiritual needs. We certainly have a number of "traditional" churches in the County, with many being neighborhood churches whose emphasis is upon service to their community rather than theological exploration. If your church/congregation is not examining itself to ascertain how it can better serve our changing world and you take your religion seriously, you owe it to your spiritual well being to become a seeker. There are dynamic churches in our county who are also seeking a closer walk by attempting to become more of a New Testament church, which might be the better answer to your spiritual needs. May you enjoy both the journey as well as the destination.

Don Lein is a Chatham resident involved in a variety of civic organizations.

OPINION

NATURE

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Ferrington, I can clearly remember the moment I was handed a cell phone. I was furious. I wanted to work. I already had the wedding director reminding me of the last 14 essential facts, the building supervisor asking me to make certain things vanish with plantings and homeowners reminding me that they didn't buy green bananas when I put in a plant that looked too small. A cell phone? It promptly "fell" out of my pocket and was run over by the bobcat. The next cell phone was clipped to my waist and got pulled off in the nursery when we were doing a huge clean up ... never to be found. You get the idea. So how did I come to be involved with so many elements that pull me from

nature? Fear of getting lost in the shuffle? I am now fearful OF getting lost in the technology.

So as I walk each morning with my dog and puppy, I have begun to notice that in one spot in the asphalt there are imprints of fallen leaves. Now, I was here when the road was last paved. I walk the same road daily. I know that nature helps me drift from squirrels to new buds, to falling leaves to dog land mines, but in all of my walking I never noticed these beautiful etches on the pavement. They are perfect outlines of every leaf from every tree in the woods that surround us here in Redbud. When I hit this spot in the road, I am lifted up into a state of pure splendor. This wondrous act of pure serendipity makes my day. I then begin to feel nature around me. I feel

the breeze on my face, the drizzle on my hair and sometimes just the warmth of the sunny spots over the totally shady nooks. As I trot along with my hounds, I know that I am at the right place in the right time for me. Nature allows me to survive the technology. Nature keeps pushing me out the door each morning to meet new challenges. Who could not smile with the sun on ones face and the wind at ones back? Focus on the moment and let it transform you. Mind wandering is part of the magic. Enjoy the season wherever you land.

Ginny Gregory is owner and creative energy behind "Beyond The Pail...Creating Gardens and Beyond". She is starting "Beyond The Crate...Finding simplicity out of chaos", an organizing, down sizing business. See www.beyondthepail.net



HEALTH

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under the age of 65. In those over 65, an age group most likely to develop cancer or cardiovascular disease, exercise yields an even greater effect, reducing all cause mortality by 44 percent. In spite of this evidence, and the countless other health benefits, few Americans are really able to engage in the behavior.

One of the biggest barriers to physical fitness and a healthy lifestyle tends to be time. None of us have any, but we tend to make time for the important things. Therefore, a cost benefit analysis may help those who want to be more physically active, but need a push in the right direction. If so, then visit the following website and take the assessment.

<www.myexerciseplan.com/assessment/barriers.php>

The biggest problem that the health of our nation faces won't be solved by better insurance policies, medications, or even better doctors. Owning your personal health is the only way to drastically reduce the risk of chronic conditions, which account for the vast majority of disease in the United States. And this is not just a personal responsibility. If everyone made healthy lifestyle changes, then chronic disease would decline and, in turn, health care would be cheaper and more accessible. So remember, you are responsible for your own health. Those who engage in exercise, eat modestly, and manage their weight are typically healthy, while those who don't aren't.



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