

Words of Faith

THE NEWSLETTER OF FAITH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Volume 3, Issue 2

April-June 2003

Calendar

May 16

Covenant High School Spring Concert

May 23

50th anniversary celebration,
Landmark Convention Center, Tacoma

May 30

Covenant High School
Commencement at First Presbyterian
Church (102 Tacoma Ave. S.)

June 10-13

General Assembly in Charlotte, NC

June 22-28

Presbyterian Youth of America Camp
at Horn Creek, CO

Annual meeting serves supper, reviews church state of affairs

They came not as single spies, but as foot-soldiers in a column, advancing steadily on the battalions of pizzas, veggies, desserts and drinks that were massed in the hallway leading to the church kitchen.

The comestibles, well-prepared but utterly defenseless against the assault, quickly gave way before the mandibles of the attacking troops. Within the space of about an hour the din of dining had diminished, with the forces of food in disarray, depleted, and in digestion, and the battlefield was a jumble of empty boxes, cleaned plates, and drained cups.

Of the conflict it could then truly be said, into the victors had gone the spoils.

And so went the first part of the annual church meeting on January 29, 2003.

After the meal was over, the attendees moved upstairs for a review of the church's activities from the previous year and to study the budget and plans for the year ahead.

Bookended by the hymns "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken" and "Psalm 33" were reports from various ministries of the church, and the presentation of the budget for 2003.

Some of the statistics:

- Total communicant membership stood at 484, up from 463 in 2002.
- Sunday school attendance nudged up to 347, from 336.

- Average attendance at morning topped 500 for the first time at 502, up from 496.

- Attendance at evening worship dipped slightly, from 339 down to 323.

- Attendance at prayer meeting held steady in the low 60s.

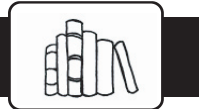
- Covenant High School reported a student body of 124 as it started its 11th year. 38% of the students also attend Faith.

- In December of 2002 the City of Tacoma approved the master plan for developing the property for both the church and high school

- Deacon's fund receipts totalled \$25,251, which was used for helping both families at Faith as well as members of the community.

- The 24-year-old practice of session visitation to individual families in the church was ended, owing to the increasing size of the congregation and a desire by the session to provide more consistent and meaningful spiritual oversight. A new form of congregational care will be based on the assignment of elders to groups of parishioners.

The report of the pastors and elders summed the year as one "of salvation and of affliction, of birth and death, of growth in the life of faith and of stumbles and doldrums. We have sought to be faithful in our leadership of the church and, no doubt, have failed in many ways, but are most grateful for another year of the Lord's blessing, of unity, of progress on many fronts." ✠



Lessons of Faith

Biblical Worship: A Continuing Series

The Evening Service

By Rev. Rob Rayburn

In previous columns, in discussing the worship we offer to God we have primarily considered questions about the contents, the order, and the ceremonial regulation of the morning worship service. But what of the evening service and all the more in our day when the evening service is rapidly disappearing from the Sunday schedule of the Christian Church? This is a great change and, in my view, a most unfortunate one.

A 1985 survey of the favorite hymns of British church-goers placed several evening hymns in the top ten (including *The Day Thou Gavest, Lord, is Ended* [No. 1], and *Abide with Me* [No. 7]). It is painful to contemplate generations of Christians growing up and not learning to sing these superb hymns so beloved of generations of the saints. But if there are no evening services, it is unlikely that these hymns will retain a place in the church's mind and heart. The number of the elect who were summoned to faith and life in Christ by preaching in Sunday evening services must be very large. But now there are half as many services in which a man or woman, boy or girl, might hear the words of life.

Are there reasons for the church to meet twice on the Lord's Day? Well, there must be, for the church has done so virtually without exception throughout her history. At Faith Presbyterian Church we love to sing *Hail! Gladdening Light*, one of the earliest Christian hymns extant, dating from at least the 3rd century and perhaps earlier. It was a hymn for the evening service of the early Christian church. The arguments for a second Lord's Day service, that is, an evening service, include these:

First, provision was made in the liturgical regulation of the tabernacle and temple for both morning and evening sacrifices and these were explicitly required to be continued on the Sabbath day (Numbers 28:1-10). *Second*, Psalm 92, which is explicitly identified as a psalm "For the Sabbath Day," reads, "It is good...to proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night" (cf. Ps. 134:1). *Third*, in the New Testament we have record of evening worship on the Christian Sabbath, that

A day devoted to his
worship...is very naturally
a day that begins and ends
in God's house...with his
Word in our ears and his
praise in our hearts.

is Sunday (Acts 20:7) and we have it in a book that very clearly intends to set before us facts representative of the life of early Christianity. Interestingly, what might be called the first Sunday "service" of the new epoch took place at night when the Lord on Easter evening met his disciples gathered in a room in Jerusalem. *Fourth*, just as morning has a special significance in the history of salvation (e.g. our Savior rose from the dead in the morning), so many events have sanctified the evening (e.g. the Savior's birth, the transfiguration, the struggle in Gethsemane, etc.). There is something appropriate in the church worshipping at the time that recollects such sacred and important events. *Fifth*, there is the consistent witness of the Christian tradition, from early Christianity, to English Puritanism and Scottish Presbyterianism's "after-

noon" service, to Anglican evensong. *Sixth*, there are a variety of practical considerations that, together, strongly recommend the practice of an evening worship service on the Sabbath Day.

For example, such a service provides another opportunity for ministers to preach and teach the Word of God. All the more in our day, when the church is not as biblically literate as it once was, reducing the number of times Christians hear the Word read and taught is hardly a recipe for spiritual prosperity or renewal. I give my own testimony as a preacher that, were it not for the evening service – a well attended evening service for which I am very grateful – there are a many parts of the Bible the congregation would never have had taught to it and many biblical themes that would never have been taught so comprehensively were I limited to a single sermon each week. A long series on the Bible's doctrine of affliction, or biblical ethics, or nearly two years in Samuel would be impossible to justify were only the Sunday morning sermon available to the preacher.

Further, the evening service provides a helpful structure to support the sanctification of the Lord's Day. Christians universally find it much easier to keep the Lord's Day holy and make proper use of its time if the hours following the morning worship are an interval between two services. Then there is a limited amount of time in the middle of the day to put to proper use before it is time to return to church. The definite structure of the day lends itself to obedience and to a wise use of the day.

In those churches where the Christian family is home from church at 11:00 a.m. or 1:00 p.m., with the remainder of the day to its end stretching before them and with no occasion to return to church, the sanctification of the day is provided no support and now

(continued on next page)

Rain at snow camp; relaxation reigns at couple's retreat

One group went north and east into the mountains, where the activity levels were as high as the elevation.

The other group went west into the rain forest, where the kinetic energy was at a level closer to that of the lake by which they stayed.

But both the high school snow camp, held near Leavenworth on January 24-26, and the couple's retreat, held from February 27 to March 1 at Lake Quinault Lodge, offered some good out-of-town and off-the-beaten-path midwinter ministry, and participants returned with stories to tell.

The snow camp this year included young people from the Evangelical Reformed Church in Parkland and Covenant Presbyterian Church in Issaquah, for a total contingent of between 70 and 80 kids plus a handful of chaperones. Rich Hamlin, pastor of the Parkland church, gave a four-part message on "Life As A Journey," and CHS senior Adam Skriven headed up the announcements and singing for the weekend.

Although there was plenty of snow all around them, what came out of the

sky during the weekend was entirely in the form of rain. The more determined campers went outside anyway for snowball fights, hikes, tubing, and even some attempted snowboarding, while the more practical ones stayed inside to read books and play games.

This year's hymn-writing competition, with the prize a scholarship to the camp, was won by David Simpson, with Anne Stopoulos in the runner-up position.

The weekend ended with a surprise: campers were stuck for an extra two hours on Sunday morning when the road flooded out, and they had to wait until the county came along to unplug the culvert that had gotten filled with debris.

The event was perhaps best summed up by CHS senior Peter McNeely, who opined that "outside of the rain and the flooding, the weekend went pretty well."

At the end of February approximately 25 couples went to Lake Quinault for a weekend in the woods and the lodge. Participants ranged from couples married for less than a

year (Scott & Alisha Bennett, Magnum & Delores Tulfo) to those who had been practicing the art and discipline of matrimony for more than 50 (Joe & Barbara Gronewold, Jack & Donna Carlman).

"Wonderful rest and relaxation," said Andy Allen (married 35 years to Sharon), "and a great opportunity for fellowship." "A good chance to get acquainted with people that we didn't know very well," recalls Phyllis Overman (married to Dick for 44 years). Time was spent hiking, sitting around the fireplace, eating meals together, and playing games, including one called "Three on a couch" in which one truth-teller and two fabricators were asked to recount a former date and tell what had gone wrong on their honeymoon. It seems that there are some members of the congregation with a well-developed capacity for mendacity – or is it just some fine acting ability?

Planning for both events was spearheaded by Pastor Rick DeMass, assisted by his wife Lisa. ☺

Lessons of Faith, continued

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depends entirely on the determined exercise of the will. We are finding in American evangelicalism that this is a recipe for disaster so far as the holiness of the Sabbath day is concerned. But, if keeping the Sabbath holy is one of the great engines of Christian faith, holiness and joy, as the Bible teaches that it is, the loss of the Sabbath in the evangelical church is no small thing.

Furthermore, there is a character to the evening that lends to worship a particular character. Generations of Christians have known this from hal- lowed experience. The English poet,

Meredith, has a line, "the largeness of the evening earth." G.K. Chesterton, commenting on that line, wrote, "The sensation that the cosmos has all its windows open is very characteristic of evening..." The special character of evening hymns bears witness to the particular set of holy thoughts that crowd the soul in the evening hours. Christian worship on the Lord's Day evening gains a special character from the hour.

God's people through the ages have prized the second service. Christian children growing up with Sunday evenings at church remember them with a special fondness. Most Christians, I

suppose, have the memory of a special spiritual atmosphere that attached to evening worship. We are, after all, talking about only another hour or two out of the entire week. Surely we should have a good reason, a very good reason, why we would not make a special effort to be in God's house, to sing his praise and hear his Word, twice on the Lord's holy Day. A day devoted to his worship and to the refreshment of our souls in him, surely is very naturally a day that begins and ends in God's house, among God's people, with his Word in our ears and his praise in our hearts.

Rob ☺



Evangelicals on the Decline

by Holly Peters

In his new book, *The State of the Church 2002*, pollster George Barna reveals some surprising facts about evangelicals in America. Contrary to popular belief, evangelicals are more generous, more educated and more likely to stay married than non-evangelicals (Yes, you read that right). We're also less likely to have debt, be stressed out, or be searching for meaning and purpose in life.

That's the good news.

The bad news is there are far less of us than you may have realized, and we keep getting fewer.

While 77 percent of Americans call themselves "Christian," only five percent meet the evangelical criteria used by Barna Research Group which is based on the National Association of Evangelicals' statement of faith. (See "How Barna Defines Evangelicals.") This is down from 12 percent just 10 years ago.

"By evangelical, we're talking about the thin slice of people who are really biblical Christians," said Barna's Vice President and Strategic Leader, David Kinnaman.

The rest of the Christians include 35 percent whom Barna identifies as "non-evangelical, born again" Christians (people who are born again, but reject a key biblical teaching) and 37 percent whom he identifies as "notional" Christians (people who consider themselves Christians, but do not meet the born again criteria).

The reason we often hear the negative statistics applied to evangelicals (such as how Christians are as likely to get divorced as non-Christians) is because of a lack of clarity in how we use our terms, according to Kinnaman. In terms of moral behavior, Barna has found no significant difference

between non-Christians and "notional" or "non-evangelical, born again" Christians.

But evangelicals are a different story.

"All our research suggests that evangelicals are the one group among whom Christianity makes a demonstrable difference in their life," Kinnaman said. "It's the best argument we have for the fact that Christianity makes a difference in a person's lifestyle."

That's one reason the distinction between evangelical Christians is so crucial — and why their decline should concern us.

While evangelicals are on the decline, the number of non-evangelical, born again Christians is rising, according to Barna's report. This doesn't surprise Biola sociology professor Richard Flory — author of *Gen X Religion* — who has observed a shift of many young evangelicals into the liturgical churches such as Catholic, Orthodox and Episcopalian. "All the ritual, the formality, the incense — that's very appealing to this generation," he said.

At the other end of the spectrum is a whole group of young Christians who are rejecting labels like "evangelical," "Catholic," and "Protestant," and meeting in coffee houses and other informal settings.

"The draw to formality and informality is totally the opposite, but the similarities are an emphasis on the visual, the experiential and the embodiment of belief," Flory said.

Barna suggests three factors associated with this decline in evangelicalism, including a rise of bad theology and doctrine within the Church, a rise of postmodernism within the Church, and an increase of worldliness within the Church.

Bad Theology on the Rise

Bad theology is definitely on the rise in the evangelical church, say many Biolans. Not surprisingly, many attribute the problem to a decline in Bible knowledge. If you don't know the real thing, they say, how can you spot a counterfeit?

"I'm discovering that a rudimentary knowledge of the Bible is something you can no longer count on Christians having," said Bob Covolo, the college pastor at Long Beach Grace Brethren in Long Beach, Calif.

Garry De Weese — philosophy professor at Talbot School of Theology and former pastor — agrees. "There are seminary students who admit they have never read the entire Bible," he said. "A few years ago, that would have been shocking."

André Stephens, director of undergraduate admissions at Biola, said that — in the six years since he's held the position — an increasing number of freshman applicants are having trouble articulating their faith in their entrance interviews.

As a result, evangelicals are accepting beliefs that would have "horrified" people 50 years ago, De Weese said. For example, he mentioned the growing acceptance of the view known as "annihilationism" — the belief that hell is not a real place of eternal torment, but rather a symbol for the non-existence of the wicked after death. "This view seems rather difficult to square with sound exegesis," he said.

Another unscriptural view that is gaining ground, De Weese said, is "open theology" — the idea that God does not have exhaustive knowledge of the future. "If people really knew the Bible, they would know that Isaiah has God saying, 'I tell you the end from the beginning. That's what sets me apart from the idols,'" he said. "So I think biblical illiteracy lies at the root of

Evangelicals on the Decline, continued

much of the aberrant doctrine being accepted.”

To make Christianity seem more “tolerant” and, thus, more acceptable to the culture, other “harsh” doctrines are being watered down, according to Covolo, including the reality of sin, the wrath of God, and the exclusivity of Jesus as the only Way. “When we lose those doctrines, the glory of our salvation is also lost because a Savior no longer seems necessary,” he said.

Coupled with this de-emphasis of the “harsh” teachings is a growing emphasis on what Talbot theology professor Robert Saucy terms the more “therapeutic” teachings, such as how to live a good life, have a good marriage, and be a good parent. “These are important teachings,” he said, “but there seems to be an unbalanced emphasis on making Christianity relevant to this life, rather than preparation for the life to come.”

Perhaps most disturbing is the Barna statistic that — although two out of three teenagers are involved in church youth programs — only one out of three plans to attend church when they move away from home. This lack of commitment among young people is the logical outcome of the “entertainment-oriented brand of Christianity” being presented in many youth ministries, according to Carmen Mayell,

founder of the Youth Leadership Development Project, based in Delray Beach, Fla. It’s a brand of Christianity where getting kids in the door seems to be more of a priority than in-depth Bible teaching and discipleship, Mayell said.

“If God’s Word is foundational to the growth of the believer, then why should we think it strange to see a defection from a faith commitment if our young people do not know God’s Word?” he said.

Postmodernism Creeping In

No doubt, the decline of biblical literacy in America is related to the growing influence of philosophical postmodernism, a view that has eroded trust in the Bible. If absolute truth can’t be known — as the philosophical version of postmodernism claims — then biblical teaching cannot hold true for all people at all times.

Although postmodernism has gained influence, primarily, at the academic level, examples of it can be seen infiltrating evangelical churches at the popular level, according to Biola apologetics professor Scott Smith. For example, in many Bible studies, members are asked to share what passages mean to them. “It’s as though what the author meant in the passage is not

something we can know; instead its meaning is something that is up to us to create,” Smith said.

But, if biblical teaching is relative, then the basis for biblical literacy and evangelism is lost. After all, “Why should I bother to study and share something that is only true for me?” De Weese said.

Given this rejection of absolute truth, people tend to make up their minds based on their feelings and emotions. This can be seen in evangelical churches that emphasize experience over doctrine, according to Saucy. “In many churches, as long as you have a spiritual experience, it doesn’t make a lot of difference what you believe doctrinally,” he said. “That is the popular, cultural paradigm for spirituality: doctrine divides, experience unifies. The view of the unique nature of the Bible as the inerrant Word of God has basically been lost.”

The problem with substituting thinking with feeling is that — *contra* love songs — something that feels so right can be wrong, De Weese said.

Along with a growing acceptance of postmodernism in the evangelical church is a declining commitment to biblical Christianity. According to Barna, between 2000 and 2002, the percentage of evangelicals who claimed to be absolutely committed to Christianity dropped 11 percent (from 97 percent to 86 percent).

The declining commitment of evangelical college students in Southern California has Covolo concerned. “I’ve noticed a lot of college students saying things with an air of hesitation because — if truth is relative — you don’t want to sound dogmatic,” Covolo said. “Yet, when I read the book of Acts, I see people who are absolutely convinced in mind, heart and will that what they have is truth.”

(continued on back page)

How Barna Defines Evangelicals

1. Believe they will go to heaven after death because they confessed their sins and accepted Jesus Christ as Savior
2. Believe the Bible is totally accurate in all it teaches
3. Personal commitment to Jesus Christ that’s important in their life today
4. Indicate their faith is very important in their life today
5. Believe they have a responsibility to share their faith in Christ with non-Christians
6. Believe Satan exists
7. Believe eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not works
8. Believe Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth

9. Describe God as the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect deity who created the universe and still rules it today

Respondents were not asked to describe themselves as “evangelical,” but were classified according to how they answered survey questions. Being classified as an evangelical had no relationship to church attendance or denominational affiliation. “Non-evangelical, born again Christians” meet criteria 1 and 2, but not all the other criteria that define evangelicals. Biola Connections recognizes that the number of evangelicals in America may be smaller given the above criteria does not exclude some groups who deny essential orthodox doctrines.

Reflections



Treading over paths to Glory:
 'Tis a journey fraught with fear;
 Fear of death and Hell's destruction,
 Fear of pain while living here.
 Though oppressed from all directions,
 Stand against the ranks of Hell!
 Fear not Death nor persecution
 Pilgrim, you in Heav'n shall dwell.

Travel not alone to Glory,
 Journey with a two-edged sword.
 Christian, take a faithful brother
 One who fully trusts the Lord.
 Seeking, watching, ever wakeful:
 Keep that visage on the way.
 And while heeding God's instruction,
 Keep your feet from paths that stray.

Forging trails through vile temptation,
 Seeing Glory rise ahead,
 Yet before us lies much danger,
 And behind that which we dread.
 But God's strength with us abiding,
 Drawing us through Zion's gate,
 Then for shining days unnumbered
 Praising Him, "Our God is great!"

—David Simpson

David Simpson is a junior at Covenant High School, and wrote these lyrics for the 2003 church snow camp competition. Most of his writing is done for school assignments, and includes hymns, sonnets, and several short stories.

I would suggest that a serious question would have to be faced as to whether the reason why modern men reject the Christian answer, or why they often do not even consider it, is because they have already accepted with an implicit faith the presupposition of the uniformity of natural causes in a closed system.

This does not mean that the Christian answer should be accepted for pragmatic reasons, but it does mean that the solution given in the Bible answers the problem of the universe and man and nothing else does.

—Francis Schaeffer, writing in *The God Who Is There* (1968)



We are, perhaps, orthodox evangelicals. We can state the gospel clearly, and can smell unsound doctrine a mile away. If anyone asks us how men may know God, we can at once produce the right formulae – that we come to know God through Jesus Christ the Lord, in virtue of His cross and mediation, on the basis of His word of promise, by the power of the Holy Spirit, via a personal exercise of faith. Yet the gaiety, goodness, and unfetteredness of spirit which are the marks of those who have known God are rare among us – rarer, perhaps, than they are in some other Christian Christian circles where, by comparison, evangelical truth is less clearly and fully known. Here, too, it would seem that the last may prove to be first, and the first last. A little knowledge of God is worth more than a great deal of knowledge about Him.

—J. I. Packer, writing in *Knowing God* (1973)

I believe that far more is done for Christ's kingdom by the holy living of believers than we are at all aware of. There is a reality about such living which makes men feel and obliges them to think. It carries a weight and influence with it which nothing else can give. It makes religion beautiful and draws men to consider it, like a lighthouse seen afar off. The day of judgment will prove that many besides husbands have been won "without the Word" by a holy life (I Peter 3:1). You may talk to persons about the doctrines of the gospel, and few will listen, and still fewer understand. But your life is an argument that none can escape. There is a meaning about holiness which not even the most unlearned can help taking in. They may not understand justification, but they can understand charity.

—J.C. Ryle, writing in *Holiness* (1879)

There is a land of pure delight
 Where saints immortal reign
 Infinite day excludes the night
 And pleasures banish pain.

Oh! Could we make our doubts remove
 Those gloomy doubts that rise –
 And see the Canaan, which we love
 With unclouded eyes.

Could we but climb where Moses stood
 And view the landscape o'er;
 Not Jordan's streams, nor death's cold flood
 Should fright us from the shore.

—From the early American choral anthem "Jordan"

New Member Spotlight



By Ron Boydston

BILL & DONNA BERG have known about Faith for a number of years. Their children attended Heritage Christian, and they have been acquainted with the Bechtel and Bond families. Now, Faith is where they hang their hats on Sundays as well. Long-time residents of Belfair, the Seattle Pacific grads and parents of four were drawn to Tacoma by the preaching and the music; they had previously attended Fox Island Alliance Church. Bill has been a State Farm agent with an office in Belfair for the past 29 years, and Donna works in Gig Harbor as an R.N., having completed a nursing program through Olympic College some 6 years ago. In addition to writing policies and taking temperatures, the Bergs also operate a small commercial shellfish company. In May and June of each year Bill can likely be found in or on the water somewhere in British Columbia, waving a long flexible rod to which is attached a very fine line, at the end of which is fastened a tiny fly. With this apparatus he attempts to catch fish.

DANA PADGETT is a 2002 graduate of Stadium High School in Tacoma, works for a group of optometrists,



has three sisters, and just bought her first car; a streak of curiosity is what brought her to Faith from Bible Presbyterian, where her mom still goes. Curiosity does sometimes lead to new discoveries: Dana is now engaged to fellow FPC member Chad Isenberger, and they plan to be married this October.

NATE SUKHIA, who transferred membership from Maryville Evangelical Church in Maryville, TN, had little practical choice about affiliating with Faith – he married into the Bentson family. Born in Philadelphia to a PCA pastor (Rev. Russell Sukhia, currently on staff at Coral Ridge Presbyterian in Florida), he attended Covenant College, then studied law at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, and in between schools married fellow CC grad Noel Bentson. Their son Quinn was baptized at Faith last September. Nate is employed with a Tacoma law firm that specializes in real estate, and is getting some hands-on experience in this area – they are in the process of buying a home in South Tacoma.

ADAM & CATHERINE UHLER both grew up in Aberdeen, knew each other in junior high and high school, then left town for college in the far east – Adam at Whitworth and Catherine at WSU. Romance brought them together again, and a job brought them back west, where Adam now teaches English and Pacific Northwest studies at Curtis High School in University Place. They have been attending Faith for about a year, favoring the sense of community, fellowship and the number of young families here. Catherine, who grew up Catholic, became a believer while in college, in part due to the witness borne by her future husband. Their daughter Elizabeth is three months old. Catherine's interests run in the direc-



tion of booking and cooking, while Adam is an avid cyclist who turns wheels on both roads and mountains for miles at a time. He rode the Seattle-to-Portland event (also known as STP) in 2002.

Child professions of faith

LAUREN TRAVIS, daughter of Mark & Karen Travis; AMY LEWIS, daughter of Phil & Kathy Lewis; TRAVIS PROCTOR, son of Kyle & Dorothy Proctor; PHILLIP DARBY, son of Paul & Dawn Darby.

Baptisms

Sadie Hanks, daughter of Mike & Tammy Hanks; Christina Sullivan, daughter of Andy & Jennifer Sullivan; Asa Malone, son of Barry & Mary Malone; Giles Bond, son of Doug & Cheryl Bond; Amy Grossruck, daughter of Collin & Barbara Grossruck; Jennifer Lewis, adult baptism.

Into life eternal

Ken Anderson (January 20)

Weddings

June 6 - Jeff Bone & Heidi Bentson
 June 17 - Chet McBroom & Lisa Peterson
 June 27 - Josh Hinman & Brenda Zittel

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Evangelicals on the Decline, continued from page 5

The fear of sounding dogmatic is driven by our culture's false definition of "tolerance," according to De Weese. By this definition, someone must accept all beliefs and actions as equally valid. But true tolerance, he said, gives someone the right to disagree with another person even while granting them the freedom to hold false views. "The failure to distinguish true from false tolerance is what is creating so much of the relativistic ethos in the Church," De Weese said.

Worldliness Within

The growing acceptance of the culture's definition of tolerance is just one example of increasing worldliness within the Church. "Every day, the Church is becoming more and more like the world it allegedly seeks to change," Barna said in his report.

Kinnaman believes another sign of worldliness within the Church is a neglect of the discipleship of believers to personal holiness. "Within churches,

we have not talked a lot about how it's not just believing the right things, but it's also living right," he said. "There's not always the emphasis on how you live as a Christian and how that makes a difference in your life."

Saucy believes this worldliness has affected evangelicals' ability to grow. "We're not going to persuade people of doctrine unless it shows in our lives," he said. "The most persuasive thing for the gospel is a transformed life."

Turning the Tide

So how can we, as evangelicals, reverse this decline?

First, De Weese says, we need to know our Bibles better. This also means that churches and families need to do a better job of teaching their children the base of their faith. "We need to get back to the basics," De Weese said.

Covolo agrees. "I think the key for us is to return to our faith once and for all delivered rather than continuing to

react to the culture," he said. "It's not that we need a bunch of new answers. We need to return to the answer that we've had all along — the gospel. That needs to recapture the evangelical church."

Second, evangelicals need to know, declare and defend the truth, De Weese said. "We don't do that by coming across as willing to accept any belief," he said. "We need to take a firm stand for the truth."

Third, we need to live out our Christian faith with love and integrity. "As we live the life of Christ in our churches, communities and families, people will see that there's a difference," De Weese said. And, fourth, he said, we need to hold one another accountable to living holy lives. ✝

Holly Peters is a 1999 graduate of BIOLA. This is condensed from the full article that appeared in the fall 2002 issue of "Biola Connections," the alumni magazine of Biola University.