

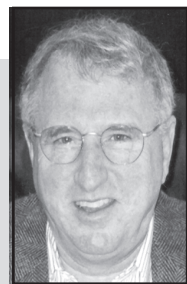
CULTURAL CHRISTIANITY

How many of the habits of your life are Christian? The self-righteous claim perfection—100%. Most people reading this would be humble enough to say, "We try," but would confess that they miss the mark too often. Does that mean your routines are 90% Christian? The really humble would be glad to get it right half the time—50%. Would you think I have lost my mind if I say we don't get it right even 10% of the time?

I am in a different church every Sunday, preaching somewhere in South Carolina. I attend Sunday School. I listen. I pay attention. Stuff we think is important has nothing to do with Jesus or the Bible. Do you know someone who has a conniption fit when the pastor doesn't finish the sermon by noon? Show me that in the Bible. If you need to be out by noon to beat the Methodists to Sunday lunch, then start worship at 10:30. For that matter, I have learned to appreciate those churches that worship first at 9:30, then have Sunday School at 10:30. None of this is in the Bible. It is a matter of personal and congregational preference.

Even the sins we emphasize may be culturally driven. I heard sermons against dancing when I was a child, but not lately. Yet, I have never heard a single sermon against usury. Once upon a time, Christians were against surgery and were for slavery. Who in our culture determined that abortion and homosexuality are the *Two Big Sins* of our culture? Far bigger realities in the churches where I was pastor were racism and unbridled tongues. Do you know any church that has ever kicked someone out for being a racist or a gossip? What about coveting? That is one of the Ten Commandments and we ignore it entirely. Do we discipline people in our churches who linger too long over the L. L. Bean catalog? Who picks the *Sins of the Decade*? It's a cultural thing, no more, no less.

The Bible says that we should not live fearfully, that we need to quit taking the Lord's name in vain, and a hundred other things. I get it right, I suppose, some of the time. Maybe you do better. Before you answer that too quickly, when is the last time you visited someone in prison? When is the last time you repented, when you actually did something in church or in your personal life, for Jesus' sake, that you were uncomfortable doing? I want to do better, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, I am in better spiritual health than I once was. But I am a long, long way from perfect. I thank God daily for Grace.



By Marion Aldridge
Coordinator of SC/CBF

Here's a very short list of things that are NOT in the Bible that are, nonetheless, part of our cultural Christianity in many Baptist churches in the South:

- The same preacher preaching every Sunday
- Bulletins
- "Coming forward" during the last hymn
- Church membership
- Not bringing soft drinks or coffee into the sanctuary

There may be good practical and cultural reasons for some of our church habits, but there is nothing Christian about these choices. None of these is a biblical mandate.



Tanner is intentional interim Path to NewKirk leads through Turkey and Warsaw

Charles Tanner has been a pastor in Turkey and Warsaw. Now he's the intentional interim at NewKirk in Rock Hill.

"I'm excited about being with Newkirk and will probably be there 16-18 months," he said. "Newkirk is a great church and we hope to see it healthy again."

Charles and his wife Linda live in Thomasville, NC. Every Saturday they drive to Rock Hill where they stay until after choir practice on Wednesday nights. Back in Thomasville for two days, Charles spends that time preparing his sermon for Sunday.

Tom is a graduate of Wake Forest University and Southeastern Seminary. Most recently, from 1997-August 2004, he was pastor of Trinity Baptist Church, Arcadia, NC. For 16 years prior to that, he was Director of Church and Community Relations with Baptist Children Homes of North Carolina. His only other South Carolina pastorate was at Faith Baptist Church in Darlington in the mid-1960s.

And, oh, by the way, that's Turkey Baptist Church and Warsaw Baptist Church in North Carolina where Charles also previously served.

Tom Cuttino —

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Since he retired in 1997, he has done one interim after another, at First Baptist Church Barnwell; Congaree Baptist Church in South Congaree, Northwood Baptist in Lexington, Union Baptist Church in Elgin, and for three years at Eason Baptist Church in Eastover.

"I've been doing interims since I retired, and think I have something to offer congregations in terms of what to look for during an interim period and how things tend to come together," he said.

Tom is a native of Charleston. He was ordained in 1961 at Citadel Square Baptist Church. He is married to Louise Armstrong, also a Charleston native and graduate of the College of Charleston. Louise was a kindergarten teacher until she retired. They have two children: John is an attorney in Columbia with one son and Anne is a school teacher with five boys.

Grant formalizes what pastors have done for years — Learn from each other

Peer Learning Groups (PLGs) gives a formal title, a formal structure, and money, to what pastors have done informally for years – get together to discuss current religious issues, common problems, relevant readings, and anything else that might be on their minds.

The initiative began last year to help sustain healthy ministers and is made possible by a grant to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship from the Lilly Endowment.

In South Carolina, a couple of area groups were quickly organized into PLGs because of previous connections. Other groups are just being formed.

Terry Brooks, CBF's Reference and Referral Associate, is a part of a Columbia area Peer Learning Group that began as a Companions in Christ group. The pastors meet on Thursdays at least twice a month. The group spent a day at the Oratorio in Rock Hill last year, studying spiritual formation. Last spring, they met with Bill Leonard, dean at Wake Forest Divinity School, for a day of dialogue. In October, they met with Dan Bell, Professor of Ethics at the Lutheran Southern

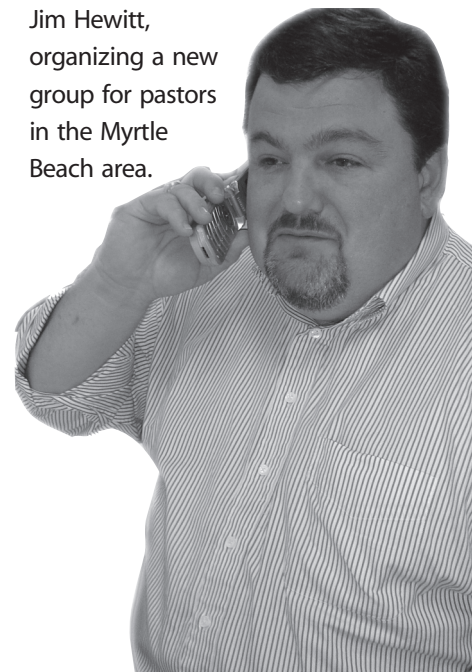
Theological Seminary and the Director of the Methodist House of Studies, to talk about Christian issues in violence, war, retaliation, and punishment of offenders.

The group is currently reading a book recommended by Leonard, "Perspectives on American Religions in Culture," edited by Peter Williams. It deals with issues in the development of pluralism in the United States.

Courtney Krueger, pastor of First Baptist Church in Pendleton, leads another PLG in the Upstate that began as a Companions in Christ group. The nine participants have been meeting together for two years, and are currently going through the Companions in Christ *Way of Blessedness* curriculum. "It has been an absolutely wonderful experience," Courtney said.

Jim Hewitt, pastor of First Baptist Church in Pamlico, and David Deming, pastor of Brunson and Hickory Grove Baptist churches in Hampton County, are organizing new PLGs "I want to pull together a group of Baptist pastors that can learn from one another and enjoy fellowship together," said Jim, a 2000 graduate of Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond. "One of the rich components of PLG is nurturing and building fellowship and offering the opportunity for

Jim Hewitt, organizing a new group for pastors in the Myrtle Beach area.



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spiritual growth," he said. "Many pastors, especially those serving in rural areas, are isolated, and being part of a PLG gives them a chance to break that isolation."

Jim's group will include pastors from the area around Myrtle Beach, Florence and Conway.

In Hampton and Allendale counties, David is pulling together a group that previously met for book study. "We are continuing to read a common book together and meet monthly to review it," he said. The group also attended a preaching event sponsored by Mercer University at the end of September.

The Lilly grant provides each group with \$1,200 a year that it can use to pay speakers or purchase books.



"This group serves two important functions for me — fellowship and understanding from my peers and intellectual stimulation, especially when the book we are reading stretches my comfort zone or expands my horizons."

—David Deming

Metanoia receives community service award

Metanoia, SC/CBF's urban ministry in Charleston, received a 2004 Community Achievement Award at the annual conference for Community Housing and Economic Development hosted by the South Carolina Association of Community Development Corporations (SCACDC) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. "It was a nice bit of PR for us to have the plaque presented in a room of 400 folks at the Francis Marion Hotel in Downtown Charleston," said urban minister Bill Stanfield. "I think we got the award because people have been impressed with the time we took to really build community support before we did anything here, and the speed at which we have become a relatively strong organization with a good board and good programs."



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Aiken Acteens missed trip but Bucharest and Belgium are benefitting

A canceled trip to Romania in 2001 has resulted in a new baptistry at a church in Belgium and a new oven in Bucharest.

It all happened because of an Acteens group at First Baptist Church in Aiken.

In 1999, the Acteens adopted the Romany people and started making plans to take a trip to the Ruth School in Bucharest, Romania, a school where Gypsy children are educated. "We had met with Philip Vestal, had breakfast with T Thomas, sponsored a dinner for missionaries and gone to a CBF conference in Atlanta to attend the Romany break-out session," said Lori Gourdin, who until this fall was Acteens director at the church.

"That year we spent much time preparing for a trip to visit the Ruth School, and began raising the needed funds to go. Sadly, when the Twin Towers were attacked on September 11, 2001, many of the parents of our Acteens decided it would be better to stay at home," she



A church in Belgium has this new baptistry thanks to Aiken Acteens.

said. "So we needed to find another way to reach out to these people that we loved."

"In 2003, one of our church members, Rose Ann Pistole, had heard of a need for an industrial oven at the Ruth School. Here was an opportunity for us to help!" Lori said. "We gladly sent a portion of the money we raised to purchase the oven, and we still had a good chunk of money in our account."

"Again, just this past summer, Rose Ann connected us with the right people, and we were able to send the rest of the money to Belgium to complete the work on the baptistry in our sister association there," Lori said.

"It has been exciting to see God work," she said. "Our girls have been able to touch the lives of people in Romania and Belgium with the funds they raised in 2000. We have received pictures and notes of appreciation. The old saying is true, 'If someone shuts the door, God always opens a window.' We thank God for blessing us through these opportunities. I, for one, will be forever grateful."

SC/CBF to sponsor trip to BWA

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of South Carolina is sponsoring a trip to the Baptist World Alliance Centenary Congress next summer in Birmingham, England. The trip will be July 25 - August 8, 2005, and will include stops in England and Scotland. The Centenary Congress itself will be July 27-31.

SC/CBF editor Sue Poss is coordinating the trip. Please contact her for a brochure. Her contact information is at the top of this page.

FELLOWSHIP NEWS

COOPERATIVE BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP OF SOUTH CAROLINA NOVEMBER 2004



Fall Convocation:

Nov. 8

First Baptist Church
Greenville

Foy Valentine • Duke McCall
• Jimmy Allen • Carolyn
Weatherford Crumpler

Beginning at 2:30 p.m.

For years Tom Cuttino had dual careers. Now he's part of A Dual Interim

Retiring in 1997 from a dual career as full-time professor and full-time pastor, Tom Cuttino since June has been part of a new kind of dual situation – a dual interim at Greenlawn Baptist Church in Columbia.

Tom is the interim pastor and Mark Tidsworth, Coordinator of the Center for Clergy & Congregations in Columbia, is the interim consultant.

Tom preaches every Sunday morning, leads vespers on Sunday night, and teaches a Bible study every other Wednesday. On the alternate Wednesdays, Mark is in charge of the program, guiding the church to look at where it has been, where it is, and where it would like to be. "Then we'll be ready to think seriously about looking for a new full-time pastor," Tom said.

"We had considered an intentional

Tom Cuttino has been interim pastor of Greenlawn Baptist Church in Columbia since June.



interim pastor but that turned out not to be very feasible," said Jim Revels, the church moderator and deacon chair. "But we got Tom as interim pastor and Mark as consultant and that has turned out to be the next best thing."

Jim said the whole congregation is involved in the introspective study that

Mark is leading, and that no timetable has been set for completing the work. "We decided when our last pastor resigned that we would not be in a hurry," Jim said.

"Greenlawn has changed through the past 6-8 years," Tom said. "Membership has been declining, and the members were discouraged."

The church got a big boost on Oct. 10 when it celebrated its 120th anniversary. The sanctuary was packed. "They had not seen that many people there in years," Tom said.

"I believe that we are on the right track at Greenlawn," Tom said. "The church has been very enthusiastic about the divided interim. We're seeing good attendance and people tell me the spirit of the church is better than it has been in some time. It seems to me we are making good progress."

Ph. D. in home and family led to Cuttino's career in teaching and preaching

Tom Cuttino was a full-time professor of sociology at Columbia College for 26 years. At the same time, he started and was long-time pastor of First Baptist Church in Irmo, then spent 12 years as pastor of First Baptist Church in West Columbia.

"When I was in my role of professor, I tried to stay on my assigned subject but was often accused of doing a little preaching in the classroom," he said. "When I was in the pulpit, I tried to stay on theological subjects but quite often did some teaching."

Tom started his career as a minister. He graduated from the College of Charleston and earned Bachelor of Divinity and Master of Theology degrees from Southern Seminary. He was pastor for 15 years at First Baptist Church, Quincy, FL. While he was in Florida, he earned a Ph.D. in sociology from Florida State University.

"I found that what people needed were skills and understanding in the family," he said. "So what I did was get a degree from FSU in home and family life. That worked real well with ministry."

At Columbia College, an all female college while Tom was there, he always taught a course in marriage and another in family. Both were popular courses. "I told my students not to get married until they knew something about it," he said.

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