



Platte Christian Reformed Church

May 2018

“What A Founding Father Believed: Benjamin Franklin”

Dear Platte CRC Family,

There is no shortage of debate over what beliefs the founding fathers of our nation held. I grew up understanding or assuming the general notion that America was a Christian nation, and the founders were generally Christians. Later, I heard the loud cries from the other side, that few of these men could be called Christian at all and had no desire to form a distinctly “Christian” nation. Of course, as is so often the case, the truth is probably more complicated. Life, and history, stinks that way. It isn’t simple!

I have found that examining the beliefs of just one founding father can be complex enough. Thomas Jefferson is particularly scrutinized – his Bible is famous as being a version in which he ripped out entire portions he didn’t really like! But what about someone like Benjamin Franklin? In Benjamin Franklin: The Religious Life of a Founding Father, Baylor University professor Thomas S. Kidd sets out to examine Franklin’s own writings and determine his general religious beliefs. Kidd argues, and I would say proves, that though Franklin might self-identify as a ‘Christian,’ he “was a pioneer of a distinctly American kind of religion” which Kidd calls “doctrineless, moralized Christianity.” Franklin believed in God. He believed in the existence of Jesus Christ. But you need not argue about the specifics. The organized church had little importance. Faith’s purpose is to make us good people. Faith exists to bring us to discipline and generosity and success in this life.

Franklin was raised in a Presbyterian, Calvinist home. His parents and beloved sister, Jane, would point to the saving power of Christ as the only way out of sin’s trap, but Franklin instead grew up to point to moral

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effort and the discipline of temperate behavior instead. At one point, he asked what the “main design and ultimate end of the Christian revelation” is, and answered, “to promote the practice of piety, goodness, virtue and universal righteousness among mankind, or the practice of the moral duties both with respect to God and man, and by these means to make us happy here and hereafter.” Morality was far more important than doctrine. “At the last day,” he wrote, “we shall not be examined what we thought, but what we did.” He admired evangelical preacher George Whitefield, who preached transformation by God, but Kidd states that “Franklin advocated gradual reformation by daily effort” instead. As Poor Richard, a favorite proverb of Franklin’s was “God helps those who help themselves.”

Kidd is right in pointing out that “Franklin was setting foundational precedents for that distinctively American, quasi-religious genre: the self-help movement.” In this way, Franklin’s ‘Christianity’ is no different from the Christianity claimed by someone like Oprah Winfrey. It’s nice, as long as it makes you nice. But it’s dependent on you, it’s not for everyone, and that’s fine, as long as we’re all good people.

Franklin’s brand of Christianity – living as good person without wholehearted trust in Christ’s saving work – is alive and well. Can it thrive in a place like Platte? It can and does. The main problem is that Christ actually had little importance in Franklin’s life. He was just an example. Franklin himself did the work. Let us be careful of adopting that faith. If his ‘Christianity’ wins, then Christ loses.

In His Service,

Pastor Drew

FAMILY PRAYER NOTES

GENERAL PRAISES AND PRAYER REQUESTS:

- ⇒ Pray that the community of Platte would know Jesus better through the witness of our church.
- ⇒ Ask for God to provide good weather for planting and a good harvest in the fall.
- ⇒ Pray this month for our graduates: that college graduates would find jobs, and that high school graduates would prepare well for the next step.
- ⇒ Pray for the church under oppressive governments like North Korea, China, Russia and other places. Pray also for the free church in the US to maintain its zeal.
- ⇒ Lift up our church's elders and deacons and thank the Lord for the sacrifice they give to lead and serve.
- ⇒ Pray for our parents: give thanks for new children and ask for patience, for wisdom and for faithfulness in raising them as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Nursing Home Residents, Shut-ins and their Caretakers:

- ⇒ Tony & Rozella Baan Hofman, Ted Bultsma, Kevin Burma, Gertie DeJong, Clair & Pearl Dyk, Marie Kok, Clarence Hunsucker, JoAnn Kuipers, Juna Meyerink, Helen Pheifer, Ruth Pranger, Cheryl Reed, Don & Evelyn Severson, Harriet Sprik, Leona Van Dusseldorp, Muriel Van Vuren, Betty Van Zee

Those Mourning the Loss of:

- ⇒ Esther Hoekman, Cornie & Eleanor Lieuwen, Jennie Bultsma, Darrell Kuipers, Janet DeJong, Harriett Meyerink, and Susie DeWaard.

Missionaries:

- ⇒ Ben & Amy Meyer (CRWM– Mexico)
- ⇒ Victor & Lori Selemeni (YWAM– Africa)
- ⇒ LaVeryl & Max Voss (Wycliffe– Papua New Guinea)
- ⇒ Calvin & Jessica Wunderink (TeachBeyond-Czech Republic)

Monthly Birthdays and Anniversaries

(to see church activities, please refer to our weekly bulletin, or to the online calendar at plattecrc.org for the most up-to-date information)

May Birthdays:

- 1: Lexy Overweg
- 2: Max Voss– Missionary
- 5: Jennie Bultsma
- 7: Darlene Van Zee
- 9: Gertie DeJong
- 9: Lauryn Kuipers
- 11: Clara Selemeni– Missionary
- 11: Norma Lorensen
- 13: Dorothy Vander Tuin
- 16: Chase Pheifer
- 17: Leanna (Bentz) Johnson
- 17: Dalton DeLange
- 19: Jesse Sybesma
- 20: Luke Meyer– Missionary
- 20: Mel Vanden Bos
- 23: Kami Pheifer
- 23: Mikayla Voss– Missionary
- 24: Joel Sybesma

- 25: Jeremy Bultsma
- 25: Jessica Weg
- 26: Ryan Van Zee
- 27: Harriet Meyerink†
- 28: Alfred Van Zee
- 28: Lyle Schipper
- 29: Cameron Sybesma
- 30: Andrew Sybesma†
- 31: Katie Hoekema

May Anniversaries:

- 22: Rod & Jeanette Pheifer
- 29: Vernon & Jan Van Vuren
- 30: Kris & Molly Sybesma

Please let the church office know if there are any birthdays or anniversaries that we've missed! Call 337-3572, or email: plattecrc@gmail.com