



Vestry Voices

The Church Family Newsletter

First Congregational
Church of Clinton

January 2026

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Jesus' New Commandment Is Why Every Christian Needs the Church

I give you a new commandment:
love one another;
you must love one another just as I have loved you.

John 13:34 (NJB)



Rev. Gary Kiontke



join a church. Jesus says that God's intended result for anyone who knows how Jesus loved him or her, is that this person will love other people who have the same knowledge of Jesus and relationship with Him. The inspired New Testament writers, especially the church planter unparalleled in church history, the apostle Paul, elaborate on many of the ways Christians love one another in the Church of Jesus. This article covers the highlights.

Paul wrote a verbless command of being (a character quality God desires) to the churches in Rome: love one another as offspring of the same mother (Romans 12:10). We know the original word of the text because the city of Philadelphia is rightly translated "the city of brotherly love." We can only have this love for one another in a church.

In the same letter, Paul writes they must receive (accept as a friend) one another as Christ has received them (Romans 15:7). Paul had previously said that Christ loved His people even while they were still sinners (Romans 5:8). Therefore, all who know they have been forgiven by Jesus Christ must accept as friends others who have had the same experience. This can only be fully obeyed as a member of a church.

In complementary letters to churches in Asia Minor, Paul says members are to patiently endure one another (Ephesians 4:1-3; Colossians 3:13). In the former case this is how Christians prove themselves worthy of

their calling in Christ. In the latter letter, the endurance of one another results in another way Christians obey Jesus' new commandment.

When Christians have a disagreement and quarrel, they are to forgive one another as they have been forgiven by Christ (Colossians 3:13). This is an everyday life application of the fifth petition in the prayer Jesus taught his disciples: "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12, NAS).

Another area is to serve one another. Jesus set the example when He said He did not come to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45). Paul wrote to the churches in Galatia that they must not let the freedom from punishment for sin to which they have been called to give them opportunity to indulge the selfish desires of unredeemed humanity, but to use it to serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13-14). Notice that in context, Paul quotes the second great commandment given through Moses to love our neighbor as ourselves (Leviticus 19:18). This is fitting because it emphasizes how Jesus' new commandment is far above the original commandment in that the new standard is to love fellow Christians more than our unsaved neighbors. It is impossible to love anyone as Jesus loved everyone without having the Holy Spirit and the fruit of the Holy Spirit as Paul later wrote (Galatians 5:22-25).

Christians are also called to build up, or edify, one another. Paul exhorts the churches in Rome to build up one another as it is evidence they have received the righteousness, peace and joy of the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17-19). And to the churches in Thessalonica, he said that in building up one another, they comfort one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11), using the verb form of the noun Jesus used for the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26; 15:26).

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Jesus' New Commandment ... (... continued from page #1)

The most quoted exhortation of why Christians need church comes from the author of the letter to Hebrew Christians. There are two “one anothers” in this passage. First, we are to consider how we might stir one another into love and good works (Hebrews 10:24). Secondly, the result of this is that we will not abandon the meeting together of ourselves so that we may exhort, encourage and comfort one another all the more as we see “the day” (of Christ’s return) coming nearer (Hebrews 10:25). There is no need to elaborate on this passage again.

I will close with Paul’s encouragement to the churches in Thessalonica concerning brotherly love. He wrote them that he had no need to touch on this subject because they had been already taught by God to “love one another.” However, he took the opportunity to exhort them to have their brotherly

love to one another increase more and more (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10). This best happens in a local church.

I hope I have convinced those who think church membership is not necessary to rethink their position. I will leave for future articles how members of churches can do better in each of the areas in this article.

I will close with an anecdote Debi passed on to me while we were dating over forty years ago. Someone once told a friend that there are no perfect churches. Then, with a smile on her face, she told her sister-in-Christ: And, if you do somehow find a perfect church, don’t join it because you will ruin it. Let us thank God in Jesus that churches are not gymnasiums for the spiritually fit, but hospitals for the spiritually sick. We all need the cure Jesus gives to those in His Church.

Worship in January

We are continuing to learn from the life of David as told in the books of Samuel.

We will have Communion on January 4 and 18.

Here are the details on the sermon texts and themes for each of the worship services:

Date	Scripture	Theme / Title
January 4	1 Samuel 21; Psalm 56	Fleeing from human enemies can also distance from God When enemies overcome, trust in God delivers from fear
January 11	1 Samuel 22:1-10; Psalm 52:1-5	Helping God’s chosen can anger wicked rulers God will bring to ruin those who plot evil
January 18	1 Samuel 22:11-21; Psalm 94:20-23	Helping God’s chosen can lead to death Corrupt rulers are eventually destroyed
January 25	1 Samuel 23:1-14; Psalm 9:7-12	Those who seek God are guided by Him Yahweh is a stronghold to those who seek Him

We will have fellowship and food on January 11 and 25.

It Just Happens*... “My Peace I Give to You” By Petros

Last month, I talked about Mom's blessed life and my belief that Mar wishes for her loved ones to join her in Eternity. I shared the story of the two criminals that hung for their crimes on either side of Jesus. There was the bad guy mocking Jesus, “If you’re a King (let’s see you) save yourself ... and save us ...”. The “forgiven” bad guy admits that he deserves punishment for his sins, while recognizing Jesus is innocent. He pleads, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!” And Jesus turns to him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:35-43.) The simplicity of this passage is, “Jesus, remember me ...”.

“It Just Happens*...” Over Christmas, a family member stated, “someday we (our family) will be in heaven with

Mom.” Jesus said He brought Heaven to Earth when he began His ministry. If we all had a heart bearing, “Jesus, remember me ...” then we would have love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control. Then the people we meet would receive the fruits of the Holy Spirit and would manifest within others. But the world we live in is full of hate, sadness, impatience, unkindness, greed, conceit, rudeness, and out of control. Hard to imagine God would allow people to bring Earth to Heaven. So, unless Jesus taps you on the shoulder and tells you he will see you later (in Paradise) then you are not going to Heaven unless you have a heart bearing, “Jesus, remember me ...”.

The “forgiven” bad guy is one of the few people that we can say went to heaven without question. Jesus told him that

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It Just Happens*...

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he would see him later that day. At this point, we need to look at verse 40. "Forgiven" bad guy rebuking the other said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?" People don't have a fear of God because they have not internalized who God is until death is facing them. While the Holy Bible is clear that God accepts us as we are, we cannot stand before God's Holiness with sin in us. The darkness within would be gone like a light switch turned on. Our sins deserve punishment. Remember Jesus and how he took on our sins to the cross so we can stand before God, forgiven and without sin, by Jesus' sacrifice on the cross (in our place). Only then will we enter the gates of heaven.

God loves us, even as we are, but He cannot accept those who have not yet come to Him in repentance. The world God created for goodwill to all mankind is fallen and broken, in part because people have fallen and are broken. And, in our unredeemed state, we are all to blame – we all have responsibility – we cannot point our fingers and only blame others. It is part of being a human that we are tempted and our feelings get us into trouble. The Holy Bible is like God's Love Story for Mankind. From the Garden of Eden, to 10 simple rules, etc., we are weak and God knows we will fail ... unless you have a heart bearing, "Jesus, remember me ...". But our world is falling apart, so it seems. Jesus brought Heaven on Earth for a reason.

For most of us, we still need to make ends meet until we see Mar, again. "It Just Happens*..." My son, Nicholas, picked John 14:27 for the Benediction. "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful." I liked the passage, as it presents what God gives us; to have the Jesus-brought Heaven on Earth life! Jesus told the apostles not to fear when He leaves them. He will send a Councilor to help. He will send His Holy Spirit. For all bearing a heart calling, "Jesus, remember me ...", you have been given the Holy Spirit of Jesus.

"Peace I leave with you:" Like a personification of, "What would Jesus do?" You will be guided by the love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control of Jesus.

"My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you." I believe this Peace comes from the trust and faith

we develop in God. As we walk the Path that God has for us, we will be willing to let go and let God do the providing.

When we fully know God created us and has purpose for our being, we allow Him to go before us in all things. (Therefore) "Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful."

I leave all with one of my favorite passages (*I will be expanding on this passage in a future article*):

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you." (Philippians 4:4-9, NIV.)

May God bless you and find you in good spirits in the New Year!

PTL!!! *"Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor uselessly." Psalm 127:1*

Author's note: This article's title "It Just Happens*..." counters the cliché ... things just don't happen. "It" will stand for the world view one chooses to abide in. "Just" is the character of the God who wants to be our God. He has made us in His image – righteous; by faith in God. "Happens" will be the events and experiences God uses to grow our faith. All things work for the glory of God. When we turn from our ways and we look to God and live His Word – His plan for us unfolds. ~VV~

New International Version (NIV)

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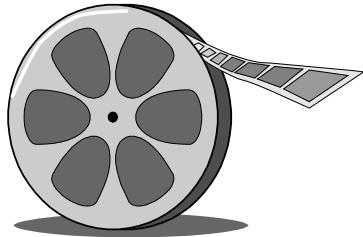
Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

(Phil. 4:8, KJV)



Movie Night

Friday, January 23 at 7:00 PM



We show a movie once each month, in Fellowship Hall, usually on the fourth Friday. The movies shown in the past have covered a range of genres, and were usually thought provoking.

We are able to show these movies based on the church's CVLII® license. However, this license does not allow us to advertise or publicize the names of these movies to the general public, and they are always free of charge.

We usually have free snacks available, and you are also welcome to bring your own meal, if you wish.

So, please join us for a night out at the movies!





JANUARY 2026

S U N	M O N	T U E	W E D	TH U	F R I	S A T
28	29	30	31 New Year's Eve	1 New Year's Day	2	3
4 Communion Sunday (Note #1)	5	6	7 (††)	8 (**)	9	10
11 FCC Worship; Coffee Hour after Worship (Note #2)	12	13	14 (††)	15 (**)	16	17
18 Communion Sunday (Note #3)	19	20	21 (††)	22 (**)	23 Movie Night (Note #4)	24
25 FCC Worship; Coffee Hour after Worship (Note #5)	26 February "Vestry Voices" Articles Due (Note #6)	27	28 (††)	29 (**)	30	31

Calendar Notes:

- #1) 1/4 — Communion Sunday: **10:27 AM.**
- #2) 1/11 — FCC Worship: **10:27 AM.** ALSO: Coffee Hour/Fellowship after Worship.
- #3) 1/18 — Communion Sunday: **10:27 AM.**
- #4) 1/23 — Movie Night — in Fellowship Hall: **7:00 PM.**
- #5) 1/25 — FCC Worship: **10:27 AM.** ALSO: Coffee Hour/Fellowship after Worship.
- #6) 1/26 — Articles are due for the February issue of "Vestry Voices" (for assembly/mail-out on January 27).
- (††) Wednesday Bible Study: **11:00 AM (but not on 12/31/2025)** (in FCC Parlor).
- (**) Thursday Prayer in Parlor: **3:00 PM (but not on 1/1/2026)**.

