

Western Times

Newsletter of the Christian Reformed Church of Western Springs

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Pastor's Note

Rev. Mark van Stee

Editor's Note: These two articles are from Pastor Mark's *Scattered Thoughts* emails that began in 2020.

Like many folks, during this pandemic we baked bread, sewed masks, and organized closets. Unlike many folks, though, we didn't get a puppy. It's not that we're anti-dogs – quite the opposite, in fact. We're very fond of dogs, but for us they fall into the same category as boats, vacation homes, and swimming pools – they are best owned by someone near and dear -- and not by oneself. The responsibility and work of owning a dog just seems like a bit too much for us right now (and probably always will). We're fortunate enough, though, to have neighbors who have a delightful dog, so our "dog itch" can get scratched frequently. It's a nice arrangement.

So, I say it's a nice arrangement, but, of course, I will admit, it's nothing like actually owning a dog. When you don't rise in the early morning with the dog or go out late at night with it, when you don't feed it or bathe it, when you don't scoop its poop or de-skunk its coat, when you don't take it to the vet or bring it along on a car trip, you simply don't develop the same bond with the dog as you do when you take the time and do the work of being a dog owner. It seems there's something about the "sweat equity" that bonds the dog to its owner and the owner to their dog. The investment, you might say, is what brings the pay-off.

I was reminded of this same kind of thing this summer as it concerns worship. As many of you know, we had a lot of volunteers helping out with the production of our on-line services this summer, and many of them mentioned how much they got out of the services due to their involvement (and investment) in the process. I was not surprised. Often in life, it's this way, isn't it? If you take the time and put in the work, you are far more likely to get something out of whatever it is you're doing. Alternatively, if you invest nothing of yourself into it, you probably won't get much out of it. It's simply the way things work.

Now, of course, worship is not principally about what we receive, but rather it's much about what we give – worship is much about the honor, glory, and praise we give to God. That said, though, there is also an element of receiving in worship, and this receiving involves, among other things, receiving the gift of God's grace and his instructions for how to respond to it. You might say that in this way worship is an exercise in give and take, and I might suggest that in consideration of what we've just discussed about owning dogs, both the give and the take of our worship might be enhanced by a little "sweat equity" or investment in the process.

So what do I mean by "investment in the process" when it comes to worship? Well, a lot of different things, really. One way to invest in the process of worship is by making worship a priority event for your weekend – not a "catch-as-catch-can" type event. Make a plan beforehand when and where to worship – and then, if possible, stick to it. Also, you can invest in the process by doing the weekly scripture readings associated with the topic of the sermon. This will give you some context for and background on new (or old) ideas that are presented in the service. Another way to invest in the process is to review the bulletin a day (or two) before the service. Note what hymns will be sung, what prayers will be offered, and what Scripture passages will be read. You can even use the bulletin as a daily devotional, working through the liturgy and the prayer requests by yourself before you do it with others on Sunday. Finally, you can pray – pray for what you will give and what you will receive in worship. Pray for the Holy Spirit to shape and mold your thoughts and your words as you speak to God and he speaks to you.

Yes, worship is a supernatural event, but it's not a magical one. Generally speaking, if you invest nothing in it, neither God nor you will get anything out of it. Let's take the time and do the work to give God what he deserves and receive from him what we need.

- originally shared August 28, 2020

The other day when I was listening to the radio in my car, I heard a report about a study that had recently come out about stars and extra-terrestrial life (i.e. life occurring outside of planet earth that did not originate on planet earth). The study, published in a scientific journal, found that nearly half of the sun-like stars in the universe are actually "binary" stars – meaning they are comprised of two separate smaller stars situated close together. The theory is that these binary stars were formed differently

from single stars (like our sun), and this has caused some scientists to wonder if planets around these binary stars might support extra-terrestrial life. Well, as someone who is woefully ignorant when it comes to matters astrophysical, I wouldn't dare render my opinion on this particular issue, except to say this – I absolutely, positively, 100% believe in extra-terrestrial life – and, in fact, I'm celebrating it today.

What? How can this be? Pastor Mark (generally) seems like a sensible sort of person, not one given to believing wild theories or crazy ideas. He might be boring, but he doesn't seem irrational. No worries, everyone. I don't dream of Little Green Men, make pilgrimages to Roswell, New Mexico, or attend UFO conventions. The kind of extra-terrestrial life I believe in is the kind represented by Jesus Christ and his ascension. I do believe that the ascended Jesus lives outside of this world and that he did not originate from this world. In this way I believe in extra-terrestrial life!

Today is Ascension Day. It's the day on which we celebrate Christ's return to heaven – or to put it another way, it's the day on which we celebrate his extra-terrestrial existence. There are, of course, many aspects of his extra-terrestrial existence to celebrate on this day, but one aspect that I can't help but think about is the promise that his extra-terrestrial existence holds for us and for this world. As someone not of this world but above and beyond this world, Christ can and will someday restore this world to what it should be. He can and will someday bring about the transformation this world cries out for. He can and will do all this when, at the end of time, he comes again into this world. Given the state of our world, this is something to celebrate indeed, yes? Now, of course, this doesn't mean that in the meantime, we, his people, simply sit on our hands and wait for that great day of restoration and transformation to come. No, we follow Christ's example from when he was on this earth. We work to spread faith, bring hope, and share love, thus in our own way participating in his work of restoration and transformation, in our own witnessing to his extra-terrestrial existence.

Now you know why I say I absolutely believe in extra-terrestrial life. Not in any extra-terrestrial life, though, but only in the extra-terrestrial life of the one whose ascension we can celebrate today and whose return we should anticipate always – Jesus Christ. *Ephesians 1:9-10: With all wisdom and understanding, God made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.*

- originally shared May 26, 2022

Thank You for All Our Years Together!

A farewell message from Dan Mattix

December 31, 2022, marked my last day as your full-time Director of Music Ministries. It has been a pleasure to serve alongside you for the past thirteen-and-a-half years. Beginning on January 1, I accepted a position as a professor of music at Moody Bible Institute. There I'll teach classes in church music, composition, songwriting, and piano, overseeing the composition program, and conducting the Moody Orchestra.

Thank you for the past years of service we've had together and for how you've taken such good care of my family and me. The four of us are extremely thankful. Katie has appreciated her opportunities to serve in the church through years of leading the children's choir, playing in the orchestra, involvement in growth groups and serving on the education committee. My children Clara and Ethan have loved VBS, Sunday school, children's choir, and GEMS.

Thank you for the many opportunities you've given us to serve and grow alongside you. As I look back on all these years, I think of the milestones things we've experienced together: celebrating the church's 75th anniversary, the sanctuary renovation, the implementation of new technology, rebuilding of the organ, and, oh yes, even surviving a pandemic! And I'm so grateful that we have recently been able to celebrate the legacy of a new sanctuary piano that will serve the church for years to come.

I'm delighted to leave the worship ministry in a stable and growing condition post-pandemic. The church is poised and ready for growth and expansion. I'm grateful to say farewell on the best of terms and look forward to being part of services in the future as a substitute or perhaps even for weddings and funerals as needed.

In the first service I was part of in 2009, I played an arrangement of Great Is Thy Faithfulness. I'll leave you with those words on which that song is based, from Lamentations 3:23, as we look forward to the church's bright future ahead:

The Lord's compassions never fail.

They are new every morning;

great is his faithfulness.

If you'd like to continue to receive my formerly weekly (or, now, occasional) mid-week emails, feel free to send me an email at Daniel.Mattix@moody.edu to be added to the list. We'll see each other soon, and please keep in touch!

Music Ministries

Gary Smit

At the start of a new year, our church will be moving forward to replace Dan Mattix. A plan has been crafted by the Worship Committee to handle various responsibilities for the balance of our church year related to the role Dan had as Director of Music Ministries. Further discussions will take place with Worship, the Elders and Administration Committee as to any future employment of an individual to serve the music ministry needs of our church.

As a church, we are grateful for the 13 years that Dan served our church and the multitude of talents that he shared with us each week. As Dan transitions to a new role as Professor of Music at Moody, the Administration Committee has graciously approved allowing his family to remain at 5200 Wolf for a period of 2 months as their new house in Western Springs is being remodeled. May Dan continue his Christian service at Moody by giving praise, honor and glory to our Heavenly Father.

Feel free to contact Pastor Mark or Gary Smit as Chair of Council if there are any questions.

Our Newly Elected Council Members

compiled by Brent Yurschak

In keeping with our tradition, we present biographical sketches of our newest-serving council members. All entries are in alphabetical order.

MIKE HEERSINK, Elder

Mike is a lifelong member of WSCRC; he was baptized, made profession of faith, and married here. This is his second term as elder, and he is also the Building Committee Chairman. He is married to Tricia (Brouwer) and they have 3 children – Megan (married to Josh Stivers, teaching kindergarten in Moline, IL and living in Bettendorf, IA), Allison (2nd year Masters Student of Occupational Therapy at Concordia University, WI), and Nathan (junior at Timothy Christian). Mike is the General Manager of Industrial Electric Supply in Burr Ridge where he has been working for 34 years. Recently they opened an office in Queens, New York. Mike enjoys traveling with family and snowmobiling during his free time.

SHARON ROBBERT, Deacon

Sharon has been a member of a CRC church since birth – she and Janet Moffat grew up together attending the First Christian Reformed Church and Calvary Christian Reformed Church in the Minneapolis, Minnesota suburbs. She and her husband Gregg have been members of WSCRC since 1984 and Sharon has had the privilege to participate in the music ministry (choir, handbells, and orchestra) for many years. This is Sharon's first term as deacon but she has been chair of the Worship Committee since 2008.

Sharon has been married to Gregg since 1983 and they have three children and two grandchildren. Oldest son Eric is married to Lindsay, middle son Adam is married to Sara and has two children (Charlee and Addison), and their youngest daughter is Anja. Eric and Adam and their wives graduated from Trinity Christian College. Anja is in her final year of college at Whitworth University in Spokane, Washington.

Sharon is a professor of mathematics at Trinity Christian College and has served there since completing her Ph.D. in mathematics in 1993 at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Her plan is to retire at the end of this academic year and pursue other projects related to higher education besides teaching in the classroom.

Sharon has travelled throughout the United States, missing only a few states (Alaska, Nevada, Alabama, and North Carolina) and a couple of times to Europe. Being married to Gregg (who loves to travel) means that additional travel is likely in the future! She would love to visit New Zealand and Australia sometime.

As for favorite hobbies, Sharon enjoys reading – especially science fiction and anything by JRR Tolkien, gardening, doing home improvement projects, playing board games, and baking sourdough bread. She states, “My children tease me about not being able to relax—I always need to have a project going.”

MATT STOB, Deacon

Matt has been a member of WSCRC all of his 42 years. This is his third time as a deacon. He and his wife Jordan have three children, Jack (11), Liam (10) and Emma (8). Matt has been a letter carrier for the US Post Office for 17 years. He did some traveling all over the US with his parents when he was younger. Matt and Jordan are traveling with their family when possible; this year they plan to visit Florida and Colorado.

DAN WESTRA, Elder

Dan has been a member of CRCWS for 24 years and has served two previous terms as deacon and once as an elder. He and his wife Cindy have three children: Tracy, 22, Heidi, 21, and Jason, 19. Dan received a Business Administration degree from Trinity Christian College in 1990. He has been employed at Resource Management Companies since 1993. Dan hopes to start traveling more in the very near future!

Dan Mattix: A Remembrance

Sharon Bulthuis

I was on the Worship Committee when we decided we needed to look for a new organist and choir director. Kit Bogan had just left for Dallas Theological Seminary. It was 2009. Dan Mattix seemed to be a promising addition to the music in our church—we didn't call it Music Ministry at that time. His wife, Katie, also joined in with her violin playing and leading the children's singing. We were blessed with a lot of good music. Dan was not from a Christian Reformed background, but he was someone who could take our large wieldy gray hymnal and find good and singable songs for our congregation to sing. It did help that our former organist, Betty Van Mersbergen, had color-coded a selected gray hymnal book with stickers that indicated "favorite," "singable," "nice but not so singable," and a red sticker that indicated "do not dare to ask our congregation to sing this". The gray hymnal was a large collection of hymns, many of which were taken from the previous red and blue hymnals, and some of the songs were reworked into different melodies. I am thankful that our new red hymnal "Lift Up Your Hearts" has reverted back to the older melodies and has added quite a few new, modern songs into it.

I used to go over the song choices that Kit Bogan had picked and approve the ones that our congregation liked to sing. I soon found out that Dan Mattix was able to make such good choices that my input was no longer needed, and he picked out songs that our choir could sing too. He even stretched us at times. One time Dan picked out a song for the choir called "O Sifuni Mungu" written in an African language with English sprinkled through it: All Men (watu wote) All creatures (viumbe vyote) Everybody (awaye yote) Praise the Lord (sifu mungu). This song was picked because of the Mission Emphasis Sunday. We went over this song until we had it memorized. Everyone knows that when you can sing a song from memory you can watch the director more closely. Our choir has budding musicians from Moody Bible Institute who gladly make their way to our church from Chicago to participate in our Sunday

services. For this song they played some rattles and jungle drums to go along with it.

These interns from Moody also had talents to play the piano (Chris Wheeler) and organ (Peter Vanderwaal and Steven Thomson). Others were singers in our choir and/or players in the small orchestra that Dan put together. He had members of our congregation (Ken Meulink, Brian Korthals, Mary Yurschak, Tricia Heersink, and others) who dusted off their instruments and have become regular players in our orchestra. If there was a big program coming up, Dan would hire a few people from Moody to fill in our orchestra and make it a larger presence in the program. I think it's cool that our church has tympani drums and our latest intern, Jane Jaikumar, can play them. And our college student, Adrian van Stee, adds to our congregational singing when he's available, by playing the drum box called a cajon (ka 'hone).

The pandemic was hard for all of us in the congregation. Many of us had to work from home. But Dan's job as a musician was tremendously impacted. In fact, his job as conductor of choir and orchestra, pianist and organist, completely disappeared. Dan had to re-invent his job. Our church had minimal video-taped sermons with a distant fixed camera. Because our church had to close to gatherings, attention was turned to presenting the service in a more quality way. But just at the right time, our church had in its congregation a technology expert—in fact, two technology experts, Ben Mills and Gil Espinoza. Ben had the ability to purchase the right camera, getting the first broadcasted service online – a couple of hours later than our usual time – but there it was, our first service in the pandemic season. After Ben left for California, Gil took over. Soon there became a need for someone to produce the service and Dan Mattix filled that spot; Gil was able to leave for Texas and his new job location. Dan refined the job of producer and now has every minute accounted for in the service plans week by week.

He also video-recorded songs each week that he played on the piano and organ and sent them out via email. I really appreciate that, Dan! Dan produced a couple of videos during the pandemic that deserve excellent ratings: Virtual Christmas Concert 2020

with four singers: Mary Yurschak, Erica Posthuma, Randy Schmurr and Matthew McKenney. He also was able to contact a company to produce a “Hallelujah” video (music by Handel). Dan Mattix and Ivy Ohashi pre-recorded our parts and music for us. Dan gathered all the videos to be put together and sent them off to the company. A second video our choir was able to record during the pandemic was "Praise My Soul, the King of Heaven" by Larry Shackley. Dan was instrumental in securing this specifically arranged piece of music for our church's 75th anniversary.

Something you may not know is that Dan is a songwriter. Some of the songs he has arranged are “Go Down Moses”, “Oh, For a Thousand Songs to Sing”, “Christ Has Arisen!” (words and music), “Come Christians, Join to Sing”, and “A Song for Peace” by Daniel Mattix and Jonathan Greene (words and music). I can’t forget to include a fun children’s song, “Jonah!” accompanied by Francis Sajja—another Moody intern. Some more information for you: Dan writes instrumental music for the various parts of the WSCRC orchestra. In conclusion, a lot of preparation goes into the Sunday morning services. Dan—Dr. Daniel Mattix—we are going to miss you! So glad we know you! We wish you the best in your new position as a professor at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago.

Related Links

[Virtual Christmas Concert 2020](#)

[Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing](#)

[WSCRC singing “Hallelujah”](#) (virtual choir)

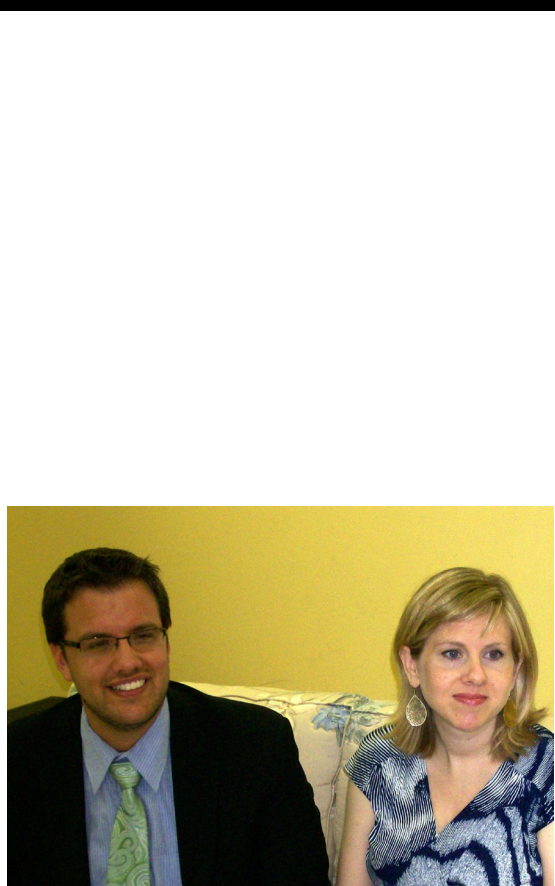
[Go Down Moses](#)

[A Song for Peace](#)

[Praise My Soul, the King of Heaven](#)

[Jonah](#) (WSCRC Sunday School Children in 2019)

[O Sifuni Mungu](#) as sung by First Call (our choir sang this for the Mission Conference)



Dan and Katie Mattix (2010)



Dan, Katie, Clara, and Ethan Mattix (2022)



Dan directing WSCRC Choir 2022

The Year 2022 in Review

BIRTHS & BAPTISMS

Charles (Charlie) Gardner

PROFESSIONS OF FAITH

Nathan Heersink

Tyler Van Laten

MARRIAGE

Megan Heersink and Joshua Stivers

DEATHS

David Ridderhoff

Geraldine Heersink