

Good Wednesday afternoon, New South Family. Welcome to the 54th edition of the Weekly Word – this for the week ending July 31, 2020.

-----**The Critical**-----

Announcements

1) Annual Conference Ordination Service: This service is scheduled for Saturday, August 29, 10:00 a.m. to 11:30a at Wilmore. Bishop Keith Cowart will be with us. Also on the 29th at 8:45a, Adam Teacher will be with us for an update about his life and ministry. Please come to the Building C Great Hall, grab a doughnut and listen to what God is doing in places far away. So the schedule for the gathering:

Friday, August 28

6:30p NSC BOA meeting with Bishop Cowart – Superintendency

Saturday, August 29

8:45a Breakfast with Adam Teacher – Building C, Great Hall

10:00a Worship and Ordination Service – Building A, Sanctuary

Here are some housing options, should you need housing:

Places to stay in Wilmore:

[Scott Station Inn](#)

[Asbury Inn](#)

[Red Bud Inn Bed and Breakfast](#)

[The Home Place guest House](#)

Places to stay in Nicholasville:

[Holiday Inn Express](#)

[Comfort Inn South](#)

[The Home Place Inn](#)

[The Cottage on the Corner](#)

[The Corner House Bed and Breakfast](#)

2) New Corona Virus Counsel if where you live is anything like where I live, there is new news, once again, just about every day about the Covid threat and announcements by lawmakers about new regulations, restrictions, etc. Though we are in different states and cities with different recommendations and mandates, please remember that our position on this is to honor the law and presume the best of our lawmakers, even in things about which we disagree – to the point of defacing the gospel. There will very likely come a day in our world where Christians are asked to dishonor Christ – which we cannot do. But until that day, we seek to honor Christ by honoring the laws of our land.

Church of the Week: We have a facility sitting in Johnson City, TN where we'd love to start a church plant. Let's pray that the Lord would raise up a people to represent Christ in that place, and a leader to lead them.

Conference / Superintendent's Calendar (all times eastern; in-person schedule subject to COVID restrictions)

August 9-11: ABS (Area Bishop and Superintendents) Meeting – Indianapolis

August 13: DL Zoom, 9:30a

August 21: BOA Zoom, 7:00p

August 25-28: Starting Strong for new pastors - Indianapolis

August 28: BOA meeting – Wilmore, 6:00p (Superintendent Search Team)

August 29: Breakfast meeting with Adam Teacher – Wilmore, 8:45a

August 29: NSC Adjourned Sitting / Ordination – Wilmore, 10:00a

September 10: DL Zoom, 9:30a
September 11-13: NSC Family Camp – pending restrictions
September 23-25: New Room Conference, Nashville, TN
October 6-8: Global Overseer’s Team, Indianapolis
October 16: DL Meeting – Wilmore, 2:00p
October 16: BOA Meeting – Wilmore, 6:00p
October 17: MEG / MAC Meeting – Wilmore, 8:00a
November 12: DL Zoom, 9:30a
December 10: DL Zoom, 9:30a
March 19: DL Meeting – Wilmore, 2:00p
March 19: BOA Meeting – Wilmore, 6:00p
March 20: MEG/MAC – Wilmore, 8:00a

And now...

-----**The Important**-----

Resources, Articles and Attachments

1) Vacation Reports From Last Week:

From Joe Ritter (Waynesville, NC) *“Unfortunately, our summer vacation plans to Florida and in another trip to Niagara Falls (our last trip with all 4 children) were scuttled. New England is requiring out of state visitors to quarantine, and FL family said no to hosting us. We may still go to FL or as an alternative find an open beach somewhere.*

The Billy Graham Cove was able to hold its Walter Kaiser retreat, July 6-10, and allowed in-person attendance. Yay! It was a much needed retreat when I could receive spiritual investment. Frankly, I had felt like I was running on empty from investing myself in a number of ministry efforts. Dr. Kaiser taught an in-depth character study on Abraham, and Tuesday morning he discussed the separation of Abraham and Lot (Gen. 13). Something he said about making righteous choices with respect to Lot stuck in my mind and heart and colored how I received the rest of his teaching through Gen. 25. It was a very good reminder on the importance of making righteous choices and intentionally turning toward God. I can say so much more, but you wanted it to be brief.”

2) **A Couple Provocative Articles are Attached Below** (admittedly both happen to be from my alma mater - ha) making good points on 1) Civil Discourse, and, 2) COVID “Experts.” I’ve found them both helpful and hope you do as well.

3) **The August Edition of Light and Life** [is available digitally by clicking here.](#)

Job Openings

At this point, we have three churches who need pastors:

Greenville (TN)

Bowen (KY)

Harriman (TN)

Please keep this process in your prayers – that the Lord would provide shepherds for His flock.

Remember too that [if you click here](#), you will find job opening listings at FMC Human Resources.

August Birthdays (*that we know of)

Daryl Diddle, August 1

Stan Dyer, August 6

Ed Bryson, August 27

*I would love to know the birthdays of all those related to the NSC who receive this communique – pastors, elders, delegates, special friends, etc. Please send month and day to Timothy at newsouthconference@gmail.com

This Week's Passage, Quote and Joke

Passage: My message this Sunday continues the study of Jude and focuses on the hidden reefs that threaten to sink the ship of the Church – Jude 12.

Quote: “I suggest that if we are truly hungering and thirsting after righteousness we shall not only avoid things that we know to be bad and harmful, we shall even avoid things that tend to dull or take the edge off our spiritual appetites.” — Martin Lloyd-Jones

Joke:

Q. Who was the greatest male financier in the Bible?
A. Noah. He was floating his stock while everyone else was in liquidation.

Q. Who was the greatest female financier in the Bible?
A. Pharaoh's daughter. She went down to the bank of the Nile and drew out a little prophet.

Blessings on your worship this weekend!

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True Diversity, True Freedom—Honoring Conscience

July 28, 2020 Benjamin V. Porter

Institute for Faith and Freedom, Grove City College

I'm a Protestant and my friend, Joe, is Roman Catholic. Occasionally, when I discover someone is Catholic, I joke, “Hey, our spiritual ancestors burned each other at the stake.” Generally, I say this once I know the person somewhat and know the person can handle humor. Joe was one such person, and we hit it off quickly. Joe, like me, is a practitioner of diversity and liberty, including religious liberty.

There was another duo a century ago that walked a similar path: J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis. Lewis was Protestant and Tolkien was Catholic, and the man who did heavy lifting converting Lewis.

Tolkien and Lewis saw much through the same lens. Both were brilliant scholars familiar with history, literature, and languages. Both were prolific writers and their books shaped generations to come. They wrote fantasy literature, letting spiritual themes and allusions speak for themselves, although they were certainly capable of apologetics. Ultimately, they sought to build a kind of bridge from heaven to earth, and the world could not help but be enraptured by their work. These men had so much in common, but they also had one glaring difference: While Tolkien converted Lewis, he did not convert him to Catholicism. Lewis died a Protestant. Did this mean the end of their friendship? Not at all.

Joe was able to take my initial joke and return a jab, but without malice or insult. In fact, Joe's defense to my critiques of Catholicism was one of patience and kindness. He completely reframed my initial presumptions of certain Catholic dogmas, genuinely trying to explain the why behind the how. For example, he would tell me that he prayed to Saint

Stephen for me, even when I insisted he didn't need to. While I disagree with his belief that saints can serve as intercessors, I could not help but be slightly disarmed that he wanted to pray for me.

Civil debate is a lost art. It still occurs at the margins, but the highway of differing opinion is crowded by social media and woke journalism, which are not modes exactly designed for helpful and even pleasurable disagreement. In this day and age, how could two people on opposite ends of a spectrum possibly enjoy disagreeing with each other, let alone on hot topics of politics and religion? There are two major principles which guide the conversations between Joe and I: commitment to truth and commitment to the other.

Commitment to the truth is the telos of debate. When probing deep truths there are laws to conversation which allow it to progress. Among them, the identity of the speaker does not determine whether the speaker's argument is valid. Race, sex, religion, or any other such category has no effect on whether the person's argument holds to reason.

It's also important when advocating our positions to seek areas of agreement as well as difference. The reason Joe and I hit it off was because we found we had read many of the same thinkers, and agreed on many subjects, particularly areas where most people are uncomfortable going. Joe was also not afraid to pursue truth. He had intellectual courage, and he welcomed disagreement in the hopes of learning.

But what completely took me by surprise was Joe's charity. This is what I call commitment to the other, and it allows the conversation to be fair and amiable. I tend to become wholly concentrated on the validity of someone's reasoning and then focus on flaws in their argument. Joe could think just as critically as me, but his position felt much less like an attack and more like an invitation. He doesn't simply try to win intellectual battles; he tries to win people's hearts. He wants to convert, not destroy.

In short, we became friends and learned how to enjoy disagreement. Like Tolkien and Lewis, we can talk for hours and enrich each other's worldviews.

At the heart of this is a love and respect for religious liberty. Religious liberty is the idea that people believe different things, and they ought not to be punished by law for those differences. Importantly, that principle is not infinite. If one's religion calls for the sacrifice of babies to Moloch, this would not be permitted because it would violate the right to life. But beyond transgressing the natural rights of life, liberty, and property, religious liberty is an essential.

Religious liberty is of utmost importance because it is a subset of freedom of conscience. James Madison wrote that a man's conscience is "his most valuable possession." If a man does not have the right to his own conscience, what liberty is left? To try and detain someone's conscience through the use of governmental force is the peak of tyranny.

I am thankful for the lessons I have learned from my friend Joe on how to disagree in a constructive way that promotes camaraderie. I hope our society, especially religious believers, can look at the way Tolkien and Lewis remained fast friends. It takes moral and intellectual courage and love for others to pull this off in a winsome way. Let us strive for these ideals together and revive them in American culture.

Summer 2020 COVID-19 Data in Pennsylvania: What We Don't Know

July 29, 2020 Gary L. Welton

Institute for Faith and Freedom, Grove City College

The COVID-19 coronavirus is a novel virus, and everybody who claims they have it figured out is living under an illusion. Our knowledge is growing, but it is still very fragmented. Our local politicians have been cautious because of the vast unknown; we have never been here before.

Our educational leaders have been (and will be making) significant decisions about the new school year. What are the risks of returning to the traditional classroom? And what are the risks of not returning to the classroom? Because of the vast unknowns, the decision makers are operating in a largely and regrettably no-win scenario.

We know that the number of positive cases in the United States is up dramatically this summer. The number of deaths has also been growing, and every one of these individual deaths represents a heartbreaking story. Yet the escalating death rates are still well below the numbers from April and early May.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania experienced a very high number of cases and deaths in March and April but has not seen the dramatic summer spikes common in the southern states (though there are concerns about the recent spikes in Western Pennsylvania). The data, as represented in the below figure, show a change in the relationship between the number of new cases and the number of deaths in the last six weeks. The recent data points reflect both fewer cases and fewer deaths. If you look at the data through the spring, there was a very strong correlation between the number of new cases and the number of deaths, reaching a correlation as high as .92. Over the last three weeks, however, the correlation has approached zero (.07).

This raises the burning question, for which I wish we had the definitive answer, namely: Why?

Why are the death rates across the country much lower during a time when the number of new cases is skyrocketing? There are many potential answers, some of which are reassuring; others, not so much. It is likely that more than one of these factors is playing a role.

1. Many of the new cases are among younger Americans, for whom the risks have always been much lower.
2. We are using better strategies in our nursing homes than we used in the early months. Indeed, we are avoiding some horrific decisions in which nursing homes were required to accept COVID cases.
3. Medical data have shown that some of the ICU treatment protocols being used early on were simply wrong and made recovery less likely rather than more likely. We have learned from the data and changed treatment protocols as a result.
4. Just give it another week or two, and we might see the death rates soar.
5. The virus exists in various strains, some of which are more virulent than others. Many of the recent local cases may represent people infected with a weaker strain. This perspective has been suggested by Dr. Graham Snyder, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center medical director for infection prevention, during a press briefing. The weaker strain might indicate a mutation in the virus. It was indeed such a mutation that finally brought the flu pandemic of 1918 to an end.
6. The data include so many errors as to be unuseful.

Grove City College, where I am a professor, is located in Mercer County, a county that has seen a spike in new cases over the last several weeks. In fact, the number of new cases has doubled, and the county is considered to be a hot spot in the commonwealth. We still need to be diligent and careful in the way we live our lives.

While there are still many concerns, the data suggest that summer 2020 is less risky than the spring. Nevertheless, the risks continue. Be careful in how you read and understand the arguments that you see on social media. It is still a novel virus. Those who make dogmatic statements (from whatever perspective) will likely be shown to be wrong.

We have been told in our state to wear face masks, and it does appear that more people are doing so. Nevertheless, many people are wearing them incorrectly (not covering their noses, for example), and many are removing them when they speak (and hence when the risks of transmission are higher.)

The current data are promising, yet still concerning. Ultimately, history may show which of the six explanations (or perhaps some seventh one) turns out to be most accurate. Some of these predict improving results; some predict deteriorating scenarios. Until we have that historical perspective, caution is still required.

Every morning I simply pray, "Lord, help me not to behave in a way that makes this situation worse for even one other person. Let me be part of the solution; not part of the problem."