

Dear family of God,

I walked into a home and the woman at the door who I was meeting me for the first time caught a glance of my hands. She looked down and after saying “hello,” she just carried right on with, “Pastor, t-t-t, you bite your nails!” I thought to myself, “Wow, she’s observant.” I sat in a congregational meeting when the pastor’s salary was up for discussion and a member said, “I think the pastors need to have someone teach them about time management. Years ago, we had just one pastor and he did everything by himself.”

I can laugh with you about those comments. It’s no surprise to me that I bite my nails. I also pick my nose sometimes! And it’s not lost on me that churches used to be served by just one pastor where now two or more are serving. But I’m not going to get into that today.

Michael, maybe you’ve heard this one before, entitled *The Perfect Pastor*:

1. The perfect pastor preaches exactly 10 minutes.
2. He condemns sin roundly but never hurts anyone's feelings.
3. He works from 8 AM until midnight and is also the church janitor.
4. The perfect pastor makes \$40 a week, wears good clothes, drives a good car, buys good books, and donates \$30 a week to the church.
5. He is 29 years old and has 40 years experience.
6. Above all, he is handsome.
7. The perfect pastor has a burning desire to work with teenagers, and he spends most of his time with the senior citizens.
8. He smiles all the time with a straight face because he has a sense of humor that keeps him seriously dedicated to his church.
9. He makes 15 home visits a day and is always in his office to be handy when needed.
10. The perfect pastor always has time for church council and all of its committees. He never misses the meeting of any church organization and is always busy evangelizing the unchurched.

I don’t believe I ever saw this part before but it’s good: If your pastor does not measure up, simply send this notice to six other churches that are tired of their pastor, too. Then bundle up your pastor and send him to the church at the top of the list. If everyone cooperates, in one week you will receive 1,643 pastors. One of them should be perfect. Have faith in this letter. One church broke the chain and got its old pastor back in less than three months.

As we celebrate Pastor Michael’s ordination to the office of Minister of the Word, we can recognize that it’s a great calling to serve in the church. But the church—just like her pastors—is not perfect.

That's why we need the Word of God to lead and guide us. And we need it now as much as any other time in history. And we can trust God to lead and guide us, first of all, just as he led his servants in the past.

## **God Led His Servants in the Past**

Pastor Michael, you are here because others have paved the way for us in the history of Christ's Church. The writer of Hebrews reminds his listeners of this fact too when he says in v.7 of our reading today:

*Heb 13:7 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.*

We recognize that Hebrews 13 follows on the heels of chapter 11 which contains a long list of heroes of the faith. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Joseph, Moses, Rahab the prostitute turned believer, and a whole list of other people mentioned by their actions rather than their names. All of them, chapter 12 reminds us, had to learn to submit to the Word of God, the direction, the leading, the discipline of God. And because they rested in God's grace and leaned on him, trusting his Word, the church—already in the Old Testament—grew into a body through which God gave us Jesus, his Son.

From there the New Testament Church blossomed. The Holy Spirit was poured out and we read in Acts 2 that the people

*Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

Again, at the time of the Reformation, people were getting ahold of the Bible—some for the first time—and rediscovering the teaching of the apostles. And as they prayerfully devoted themselves to it, we have men like Martin Luther, encouraged by his wife, as he taught the Scriptures which brought light and comfort to his own soul and delivered him from despair.

Luther discovered the wonders of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. He was questioned by leaders of his day who wanted to preserve their personal empires rather than secure true spiritual comfort for God's people. They wanted him to recant his teaching of salvation by faith alone. And many of us know what he said:

"Unless I am convinced (of error) by the testimony of the Holy Scriptures or by evident reason--I can believe neither pope nor councils alone, as it is clear that they have erred repeatedly and contradicted themselves. I consider myself convicted by the testimony of Holy Scripture, which is my basis; my conscience is captive to the Word of God. Thus I cannot and will not recant, because acting against one's conscience is neither safe nor sound. God help me. Amen."

Luther was a servant of Word who knew the Scriptures were alone a trustworthy guide for our salvation.

Congregation, what I respect about Pastor Michael is his desire to honour his parents and their guidance through their church that led him closer to Christ and to the Word. He didn't see it until later, but looking back he knows his family and church played a formative role in growing his faith. And that's a message of encouragement for all of

our parents and mentors and other members of the church. We never know what effect our life will have when, even in little ways, we point others to the trustworthiness of God and his Word.

For Luther, it led to a Reformation calling the Church back to living by Scripture alone. God used faithful servants of long ago to preserve and protect and transmit the Word of God. He uses parents and church family today still to encourage the next generation and others to trust in Jesus as they believe God's Word.

So, now, says the writer of Hebrews, "consider their way of life and imitate their faith"! That's a call to dig deeper into the Word. It's a call to go deeper with Jesus, our Saviour. It's a call to Pastor Michael. It's a call to me. But it's also a call to each and every one of us in the pew. It's a call to parents and teachers to take hold of the Bible. As God's people of old followed God by believing and trusting the truth of his Word, so we must let the truth of the Bible shape our minds and hearts and lives. And the Lord will take care of the details, however the chips fall in our life. He will show himself to be faithful to us. He always has been faithful to his servants in the past. And he always will be—also to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Recognize the Source of Their Strength**

However, let's get something straight for our second and final point. These faithful servants of the past were faithful because they got their strength from outside of themselves. They got it from Jesus, the Word made flesh. That's why Hebrews 13:8 tells us to remember,

*Heb 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*

Friends, tomorrow's newspaper will be full of sex, power, money and suffering, says one author; "it's what sells, it's what some people think makes the world go round. Meanwhile, you can look through the newspaper from end to end for a mention of Jesus. There may be one or two hints (perhaps someone copying the Beatles and claiming to be more famous than Jesus!), but he won't dominate the urgent trivia that is pushed at us day by day and week by week." Yes, we are bombarded by world tensions between Trump and North Korea, the most recent Hollywood personality to be found in a sex scandal, the latest forest fire, hurricane, drought or war.

"Yet here, in the closing chapter of [Hebrews] one of the great documents of early Christianity, we find sex, power, money, suffering—and Jesus. What's more, he's the one who makes sense of all the rest. He is the same 'yesterday, today and for ever'. The writer wants us to realize that, if your **faith** is firmly rooted in him, none of the forces that blow people off track and into the newspapers need harm you." That's powerful and comforting, isn't it!

Michael, you are called to be a Minister of the Word! You have the privilege and responsibility to point us as the church to truth we can live by. We need truth that helps us and comforts us as God's people. People don't always ask for it in those words but our church family is looking to their pastors in their times of struggle to find comfort from God! In times of joy we also can help them, by giving expression from God's Word to the praise in their heart.

But more than anything else, we need to point people to Jesus. The Bible is good and important. But the whole Bible is pointing us to Jesus over and over and over again. Saying we are a church that lives Sola Scriptura or by Scripture Alone means we believe Jesus is the unchanging source of our strength in life. He builds his church upon his Word from age to age, yesterday, today and forever. We trust the Bible alone to guide our lives because it comes from our Lord Jesus who saves us completely so that we can live a new life.

Looking at the opening verses of Hebrews 13 helps us understand that the Holy Spirit wants us to know that Jesus alone gives us strength to live out the powerful life that is spelled out for us in this chapter. Jesus empowers us to live a life where our sex life is under control and marriage is honoured. He empowers us to obey God's call to keep from loving money. He empowers us, instead, to help advance God's kingdom and fight back poverty and injustice—helping the poor and those wrongly imprisoned as well as also loving those who truly belong there. Again, we do this not because we are so strong, but because Jesus lives in us. His strength is here for us today, just as it has been yesterday and will be forever. Strength that enables us to live Sola Scriptura.

Pastor Michael and congregation, our help comes from Jesus! He helps us live out the direction in the Bible so that God is glorified in and through our life. God builds his Church upon Christ, using the powerful Word that he has given us. Let us cherish his gift of the Word, His gifts of pastors and leaders for us, and let us encourage one another to live out of the call of Scripture on our lives—today, tomorrow and forever.

**United Response:** All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that all God's people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 *Tim.* 3:16-17) We are confident that God is once and for all revealed to us through the words of Scripture. The Bible is the supreme standard by which all human conduct and opinion should be tried. Amen

**Morning Worship**  
*Ordination of Michael McGowan*  
October 15, 2017 10:00 AM

We are thankful to God for bringing us to worship together today. We praise Him as we celebrate the ordination of Pastor Michael, whom the Lord has brought here to serve as our new co-pastor. Also, a special welcome his parents visiting from Michigan! May the Lord be exalted in our worship as we praise His great and holy Name. And may our hearts rejoice in knowing and following Him each day. We're continuing to follow the 5 Solas of the Reformation theme; our focus today is *Sola Scriptura*.

Notes: \* indicates please stand if you are able

LUYH = red hymnals on back table

**SOLO CHRISTO—Christ Alone**

Welcome & Announcements

We Greet One Another

\* Gathering Song: *What a Beautiful Name*

\* Opening Prayer

\* Call to Worship: from Jan Hus, Czech reformer

\* God's Greeting

\* Song of Remembrance: *Thy Word*

**SOLA GRATIA—Grace Alone**

Call to Confession

Prayer of Confession: *Westminster Catechism, Q&A 1*

Words of Assurance from God: *Romans 3:23-24*

\* Song: *Your Grace is Enough*

**SOLA FIDE—Faith Alone**

Stepping into God's Will for Our Lives

**Ordination of Michael McGowan, Minister of the Word**

Vows of the Candidate

Vows of the Congregation

\* Song: *Will You Come and Follow Me*

LUYH 742:1,4,5

**SOLA SCRIPTURA—Scripture Alone**

Children's Message

*Ages 3 to grade 4 dismissed for Wee Worship*

Prayer for the Word

Bible Readings: Hebrews 13:1-8

Sermon: **God's Truth Still Holds and Guides**

United Response: based on 2 Timothy 3:16-17

\* Song of Response: *Ancient Words* LUYH 762

**SOLI DEO GLORIA—God's Glory Alone**

Confidently Bringing Our Prayers to God Almighty

Joyfully Giving our Gifts to the God of All Mercies:

1. God's Work through Trinity CRC

2. Rehoboth Christian Ministries

Offertory: *Today*

\* Going Out in Faith

Led by Rev. Michael McGowan

\* God's Parting Blessing

\* Song: *Cornerstone*