



THE HICKORY MESSENGER



Pastor's Pen

BY PASTOR TOM JONES

The warning signs are everywhere: "Do not text and drive!" That message appears on social media, billboards and television commercials. Parents are constantly reminding their teenage drivers of the dangers of texting and driving at the same time. Of course, the core message is to avoid the distractions that take your attention away from the operating the automobile safely.

One of the verses in the Bible that I think about often is when Jesus says in Luke 9: 62, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." That verse is a warning sign to avoid the distractions that take our attention away from following Jesus. As a farmer plowing a field focuses on where he is going, we are instructed to do the same. If we lose that focus by looking back, we will stray from the desired destination.

The reason I think about this verse so often is because my entire ministry has been affected by getting distracted by the latest controversy, complaints, or the demands of others on what they think I am called to do. Too often I end up "chasing my tail" in an endless circle as I keep looking around for a direction to go. For me, it has been a difficult lesson to learn, but sometimes it is best to ignore all the noise and just follow the Lord where He is leading.

The perfect example of what I am talking about was a session member in a previous church who complained that there were church members who were unhappy about not receiving home communion. I spent numerous weeks reaching out to the congregation in various ways to let everyone know that we would be happy to bring them home communion. After all that work, we added exactly zero to our home communion list. I realized that I was "chasing my tail."

Pastors, churches and church members can too often get caught up in the various distractions that lead us to stray from the path. I see a lot of great things happening at Hickory United. It is now more important than ever that we focus on pressing "toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ!" (Philippians 3: 14).

Love and Blessings, Pastor Tom

WORSHIP:

Sundays | 10:00 am

SUNDAY SCHOOL:

Sundays | 8:45 am

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THE VISION

Leading one another into growing relationships with Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit all for the glory of God.

THE MISSION

Reaching upward to God,
Growing inward with God, Serving outward for God.

Reality of Experiencing God #5

BY BRUCE SHARNACK

Stewardship & Benevolence Committee

God's invitation for you to work with Him always leads you to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action. "Then Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And Isaiah said, 'Here am I. Send me!'" (Isaiah 6:8). Is God inviting you to do join His work? Has the Holy Spirit clearly spoke? Perhaps, it is a new family work. Perhaps, it's a new work assignment. Perhaps, it is a new community or church need. Hickory United EPC is a faith and action church. You are like the Nike ad that says: Just do it.

As God says through James: As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. Spontaneous, random giving is good. God's Spirit invites you. You ask, "can I do this?" You meet the question with faith and action. You trust and obey. It's a "God thing." Promising to give a specific amount for a specific time, or pledging, is a more sweeping, Spirit call. God invites. You question, "can I do this?" You respond with faith and action. You trust God and obey. It's a "God thing." Pledge can be completed online at hickorychurch.com/stewardship or by contacting the Treasurer: treasurer@hickoryunitedepc.org.

DEACON'S CORNER

HELPING HANDS PROGRAM

Canned goods, vegetables and boxed cereal/pasta donations are requested for collection on Communion Sundays. Items will be distributed through the Fort Cherry Helping Hands program to local families who require additional assistance. Thank you for giving generously! Please place items on the metal rack in the main entrance foyer.



Next Communion: May 4

10:00 am | Sanctuary

Gluten Free wafers available

MCDONALD AREA FOOD PANTRY

The McDonald Food Distribution program has grown by twenty families. There is great need for food donations of the following items: peanut butter, jelly, canned chicken, tuna, vegetables, boxed cereals and pastas, pasta sauces, and small snack food items. Please drop-off donation items to the red bin outside the Main Office. We appreciate your contributions!

DEACON'S ROLE IN THE EPC:

According to Scripture, those who bear the office of Deacon should especially exhibit the spiritual qualities of the Christian and should be steady and reliable. The first duty of the Deacon is sympathy and service, and together the Board of Deacons carries out the ministry of compassion. As the law of love places certain duties upon each Christian, the Deacon is especially bound to fulfill those duties and to be an example to all.

Ref: The Ordination and Installation of Deacons Book of Government 14-1E.

2025 DEACONS

Bob Spencer, Moderator; Kathy Yonker, Vice Moderator; Lois Templeton, Secretary; Gretta MacIntyre, Treasurer; Dale English, Derek Geisler, Sandy Martinek, Sharon Mechtel, Rich Moore, Denise Rollinitis

Experiencing God Bible Study

BY BRUCE SHARNACK

Several years ago we did this Bible study. We found it transformed how we viewed God's work around us, His love relationship with us, and His will in our lives. It is a 12 week study with daily workbook readings and a weekly class to summarize the teaching. Each group is limited to 8 -10 participants. Like last time, we'd like to offer three groups per week: Saturday am, Sunday am, and Tuesday evening. First session starts Saturday, June 21 and runs through September. Sign up in the Welcome Area May 4-18 where we will have more details. Questions? Contact Bruce: 724-255-0975.



MISCELLANEOUS NEWS

NOTES OF Thanks

Thank you for your generous donations to F.C.'s Helping Hands. Your generosity is heart warming.

~BRIANNE EILER

We thank you for your financial support that keep the ministry going. Thanks for check #22346 in the amount of \$1,700.00 issues on 3-21-2025. All continues to go well at the mission. Children receive their hot meals. We thank God that we can still buy and get food safely at the mission. God is good. God bless.

~ERMITHE & PIERRE

I am writing to thank you for the generous gift you sent to Samaritan's Purse for U.S. Disaster Relief. We are deeply grateful for your investment in what God is doing through this ministry.

We have teams and equipment deployed in Oklahoma, Missouri, Kentucky, West Virginia, California and Hawaii, helping families who have been devastated by storms and wildfires. In the aftermath of Hurricane Helene in western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee, we are continuing to help people recover and get back on their feet and have begun rebuilding houses destroyed by the storm. We have also ordered and received 57 replacement mobile homes so far, are working on site preparations, and look forward to dedicating the first of these very soon for families in need.

As we bring relief in Jesus' Name to people who are hurting, it is our prayer that many will put their faith and trust in Christ. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live" (John 11:25). May God bless you.

~FRANKLIN GRAHAM



Spring Work Day

Saturday, May 10 | 8 am - 12 pm

Rain Date May 17

Volunteers are needed for our Building & Property Team's annual Spring Work Day. Time will be spent on outdoor church grounds projects. Contact Lou Templeton or the Main Office to lend a hand!



Discipleship Pancake Fundraiser

Sunday, May 18 | 11:15 am | Covenant Ct.

Donations encouraged

Discipleship team is hosting a Pancake Fundraiser after service in Covenant Center on May 18. This will be in lieu of our monthly Food & Fellowship potluck meal. Instead of a dish, we encourage attendees to bring a donation to benefit the Christian Youth & Development Fund. Please join us!



(Top left) New Members were received into the congregation on Sunday, April 13. Congratulations to (left to right) Beverly Scott, Renee Wentzel, Brad Wentzel and Ayden Waller. (Top right) Ayden Waller was also baptized by Pastor Tom on Palm Sunday as a special surprise for her grandparents! Praise the Lord!



VBS VOLUNTEERS STILL NEEDED!

Each year, Hickory United's summer VBS serves over 100 children (preschool through fifth grade). God consistently calls many hands and hearts to serve with preparation before VBS and duties during camp week. There is a role for anyone and everyone!

VBS is a church wide initiative and the biggest outreach event of the year for our community's littlest disciples! Whether you are a builder, painter, list maker, attendance taker or just want to interact with the kids and have a blast, join the team! Register now: vbspro.events/p/7755c6

HOLY WEEK *at* HICKORY UNITED



Palm Sunday

Betty Little (left) led the congregation in a responsive reading for Palm Sunday while our K-5th graders (right) participated in the processional and opening hymn. Great work kids! Hosanna in the highest! The entire congregation celebrated Jesus' Triumphal Entry and the beginning of Holy Week by waving palms in Worship. Special



Special thanks to our Building & Property team who hosted a lovely Easter themed Food & Fellowship after the Palm Sunday service. Delicious Easter Dinner staples of ham, mashed potatoes with gravy and rolls (middle right) were served with a myriad of delicious sides and desserts. There was a blessed abundance of incredible eats and fellowship!

Maundy Thursday Cantata: Candles of Grace

The Maundy Thursday evening service featured a cantata performed by the Hickory United Chancel Choir (bottom left), directed by Tim VanNasdale, narrated by Brian Shields and featuring guest musicians (center) Jennifer Madge on violin Louise Farbman on viola, Jeanne Tupper on cello with Tim VanNasdale on piano.



The tenebrae service featured a dramatic draping of items in the Sanctuary through each movement of the Cantata. This darkening symbolizes sin, sorrow and the impending death of Christ. We are meant to feel the weighty cost of redemption Jesus paid for us all.

Communion by intinction (bottom right) was observed during the Epilogue for a powerful reminder of the covenant Christ made with each of us during the Last Supper. What an impactful and Holy Spirit filled evening!



Easter Sunday

Pastor Tom (right) delivered the Easter Children's sermon, emphasizing Easter is about the presents God gives us - His love, grace and Jesus Christ. We then share god's love and grace with others.

The message of Easter is that Jesus is alive! Pastor Tom gave out gum for the children to share with others and use as a vehicle to also share the message that Jesus has risen!



KIDS & YOUTH

HICKORY UNITED Kids

In Sunday School this May, our Pre-K-5th graders are learning about how the Holy Spirit is a helper. We often use the word helper to describe someone who is well-meaning but not that powerful, like the sidekick to a superhero. But when Jesus told His disciples in John 16:7 that He was sending a helper, He was promising someone so much more than a sidekick! The Holy Spirit is the very fullness of God—fully powerful, fully wise, fully loving. The Holy Spirit is God, and just as Jesus promised, the Holy Spirit is with us! In this series, we'll see the Holy Spirit work through Paul, move in prison-breaking power, help us pray, and unite the church. The Holy Spirit isn't merely a sidekick; He is God, our helper!

HARVEST STUDENT MINISTRY

In Sunday School, we are continuing to read through the Gospel of Mark. Each week, observe and examine characteristics of Jesus in the passage we are reading. We discuss who Jesus is revealing himself to be, how God is demonstrating his love for us through his son, and how as Christians we should respond to these revelations. Recently, we examined Mark 4:35-41. Jesus demonstrates his authority and his care for his disciples and when he rebukes them in this passage, he likely does so because they questioned his authority, not because they asked him for help. When in need of help, we should ask God for assistance with confidence instead of an accusation.

UPCOMING EVENTS

SUNDAY SCHOOL 8:45 AM | YOUTH GROUP SUNDAYS 6:30-8 PM



Kids: KidVenture

Tuesdays | 5:30-7:00 pm | Youth Loft / CC
Spring Session runs through May 13

This May in Kidventure, we are going to teach kids to Pass It On as we share the Simple Truth, "I Am Here to Share Jesus." Kids can know that God made them for a purpose, and part of that purpose is to share the good news of Jesus with others. Kids will learn that we can share Jesus because He is the only truth, God's only Son, the only way, and the One to follow.

Join us for the last few weeks of our KidVenture Spring session!



Youth: Glow Lock-In!

May 17-18 | 5 pm - 1 pm | Covenant Center

Join us for glow dodgeball, dance party and dinner! The Sunday School hour will be spent prepping batter, eggs, bacon, and fruit to serve the congregation at the Discipleship Pancake Fundraiser @ 11:15 am in Covenant Center following Sunday service. All funds raised will benefit the Christian Youth & Development Fund.



Kids: VBS Egypt - Joseph's Journey

June 16-20 | 9 am-12 pm | Hickory United
Closing Celebration June 20 | 6 pm

Come to Egypt and learn about Joseph's Journey from Prison to Palace. God's Word comes alive as campers enjoy traditional Bible-times customs, occupations, food, and even games! Open to ages 4 through 5th Grade or 3 year olds with one year completion of Pre-K.

Questions? Contact Patty
Lin: plgrowden@gmail.com
Registration open May 1:
vbspro.events/pl/7755c6



Kids: End of Year Celebration

May 18 | 11:15 am | Covenant Center

Join us for an end of year celebration for all kids Sunday School classes during the Pancake Fundraiser! Kids will enjoy Games, craft and take home party favor! Memory Work students will also be formally recognized for their achievements.

MAY CALENDAR

ALL EVENTS, DATES & TIMES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

SPECIAL DATES THIS MONTH

- 5/1-5/2 *Preschool Closed*
5/4 **Communion** | 10 am (S)
5/5 *Cinco De Mayo*
5/8 *PreK 4's Graduation Program* | 10 am (S)
5/9 *PreK 3's Closing Program* | 10 am (S)
5/10 *Spring Work Day* | 8 am - 12 pm (HUEPC)
5/11 **Mother's Day**
5/13 **KidVenture Spring Session Ends** | 5:30 pm (CC)
5/17 *Harvest Student Lock-in* | 5 pm (CC)
5/18 *Spring Work Day Rain Date*

- 5/18 **Discipleship Pancake Fundraiser** | 11:15 am (CC)
Sunday School End of Year Celebration | 11:15 am (CC)
5/19 *June Newsletter Deadline*
5/26 **Memorial Day - Office Closed**

NEXT MONTH

- 6/1 **Communion** | 10 am (S)
6/8 *Senior Recognition* | 10 am (S)
6/13-6/22 *Fellowship Hall/CC Reserved for VBS*
6/19 **Father's Day**
6/16-6/20 **VBS Week** | 9 am - 12 pm

(CC) Covenant Center (CR) Choir Room (FH) Fellowship Hall
(LB) Library (P) Parlor (YL) Youth Loft (S) Sanctuary

CHECK ONLINE CALENDAR FOR FULL LIST OF RECURRING WEEKLY/MONTHLY MEETINGS: hickorychurch.com/calendar

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