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Official Paper of the Pennsylvania Association of Regular Baptist Churches

Keystone **BAPTIST**



Talents for Christ:

An Under-Utilized Teen Growth Experience

by Pastor Sean Stouffer
Calvary Baptist Church, Bloomsburg, PA

What is Talents for Christ? Why is it called TFC and Rally? Why would the PARBC continue to support the annual competition and rally? Does it really make a difference?

While I may not be the one to talk to concerning the long history of Talents for Christ within the PARBC association, I can give you my experience as a father of teens who have participated in the TFC competitions and rally for the past 9 years, as one of the youth leaders for our church for 8 years, and as a TFC committee member since 2015. My name is Sean Stouffer, and I am the associate pastor at Calvary Baptist Church in Bloomsburg, PA, the host church for the Talents for Christ competition and rally.

Talents for Christ competition is a ministry of the PARBC that is dedicated to helping teens from associating churches to hone their God-given talents for their Savior. While each contestant should be utilizing their talents at their home church on a regular basis, it is easy to get stuck in a rut and

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Let's Be Honest: Is Church Really "Essential"?

by Pastor Keith Williams
Marsh Creek Fellowship Baptist
Church, Wellsboro, PA

By now, most of us are tired of hearing about the negative consequences that Covid-19 has wreaked on our nation's economy, culture, and unity. It is difficult to think of a more universally impacting social phenomena since WWII. This impact, for the most part, has been negative and divisive, and the long-term effects on so many aspects of what used to be normal are impossible to measure.

There was already a significant assault on the legitimacy and value of the local church as traditionally represented in our country. The church was being berated, resented, and misrepresented by a wide host of media outlets and former participants. Those that were not quite ready for a complete divorce from the

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EDITOR

Rev. Paul J. Connor

LAYOUT & DESIGN

Anita L. Fordyce

State Representative's Comments
Rev. Paul J. Connor



“Not Me”

I hear young people saying that all the time. I remember saying that way, way back when I was young. It is an expression quickly stated to exclude self from any involvement of blame or stepping forward to be involved in something deemed very precarious and risky.

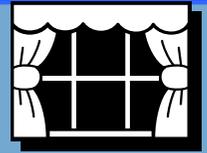
You see, when my father would come home from the office and ask which one of us broke something that was useful and valuable, it was an automatic reflex to say, “**Not me.**” Whether it was true or not, but my father had a way of finding out the truth very quickly – which had its own consequences.

On the other hand, if Dad would take us to his dental office and ask who wants to be first to sit in the dental chair? Well, I don't have to tell you how fast the two little words came out of my mouth, “**Not me!!!**” My younger brother would jump at the opportunity to volunteer me – since I was the older. Being the elder does have its down falls.

Even in Scripture we find some illustrations of the same. In Exodus 3:11-4:16, when the Lord is selecting Moses to lead His people the response of Moses was much like, “**Not me, not me, I can't speak.**” Scripture declares that God took care of that excuse and appointed Aaron to assist Moses and be his spokesman.

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From the Parsonage Window



“My Obituary”

by Anita Fordyce, Hope Baptist Church, Hanover

I once was asked to write the obituary for one of our church members. Writing the obituary is normally handled by the funeral home. Her body was to go for scientific study, and had gone to a university at her death. However, when I submitted it to the newspaper, I got a call from the editor saying that there is a formula used to write an obituary. A what? A formula? I don't remember the formula but with his help, and with the same information that I had submitted we used the formula.

Recently I read a lady's obituary which highlighted a rare testimony of a life in Christ.

It started out like most obituaries but with a little different twist about her parents, it said that she *was the daughter of appointed parents BUT was "...re-born thru the faithful witness of spiritual parents ..."*

It listed who survived her and who predeceased her. Then following her education and profession, it said, "*Her real living began ... when she met her Savior and King, Jesus Christ. It was then, with a growing delight, that the elements of her Jewish heritage began to become meaningful: with the Shema, the Paschal Lamb, the Temple and O.T. sacrificial system to name a few. Her earthly life was very imperfect but in God's eyes perfect thru His all consuming love and grace thru His Son.*" I'm positive that this obituary didn't fit an editorial formula. I wondered if she wrote it herself. What an incredible example of a life lived for Christ...a life that even after her death clearly and plainly stated the most important facts about her. It made me think, how would I write my obituary? I'm going to give that some thought.

One of her favorite Bible verses, among many others was listed as "...to whom shall I go? You (Jesus) Have the very words of Life" (John 6:68).

Her testimony lives on but no doubt she's with Jesus, our Lord.

not continue to grow one's abilities. Churches get accustomed to how an individual sings or plays and expects the same quality during the next ministry opportunity. While we might be fine with that, growth is expected of believers by God. That growth is not limited to avoiding temptations of active sin, but also the sin of inactivity or non-growth in holiness and abilities. God expects growth in and increase of our God-given talents and abilities in service to Him.

Talents for Christ seeks to challenge teens toward growth, both of their talents and of their spirit. TFC competition exposes each entry to constructive critiques from qualified judges who desire to help the church youth grow their talents for the benefit of the church as a whole. The 2-day event begins on Friday evening with Bible Quiz with a special speaker. Saturday flurry of competitions ranging from digital media, and puppets to judge-economics projects. The judges provide quality feedback to each from Superior, Excellent, and Meritorious. The day ends with another final Bible Quizzing round prior to the announcement of the placements for each competition category.



The Rally services are intentionally evangelistic and revival focused.

The two services tie together the reasons for the TFC and Rally weekend—encouraging individuals to skillfully worship Christ with us. Friday evening's service includes congregational singing and an evangelistic message. Saturday's rally service includes congregational singing, special music played and/or sung by participants of the competition who are chosen by the judges, and another Gospel message. This year's speaker is Rand Hummel, director of the Wilds of New England. With many decades of youth ministry, Rand understands current teen issues and uses his experience in counseling troubled teens. His messages are pointed and relevant to teens and adults alike.

There are some that may discount the need for TFC. Some may say that as long as our heart wants to glorify God, God is okay with whatever service we bring. From a human level, would we accept it if our pastor got up on a Sunday morning, read a verse, gave a couple thoughts that are obviously from a surface level reading of the passage and ended in prayer? No! We expect him to take time to study the passage, understand the meaning of the words from the original language, consider the context, know to whom it is written and when and why. We expect him to correlate that passage with other passages and know what other men through the past 2000 years have said about that passage. We expect his delivery to be thought through and well composed. This requires training, experience, access to sources, and work... lots of work.

We expect this from the pastor when he gets up to preach, but do we expect the same from other "ministers" in our services? Do we just accept someone getting up to sing a "special" and saying, "I haven't had much time to practice, so y'all pray for me"? In scripture, we are exhorted to give our very best effort the Lord in all areas of life (I Corinthians 10:31) – especially in direct worship to Him! One pitfall of worship services is that we cannot see God in the flesh – we are worshipping Him "in Spirit and in Truth" (John 4:24)

When our spiritual eyes get diverted from this truth, our purpose becomes skewed, for instance, we sing for the benefit of the audience or to make ourselves look good. It is imperative that anyone ministering before the Lord do so with a heart dedicated to His praise. This dedication looks similar to the pastor's work in preparation for a message.

Choosing an appropriate piece to play or sing, practicing the notes and words, understanding the message of the song, and working to convey that message from a heart that is in tune with the song (lyrics and tune), and sufficient practice – lots of practice – are part of preparation for ministering in worship. A personal desire to be skilled in the talent areas God has given manifests itself in continued improvement (formal education or informal), a desire for excellence, and hard work.

The Bible has much to say about corporate worship. While much of the emphasis in Scripture is rightly on Whom we focus, there are several scriptures that display the desire to worship God with all the skill we can muster. In Psalm 33:3, David states “Sing unto him a new song; play skillfully with a loud noise.” David prepared the choirs and musicians for temple worship and specifically emphasized advanced training to those who showed skill or, as we term it, natural talent. When the Ark of the Covenant was to be brought to Jerusalem, all of Israel came together. I Chronicles 13:8 states “And David and all Israel played before God with all their might, and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets.” In I Chronicles 15:16-22,

David delegated the responsibility to determine who would play various instruments and who would be the vocalists to skilled Levites. David did not leave the leadership of music to a novice, and nor should we. While David is a great example of a skilled musician, Moses, Solomon, and the later kings that did restoration of the temple sought out skilled craftsmen to work on the tabernacle and temple. Solomon’s prayer at the temple dedication shows preparation and eloquence. Our desire to do great things for God should engage our skills in music, the crafts, speech and any other. Solomon put it this way: “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.” Don’t work with half effort or half desire. Expect nothing less than your absolute best. God-honoring ministry in the church requires a humble attitude that recognizes personal faults, a desire to do all things for God’s glory, accepting of constructive criticism that promotes growth, and a desire to grow in one’s abilities/talents for use in God’s Kingdom.

Ultimately, our dedication to improving our abilities isn’t for us or for the church. Our worship isn’t to help others feel better about themselves or to draw others into our church’s membership. True worship is dedicated to glorifying our Savior and Lord. True worship is Christians willingly, joyfully, enthusiastically, skillfully, and wholly ascribing worth to our Creator. Talents for Christ is one tool in the church’s toolbox in the preparation of its members to accomplish this goal.

The article is labeled “An Underutilized Teen Growth Experience” for a reason. The majority of competition entries are in Home Economics, Writing, Art, and Photography. While these categories are great, they aren’t used on a weekly basis in the services in our churches. In the past few years, only about 1/3 of all entries were music and speech categories. Combined with fewer churches participating in TFC, the number of teens attending the weekend has declined.

What can we, as churches, do to combat this decline? Be intentional in our preparation of the next generation and mentoring the families in the church. We should not be satisfied with just giving them a solid foundation, but actively work with them to build a temple for God. We must show them the building plans for a Godly life and mentor them through the process. We must observe their actions and look for the talents and abilities with which God has given them and help to grow those abilities through use and training. We must work to instill habits of consistent church attendance and service. Not because our churches will die without it, but because that is how God has chosen to continue to build the church and glorify Himself.

Churches Searching for Pastor

As of February 2022



First Baptist Church – Corry
 Grace Baptist Church – Hazleton
 East Lawrence Baptist Church, Lawrenceville
 Grace Baptist Church, Norristown
 Middletown Road Baptist Church, Pittsburgh
 Chestnut Street Baptist Church, Port Allegheny
 First Baptist Church – Roulette
 Carmel Baptist Church – Saegertown
 Tidioute Baptist Church – Tidioute
 Faith Baptist Church - Waynesburg
 Calvary Baptist Church – Union City

Coming Activities for Our Fellowship

Youth Retreat and Talents for Christ

Calvary Baptist Church, Bloomsburg

Special speaker: Rev. Rand Hummel

The Wilds of New England

Date: April 1 – 2, 2022

See further details on www.parbc.org (Teen Activities)

Spring Conference – April 25 & 26, 2022

Grace Baptist Church, Kittanning

Hosts: Pastor Nathan S. Bramlet & Congregation

Fall Conference – September 12 – 14, 2022

Faith Baptist Church, State College

Hosts: Pastor Drew Fenstermacher & Congregation

Spring Conference -- April 17-18, 2023

First Baptist Church, Butler

Hosts: Pastor Dave Maitland and Congregation

Fall Conference -- September 11-13, 2023

Independent Baptist Church Towanda

Hosts: Pastor Donn Hauser and Congregation

Future Dates for Conferences are on our website

www.parbc.org

church were busy reimagining the kind of church that would please them and modern society. Some Bible “scholars” creatively asserted that regular attendance at church or Sabbath observances was a law given to Jews only and that enlightened Christians of the New Testament era are free to conceptualize and practice “church” as it suits their preferences and convenience.

Then comes the Covid-19 virus shutting down nearly every church for several consecutive months and, in some cases, for most of the year. Church commitment collided with health and safety concerns and kept many people at home. Churches quickly got creative with various methods in a battle to stay relevant in a world that was really just waiting for a good excuse to demote church. Let’s be honest: is church really “essential”?

Recently, I have been having a discussion with a brother in Christ named Tony who facilitates a large blog. I believe his doctrine is orthodox and conservative and that on most issues he and I would agree. However, though Tony attends church, he does not see it as “essential.” I believe that devoting one day a week for the unique expression of worship to God in a called-out assembly of like-minded believers is “essential” and has been God’s plan for all peoples of all times. Tony has challenged me to validate my belief with scriptural support to convince him to rethink his position. I share some of my efforts to persuade him with you.

Practically, most people strengthen their biblical foundation by attending a Bible-preaching / teaching church. If they don’t attend regularly, or if they attend a church that doesn’t make preaching and teaching the Bible a priority, then they will have a weak foundation. This will always be the result of minimizing the importance of the church and weekly attendance.

Genesis 2:1-3 reveals that God, as the Designer of time in our world, organized it into segments of seven days. This unit of time has been utilized universally since it was established – even being measured by Noah when the human population was reduced to just eight after the flood (Genesis 8:10,12). The increments of time employed in Scripture are irrelevant if they are not anchored in a universally understood way. On the first seventh day, God instituted His plan to treat it differently than the other six days. It pleased God to bless and sanctify one day in seven for the remembrance and worship of God. This was instituted for man’s well-being as only his omniscient Creator could understand how much he would need it. This was done prior to Moses and the law, prior to Abraham and the forming of the Hebrew nation, prior even to Adam’s sin and all of the consequences of our fallen condition. It was instituted for human beings – not just sinners, not just Jews – but for all humans.

It is evident that keeping the Sabbath Day and keeping it holy was strongly mandated in the Mosaic laws, but this does not mean it was given first and only by Moses to the Hebrew people. It is clear in Exodus 16:12-36, that the Jewish people were already practicing a Sabbath Day before Moses listed it as one of the Ten Command-

ments in Exodus 20:8. Most every orthodox Christian acknowledges that God has not changed His mind about any of the other moral laws of the Ten Commandments. Not one of them is rescinded anywhere in scripture. Why would we believe anything differently about the fourth commandment? The Ten Commandments are basically free of all ceremonial and judicial peculiarities of the Mosaic system. They are not types of Christ, or patterns of things to come, they are eternal standards of the character of God. We see many references to Sabbaths in the Millennial Kingdom period (Isaiah 56:6-8; Ezekiel 44:24, 45:17, 46:1-4, 12). Why wouldn't the "Lord of the Sabbath", as Jesus described Himself in Luke 6:5, have told us that the Sabbath observance wasn't going to be important anymore after He died; at least not until the Millennium?

Clearly, the Apostles did not embrace this thinking as it was their practice and habit to be in a place of worship together every week. (Acts 2:1, 41-42, 46; 5:11,14, 42; 8:1,4; 11:19-22, 26; 12:1, 5; 13:5, 14, 15, 43, 44; 14:1, 23, 27; 16:4, 13; 17:1-3, 10, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8; 20:7, 17-38). So many of the actions of our Savior that are recorded for our perpetual benefit occurred on Sabbath Days. The vast majority of the New Testament, after the gospels, is written to local churches or to those that were serving as pastors and leaders of local churches. This seems illogical if the church was to become such an unneeded nuisance. The whole focus of the Apostles in the book of Acts was to establish churches throughout the world so that the Gospel would have a local place for preaching and discipleship. The gifts of the Spirit described by the Apostle Paul were designed to be exercised in local assemblies – not on television, or in massive stadiums, or on internet blogs. God knew that we would need the fellowship, encouragement, discipline, accountability, support, guidance, preaching, teaching, etc. that occurs and *can only* occur, practically speaking, in local church settings. Why would Paul be so serious in his exhortation to the pastors in Acts 20:28-30 about taking great care of the church of God that was purchased with "His own blood" if it was in the process of being "phased out"? Later, Paul is inspired to refer to the church of the Living God as the pillar and ground of the truth (I Timothy 3:15). Could it be that the Evil One is behind all efforts to topple our pillars and destabilize our foundations? Attendance at a Bible-believing and preaching church *is absolutely* "essential" for leading a righteous, Christ-imitating life. We should be doing everything possible to safeguard the position and influence of the church. We should be demonstrating its worth by our own personal commitment to attend, to serve, and to give to its efforts to evangelize and make disciples.

In the Mosaic system, violations of the Sabbath Day observance could mean death. How can we imagine that God today doesn't really care whether we go to church or not? We must, as believers, recognize that we are being influenced by the world rather than the Word when we start making less and less of the Lord's Day. It was history's first memorial, given by God for mankind's benefit. It was a day set aside to remember creation and the Creator. Any nation that allows this God-ordained practice to fade away from prominence and relevance will be a nation on a trajectory toward moral collapse and spiritual bankruptcy. God forbid that we, as His children, should in any way be in collusion with Satan's designs to silence the church.

Some will, of course, stumble over the Sabbath Day being the seventh day of the week in the Old Testament and demand that Sundays are not the Sabbath days. The Apostles and early believers exchanged the seventh day for the first day of the week in honor of Christ's resurrection which occurred on Sunday (Acts 20:6,7; I Corinthians 16:1,2; Revelation 1:10).

In Revelation 1:10, we see the aged Apostle John talking about his celebration of the "Lord's Day." While actively participating in remembrance and worship of God on that day, God blessed him with the wonderful visions of the book of Revelation. Long after Christ had ascended to heaven, John was still careful to practice a time of worship with God on this special day of the week.

As a boy of twelve, Jesus began to be in earnest about "His Father's business." He concluded that being at the Temple on the Sabbath was an essential aspect of that business. When He began His public ministry, after His testing in the wilderness, the first place we see Him engaging others with the preaching and teaching of the Word was in the synagogues of Galilee (Luke 4:14-16, 31, 44). Christ showed, by His own example, the importance of the weekly worship gathering. Knowing all, God chose the church to be an "essential" vehicle for spreading the gospel and establishing believers.

Not Me—Continued

In the New Testament there is a vivid illustration of the same with the apostle Peter denying his Lord, Jesus, three times before the cock crowed (Luke 2:54-61). In other words, when asked if he were with Jesus, Peter was swift to say, "**Not me, not me, not me.**" In facing a hostile group Peter chose not to be identified with his Savior Jesus Christ.

I share all that with you because I have heard of Christians, like Peter, that are not standing up, under pressure, for their Savior and the Word of God in our current times. They are quick to say, "**Not me, not me!**"

I used to preach from the pulpit that a time was coming when we would be facing similar situations and we will have to choose whether to stand for Christ or deny Christ. But in watching and reading what is taking place around our own country, the United States of America, I can see that it is not just our children and grandchildren that are going to face persecution and pressure not to stand for Christ and the Truths of Scripture. How alarming and sad is that?!?! There are communities, states and even the federal government that are making attempts to promote evil and restrict Christians from counselling, speaking out or preaching against the evil that is so clearly defined in the Word of God. We are NOW in precarious times!

I am reminded in Mathew 5:10, it says: "*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness's sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" *May the Lord find us standing firm for our Savior and His Word. May we never give in to say, "Not me."*

TALENTS FOR CHRIST CATEGORIES

Calvary Baptist Church, Bloomsburg, PA April 1-2, 2022

- Extemporaneous Writing
- Bible Knowledge: Old & New Testament
- Art: 2-Dimensional, 3-Dimensional
- Photography
- Home Economics: Baking, Needlework/Handiwork, Sewing
- Bible Quizzing Team
- Vocal
 - Male & Female Solos
 - Large & Small Groups
- Instrumental*
 - Brass: Cornet, Trumpet, French Horn, Trombone, Baritone, Tuba, Sousaphone
 - Strings: Violin, Viola, Cello, Bass, Classical Guitar, Folk Strings
 - Woodwinds: Bassoon, Oboe, Clarinet, Bass Clarinet, Alto Saxophone, Tenor Saxophone, Flute
 - Piano
 - Large & Small Group
- Speech
 - Oral Interpretation
 - Public Speaking: Male & Female
 - Visualized Bible Teaching
 - Puppetry
- Digital Media
 - Digital Presentation
- Exceptions can be made to these categories and instruments with prior approval from the Talents for Christ Committee.

DEADLINE FOR REGISTRATION IS March 17th

YourEternityChoice.com

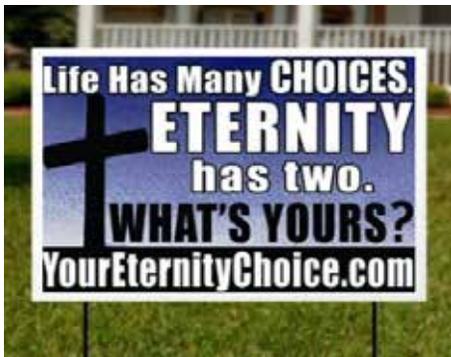
submitted by Evangelist Ken Lynch

Ken Lynch forwarded the following information which you may find interesting as you are "...keeping the gospel of Christ before your community."

Ken suggests "Your EternityChoice.com, a website set up as a resource that was established and written for the diligent seeker of the Truth of God...as found in the Bible.... It is a great resource to reach unbelievers and to guide following the believer's salvation.

How did it come to be? A church in Kansas desired to increase their community and area outreach. They began putting up billboards that would lead people to the gospel of Jesus Christ. They established a website to compliment their outreach. Following that, using online and practical means, they began to assist others with ministry tools such as billboards, yard signs, witnessing cards, vehicle decals, door hangers and more.

To quote their website, "Our express purpose is Bible Ministry and Evangelism, without any thought or intent of profit from the cause of Christ and the Good News of the Gospel of Christ.



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