



Beverly Heights  
Presbyterian  
Church

# scattered seeds.

THE MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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## Raising up the foundations



And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the  
foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer  
of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in. Isaiah 58:12

# There can be no peace when there is hostility

Remarks of Senior Pastor Nate Devlin before public comment at the Annual Congregational Meeting of Beverly Heights Presbyterian Church, Sept. 27, 2023

Before we open the mic, I do want to share that it has been several months since we had a congregational meeting. Our last congregational meeting was in June, June 11, this past summer. Many of you were here in attendance. It was a difficult meeting, as many of you remember. Many of you experienced that difficulty here with us as a body. And our body has been divided and struggling as a result of not only that meeting, but events preceding that meeting and following that meeting.

And as the pastor here at Beverly Heights Church, there is a certain responsibility laid upon me for that division and for that difficulty that we've had. I am the pastor here. And as pastor, I'm responsible, and I take that responsibility seriously. I have been saddened as I know many of you have, because of the division we've experienced.

I am hopeful that in the days and months and perhaps years to come, that that division can be healed. And that we can be a body that is united together in Christ, who is the head of the church, but united with real affection and real love for one another, care for one another, mutual support of one another. But I also know that there are many of us who have strong feelings about situations and circumstances that have developed in and through our congregation.

It is my sincere hope and desire that

any broken relationships and hurts and wounds that we as a body are experiencing can be healed. It is my desire to do whatever I can, in order that that might take place. And if there has been something that has been done over the course of the year that has contributed to that hurt, I would welcome a conversation with you so that that relationship can be mended.

Many of you know that we have been working with an Administrative Commission, through the Presbytery [of the Alleghenies]. And in meeting with the Administrative Commission, one of the things that they shared with us is that the EPC [Evangelical Presbyterian Church] strives to be a relational church. I was encouraged to hear that, because relationships are important for the body of Christ and personally important to me.

There can be no health, can be no peace, can be no union when there is hostility or a dividing wall that separates brother from brother, sister from sister, Christian between Christian. It is my sincere hope and desire that by the Spirit of God and by the grace of God, by the work that Jesus did on the cross to reconcile men and women, that we can come together as a body and as a congregation.

I am eager to be a part of that, to the greatest extent that I can.

# There's a massive trust gap that exists in this church



Remarks of Elder Dean Marshall at the Sept. 27 Annual Congregational Meeting, in response to a question posed by Deacon Rick Sikes, about the earlier June 11 meeting

So I can see everybody [turning the microphone toward those in attendance], as it relates to the Congregational Meeting [on June 11], I'll stand up here and confess to all of you that I was the architect of that meeting. And I can tell you firsthand that Pastor Nate didn't once ask me to review any of the comments. Not only didn't he draft it, but he didn't even ask to review it before it was said.

He deferred to me on all of it. There's a massive trust gap that exists in this church. And I'll take ownership for that fact, for a lot of reasons. You know, we [Session] weren't good at communicating. We weren't good at addressing conflict early in the process when it came up. And conflict morphed into bitterness and bitterness morphed into personal vendettas. And then personal vendettas spread around, and led to vitriol among people that we love, among people that I love.

Rick, I think you've held yourself incredibly well. And, first, I wanted you all to hear that directly from me. Second of all, I just want you all to appreciate that I feel terrible, Rick, about you sharing the pain that you went through. I feel terrible that Rick Durstein, who I love and who I have a good relationship with, walked out in protest in my meeting. I feel terrible about that.

And one of the things I just want you to appreciate, from my perspective, the needle that I was trying to thread was very complicated. On the one hand, for the very reasons that you're describing, Rick, I very much wanted to protect our

pastor and his family. And so that was element number one.

Element number two was, because we weren't engaged like we should have been with the congregation and communicating on an active basis, the communication event kept getting deferred and deferred and deferred. We should not have let that happen. And ultimately, when it got deferred, and when the event finally did happen, we were in the midst of the Judicial Investigation Committee [which, on Aug. 1, dismissed the charges against Pastor Devlin]. There were all kinds of edicts being sent around.

We wanted to convey to the congregation that we took the charges extremely seriously, that we all independently discerned, whether [the allegations] were genuine or valid or not, we wanted to communicate to the congregation what we thought and what we believed, in response to a lot of dissent that was spreading throughout the church. In hindsight, we should have done it way better.

Those circumstances built up to that point because of our inaction. We should have been more engaged. And so, I just want to assure people who felt we were mean spirited, I want you to appreciate the fact that that was not our intent. We were trying to thread a needle that was very difficult to thread, to a large degree because we didn't communicate on a timely basis. It pains me to see people that were hurt by that. So that's the best that I can say right now, Rick.



# Addition by division

Reflections on the biblical meaning of division by Peter Chace

The recent division in our church has caused me to reflect in my biblical studies on the subject of division and its purposes and meaning in God’s kingdom.

What are we to make of division within God’s church when it occurs and what we’ve experienced at Beverly Heights recently? Is God building or preparing to fill something in a new way?

While these are difficult questions, I believe they are the right ones to be asking.

Whenever I encounter conflict, my immediate personal preference is to seek the middle. I usually assume both sides have some merit, and both probably need to get over themselves. After all, we have all sinned and fall short of God’s glory (Rom 3:23), and we must all first take the log out of our own eye before we can see clearly the speck in our brother’s eye (Matt 7:1-5).

At the same time, man’s ways are not God’s. Here are some thoughts that I hope you may find clarifying and comforting amid our own division.

### Creation and division

In Creation, God makes the world according to a pattern. He builds by

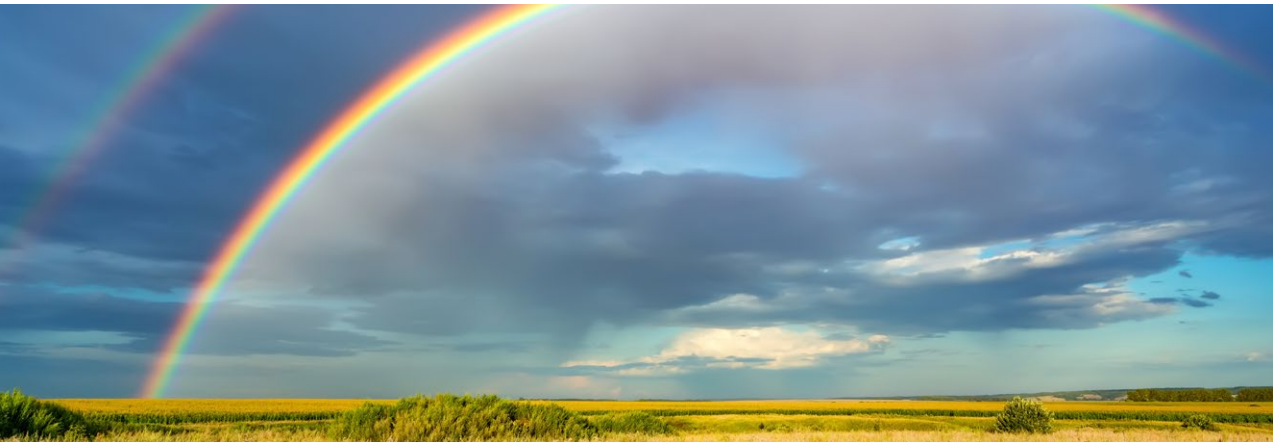
separating things from one another, and as He divides, He defines what things are.

God spends the first three days creating structure and expanses through separation and gathering. On day two, God separates water from water to create the expanse of sea and sky, and on day three He gathers the waters together into one place to define the fertile land. When God lays a foundation, He separates and gathers together. He defines structure through division.

God then spends the next three days filling the structures and spaces He just created. On day four, He fills the heavens with lights to rule and govern the expanse of time He created on day one. On day five, He fills the sea and sky with fish and birds, and on day six, He fills the fertile land with animals of every kind.

As God lays His foundation, He simultaneously creates and separates, divides and defines. Before He fills the creation, He lays its structure carefully in place.

God’s pattern of addition by division continues with Adam. The first time Scripture says something is “not good,” is when God proclaims it is not good that the man should be alone (Gen 2:18). But in order for God to



make a helper that fits Adam, he must be divided. So God divides Adam like He divided in the days of creation, and He makes a new expanse to be filled. God puts Adam in a deathlike sleep and separates a rib from his body.

God “made” the world and “formed” Adam, but God “fashions” Eve. The Hebrew word literally means that God “builds” her. God continues to

extra time and resources to indulge at the table, while those who are of humble means don’t get enough. This division occurs when the world’s distinctions are allowed to come in and divide the church when the Lord requires communion.

The Greek word *schisma*, from which we derive the English word “schism,” occurs six times in the New Testament with the meaning

by sinful people who cause division when God commands unity.

When it comes to division in the Church, we must agree with Christ that unity in the Church is an essential (John 17:21). But this unity can only come *in* Christ (Gal 3:8). When we are united in Christ *we see His glory*, given to Jesus before the foundation of the world (John 17:24).

Discerning the cause of division, and what to do in the midst of it, requires the kind of wise judgment that Jesus describes in John 7.

But this much is clear. When divided, we are called to be Christians. We ought not divide that which God has joined, but we also must not attempt to hold together that which God’s Word is dividing. It may be that His Word goes forth to separate and divide, to lay a foundation, in order to gather, fill, and build upon it in a new way.

*Peter Chace is husband to Sarah and father to Noah, Liam, Eli, Eva and Lily. He leads our ministry to youth and college students. Peter is also working toward his Master of Divinity degree, which he expects to complete at the end of 2024.*

## We must agree with Christ that unity in the Church is an essential.

build on His foundation by adding to it through division. And so, the creation story ends in the beautiful union – one could say the re-union – of the first man and first woman in marriage.

### Church and division

What does Scripture have to say about division in the church?

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul describes the division of the Corinthian church at the Lord’s table. This division is caused by members of the church acting selfishly. Those who have luxury and privilege are using their

of “division.” Three times, *schisma* appears in John’s gospel as Jesus Himself causes division through His teaching and miracles (John 7:43; John 9:16; John 10:19). Three times Paul exhorts the brothers “that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10; see also 1 Cor 11:18; 1 Cor 12:25).

Does the Bible say division is good or bad? Scripture reveals that division may be caused by God’s Word and action when sinful people rebel against it. Scripture also reveals that division may be caused

# You can't build stability on a broken foundation

Senior Pastor Nate Devlin's closing remarks at the Annual Congregational Meeting

Let me close by sharing this thought with you not from the scriptures, but the Apostles' Creed.

We had the privilege of reciting the Apostles' Creed together all summer. And there's three sections that speak of God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, and then the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church and the life of believers. Each section begins with, as you know, I believe, which is not necessarily a statement of cognitive assent. It is a statement of trust.

*Credo*, or I believe, is a statement in which we stand and put our trust in. We stand on these words. And you've heard me say many times, words build worlds. And every week over the summer, we had a chance to stand on these words. That I believe in the Holy Spirit. I trust the Holy Spirit. I believe in the Holy Catholic Church, the Catholic church being a unified church, a universal church that is bound together by Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

I believe in the communion of saints. The life that is lived with one another, and fellowship, peace. I believe, I trust, that it's possible to forgive sins among the brethren, within the church. I believe in the resurrection of the body, which means that I believe that almost anything can happen if God wills it. I believe in the life everlasting.

All summer, we recited that not as a statement of our cognitive assent, but what we stand on, what we trust in. And I believe in the resurrection body.

This body is broken. And maybe it has to die. I've reflected for many months, even a few years now, on our origin as a congregation. Our story, if you read the 75th anniversary history of our congregation which we've been giving out for many, many years now, it details where Beverly Heights came from.

Beverly Heights didn't start at 1207 Washington Road. It started in Herron Hill, in the Hill district [of Pittsburgh]. And there was another church before that, that was the predecessor to the Herron Hill Church. The name escapes me. But that first church in the late 1800s [the Thirty-Third Street United Presbyterian Church] left its original site because the area was becoming too Polish Catholic.

And so the Presbyterians pulled up their tent pegs and went to Herron Hill. And they established the Herron Hill Presbyterian Church. And that church existed for many years, but the community changed. And there was suburban sprawl and white flight that happened in the 1920s and the 1930s. The community became too black as our own history records. And it became uncomfortable. It was not palatable. We didn't enjoy that experience as a congregation. It didn't serve our needs and our interests and our desires.



And so, the congregation petitioned the presbytery to relocate and we built this church. Not only did we abandon Herron Hill because it was no longer in keeping with our sensibilities and desires as a congregation. We took the stained-glass window, that beautiful, gorgeous stained-glass window that's seen throughout our entire community. We took the riches of the church out of Herron Hill, out of the Hill District, and we brought it here to comfortable Mount Lebanon.

It's been hard to endure as a people, as a congregation. We're experiencing a form of death and dying. Because the foundation upon which this congregation is built, is broken.

But I believe in the resurrection, the resurrection of the body. I believe in the resurrection of this body. I believe that God has a good future for this church. But I believe that we cannot get there based upon a foundation of abandonment, of a people and of a place, because

I don't want to abandon my post. I won't abandon my post. But if God calls me somewhere else, you can rest assured I will obey Him.

I don't want to abandon this church. I want to lead us to be a people who are held together in love. So I pray that you would discern as I'm discerning. I would pray that you would reflect as I'm reflecting.

I would pray that you would believe as I'm believing. I pray that you will yield your life to Christ as I seek to

I don't want to abandon this church.  
I want to lead us to be a people who are held together in love.

Our history as a congregation is built on abandonment. We are a congregation that abandons its post. And I've come to the firm and settled conviction that God wants our congregation to stand. To stand firm and to hold fast to that which is good. But our foundation is broken. And you can't build stability on a broken foundation. And I've been wracking my brain asking, "Lord, why is this happening here?" It is painful for all of us. And I believe that the Lord has been excavating down.

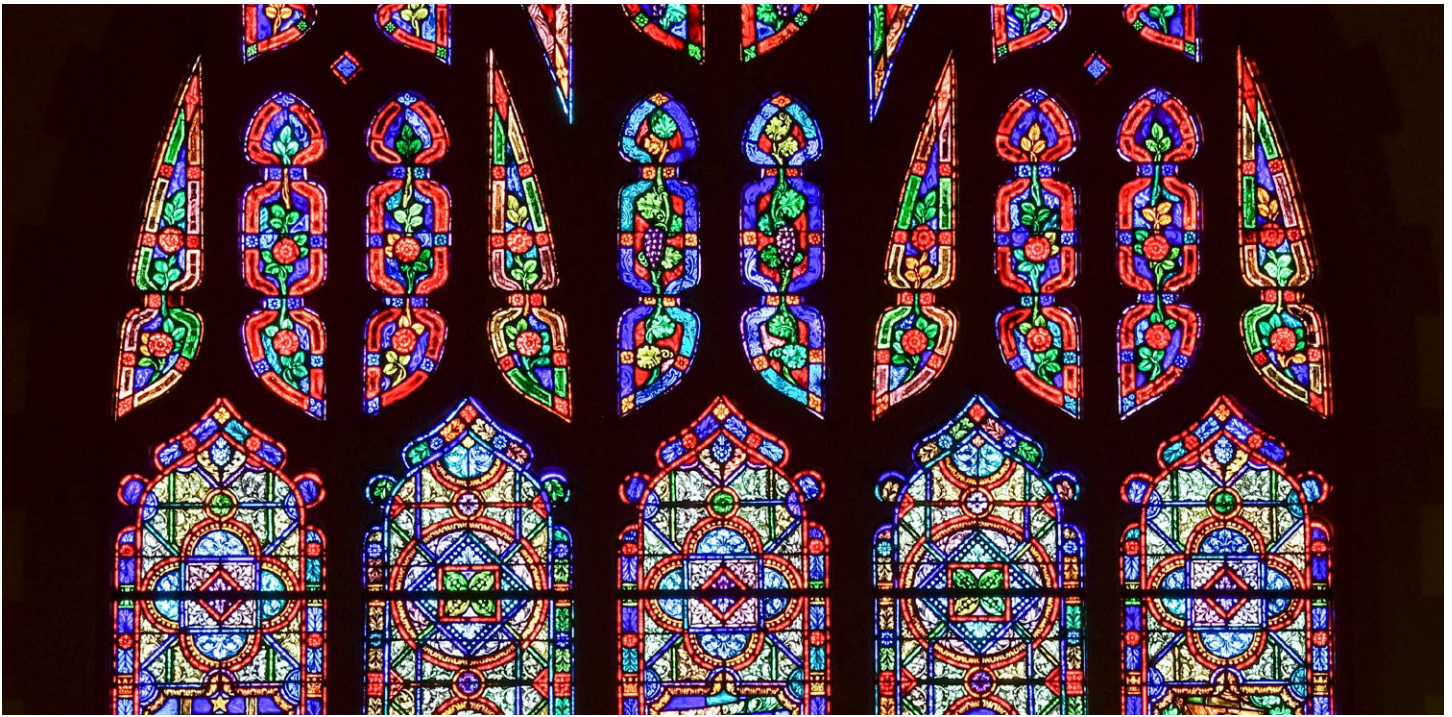
it's uncomfortable. We've been doing that for far too long. And I believe that God is calling us to repent, as a congregation of our reckless abandonment. And I, for one, want to stay.

I want to be here and I want to be your pastor, and I want to serve you and I want to love you and I want to lay down my life for you. And I'm discerning if that's possible. I hope that it is. I'm believing God that it is.

yield my life to Christ. I pray that you will delight in the invitation to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him, as I seek to deny myself, take up my cross and follow Him. I believe it's possible. It seems impossible right now. It seems and it feels impossible, with the atmosphere of this place right now. But I believe in the resurrection. I stand on that promise. Please stand with me.

[Sustained applause, which was permitted 😊 ]





**Senior Pastor Nate  
Devlin's closing  
prayer at the Annual  
Congregational Meeting**

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, our desire is to hold fast to that which is good and what is true and beautiful and noble. Our desire is to stand fast and be your people.

Right now, we don't particularly look like that glorious church without spot or wrinkle.

And yes, there have been mistakes and we seek to make those right Lord, first and foremost with you.

We want to be a church that no longer abandons its post, that pulls up tent pegs and moves on when things get uncomfortable. We want to be a church that's nailed down.

Even as you Jesus were nailed to the cross for us because of your great love for us.

You died for us. You served us. Help us Lord to serve you and serve one another. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

*We closed the evening with the singing  
of the Doxology.*

Praise God, from Whom all blessings  
flow;

Praise Him, all creatures here below;  
Praise Him above, ye heav'nly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.  
Amen.