

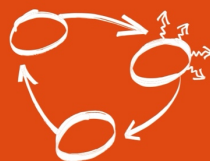
# Highlights *From the Heights*

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER | NORTHMINSTER EPC | SEPTEMBER 2025 — VOLUME 9

## PASTOR'S CORNER — THREE CIRCLES

*And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves."*

— Luke 10:2-3



### 3 CIRCLES

An Early Fall 2025 Sermon Series

Last fall we had a couple of town hall meetings to discuss the state and future of our church. To recap: like many churches, we have seen a significant decline in worship attendance and engagement in the life of our church. While for the most part our income has remained steady, it is also declining. Up until last fall, we had seen very few visitors to our church, and those who did visit usually did not return. It seemed as if, while we love our church and what we offer, it wasn't resonating or connecting with others in our community. Our circumstances seemed discouraging, to say the least. One year later, we've often been asked about where things stand and if we are as concerned as we were.

When you look at the practical numbers — worship attendance and income — not much has changed. Our average worship attendance is about the same as it was last fall, and our income is just slightly lower. But those numbers only tell one part of the story, and not the most important part. Since last fall we have had a steady increase in visitors to our church, which led to our largest Inquirer's Class in the past 8 years. One new regular attender commented, "I didn't know churches like yours existed any more." Where we often wonder if our church is declining into irrelevance, another visitor sees a community that has deep faith and deep relationships, the very things she has been needing and looking for.

Where did these new visitors come from? In almost every case, the answer is the same: Someone invited them. In fact, when you boil every church growth and evangelism strategy down to its core, it's always about

some form of personal invitation. It's how the Gospel spread in the very beginning, and it's how the Church has grown ever since. Telling others about Jesus is something that all believers are called and invited to do. As Jesus and the Holy Spirit change and transform us, we are invited to share that transformation with others.

The most important part of our life of faith is for us to be looking to see how we are growing as disciples of Jesus Christ, paying attention to how the Holy Spirit is making us into new creations, formed in the image of our Savior: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." (2 Corinthians 5:17) Think about it this way: when something good happens in our lives or when we have good news to share, we naturally and instinctively want to share that with the people around us. When we see how Jesus has changed us, we want to share that change with others. This change is a process that happens throughout our lives on this side of Glory. Look for how the Holy Spirit has changed you and how you are growing as a disciple. If you aren't sure how that change is happening in your life, consider asking what the Holy Spirit might be inviting you to change or do differently so you can experience the change He wants to bring about in you.

Sometimes, though, even when we know how we are being changed, we hesitate or aren't sure how to share that with others. We know Jesus has told us to tell others about the good news of God's grace, but don't want to be pushy or offensive. In fact, this is one of the most common questions we're asked: I know I'm supposed to tell others about Jesus, but I don't know what to say. To that end, we are going to spend time in September talking about a model for sharing

your faith called "The Three Circles." This is a slightly different model than others you might already know. The emphasis with The Three Circles is helping you learn how to turn everyday conversations into Gospel conversations. We'll introduce the Three Circles in a three week sermon series, which will be followed by a six week Sunday School class.

If we want to see Northminster grow, it simply comes down to telling others about Jesus and inviting them to church to learn more about Him. The elders and I encourage everyone to join us for worship and plan to participate in the Sunday School class. We're excited about how the Lord will use the Three Circles to help us share the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ with our friends, our family, and the community around us. Look for more information about the Three Circles Sunday School class on page 7 of the newsletter.

Blessings,  
Rev. David Garrison

## ***Romans 10:14-15***

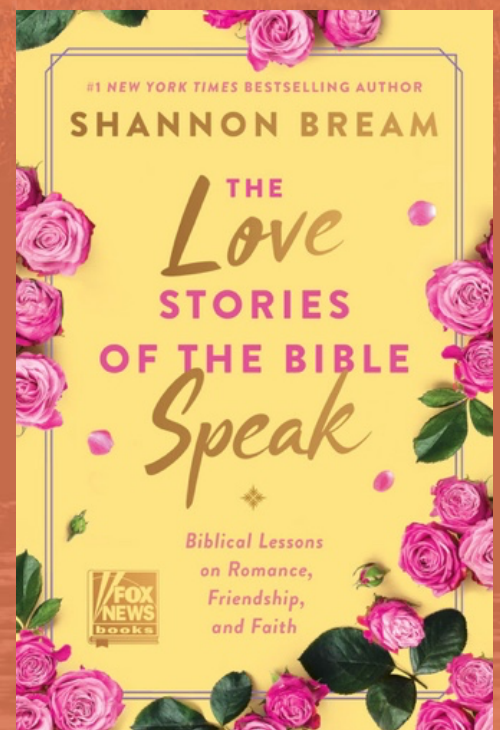
*How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"*

## **WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY** **Tuesday, September 2, 7pm**

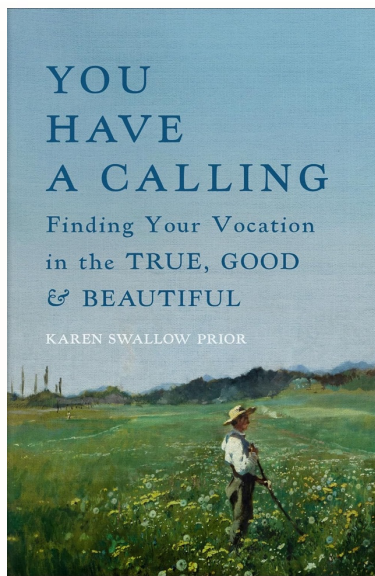
The Women's Bible Study will reconvene on Tuesday, September 2 at 7:00 p.m. We will be studying the last chapter of our book, "God's Unconditional Love for Us" in The Love Stories of the Bible Speak by Shannon Bream. Please read the chapter and complete the questions in your workbook. Come prepared to share what you got out of the reading and any questions you might have. (And if you don't get a chance to read it, come anyway!)

Once again we are going to ask you to bring a refreshment to share. Also, be thinking about a new Bible study book, as this is our last chapter!

Looking forward to seeing everyone on Tuesday night, September 2nd!!







## WOMEN'S BOOK CLUB MEETS THURSDAY, Sept. 18, 10 AM @ NEPC

The Women's Book Club will meet on Thursday, September 18 at 10:00 a.m. at Northminster. We will be reading, You Have a Calling, by our friend, Karen Swallow Prior. Karen will be at our meeting on September 18 to read parts of her book and share her motivation for writing this book. She will also answer your questions.

In this book, Karen argues that true vocational fulfillment comes from pursuing the good, the true, and the beautiful, rather than solely from passion or a dream job. Karen explains while passion is internal and often fleeting, a calling is a service-oriented call from an external source, like God or others, that directs us to serve in ways that uphold these universal virtues. The book offers a virtue-based vision of vocation, asserting that by integrating these transcendentals into our everyday work, we participate in our divine creation, regardless of the prestige or alignment with passion.

Join us as Karen shares her thoughts about her book, You Have a Calling. Please bring a snack to share and remember, if you haven't read the book, come anyway. We always have a good time!!

### FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP REPORT 2025 GENERAL FUND

	July	Year To Date
Income	\$10,404	\$70,383
Expenses	\$ 9,987	\$69,577
Balance	\$ 417	\$ 807

# LIFE TOGETHER

*Keeping in touch with one another*

## SEPTEMBER BIRTHDAYS:

11 Megan Aderholdt  
Ian Moore I  
16 Ray Vandall  
19 Sharon Bryant  
27 Tim Wright



## SEPTEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

1 Anne & Vance Wilkins, 2007  
5 Janet & Ray Vandall, 1956  
10 Mickie & George Brine, 1977  
13 Kristin & David Kidd, 2014  
18 Karey & David Garrison, 1999  
21 Beverly & George O'Brien, 1974

## PRAYER REQUESTS

*I sought the Lord, and He answered me;  
He delivered me from all my fears.*

— Psalm 34:4

**Several members** have asked for prayers for needs that they'd prefer not to share publicly. Please lift up these prayers, knowing that God knows for whom you pray and what they need.

**Pam Tinsley** asks prayers for her sons Matthew, who is dealing with cellulitis in his right foot and Macon, who has hearing issues.

**Cindy Copp** asks prayers for her father, Art Pierce, who is recovering from a fall and brain surgery.

**Bob Mills** asks prayers for his brother David, who has been diagnosed with stage 2 myxofibrosarcoma.

**Jude Nyanzi** is healing from a bus accident while on a field trip with students from Daystar last month. Two students died, 10 others were injured.

Remember others who cannot be with us in church:  
**Arlene Horton, Mary Murray, Mary Wilhelm and Dolores Wright.**

**All active servicemen and women, law enforcement personnel, first responders.**

## SEPTEMBER 2025 MISSION FOCUS: AMHERST COUNTY HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

Habitat for Humanity is a non-governmental and non-profit Christian organization whose vision is of a world where everyone has a decent place to live. Work is done to perpetuate this vision in all 50 states in the U.S. and approximately 70 other countries. This goal is accomplished by building strength, stability and self-reliance in partnership with families in need of decent and affordable housing. Habitat homeowners help build their own homes alongside volunteers and pay an affordable mortgage.

By partnering with Habitat, families and communities transform their lives with the incredible effects of safe and affordable shelter, including improvements in health, safety, child development, economic opportunity and educational achievement.

Northminster Church has been a long-time supporter of this organization. In past years our members have helped with the actual building of homes. We have donated money and we continue to provide meeting space for the monthly meetings of the Amherst Habitat Board of Directors, for which our Pastor David is acting President.

Last year we helped serve lunch to builders and visitors at a new building on Coolwell Road. This was a new type of construction and the techniques were fascinating to witness. These homes were completed last month.

Habitat for Humanity is alive and well in Amherst County and can use our help with volunteer time and with donations.



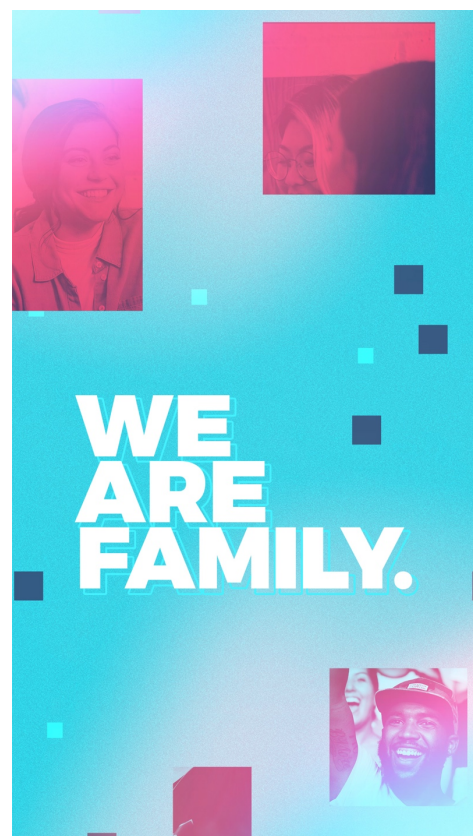
## DICK & JOAN RICKETTS BODY LIFE FUND

Following the lead of Pastor Ray Steadman in his book, *Body Life*, Northminster seeks to be the body of Christ. One way of doing this is by reaching out not only to people in our community, but also assisting members of our own congregation who find themselves in a financial crisis.

When a family in the church has special needs that they are unable to meet, perhaps due to losing a job, or some sort of crisis, money from the Body Life Fund can be requested to help. While money does not usually solve people's problems, it can be a source of great encouragement to a family that is struggling through a crisis. Although the church cannot fully support a family that is out of work, any financial help is usually appreciated greatly, and tells them that the church truly cares.

Northminster's "Body Life Fund" was established in 2002 and named in honor of Dick & Joan Ricketts.

Funding for the Body Life Fund occurs through contributions made directly to Body Life, not from the general income. Over the past several years, we been blessed to be able to provide special assistance to many in our congregation. As a result, the balance in the fund right now is very low. We invite you to consider prayerfully making a special donation, above and beyond your regular giving, to help replenish this fund so that we might be able to bless others in our church family should the need arise.





# MILLS' MUSINGS – ANOTHER BIRTHDAY?

*By Rev. Bob Mills*

On January 28, the Roman Catholic Church annually observes the Feast of Saint Thomas Aquinas. This year, that festival celebrated the 800th anniversary of his birth.

I use that admittedly awkward phrasing because no one knows his actual birthday. From existing records, we can tell he was born either in late 1224 or early 1225. However, 13<sup>th</sup>-century Italian officials in the city of Aquino weren't terribly fastidious about the exact dates children were born to minor noblemen. Nonetheless, the providential timing of his birth helped Aquinas become one of the most important theologians in the Christian Church and one of humanity's most influential philosophers.

Aquinas lived and worked at a hinge point in Western culture. Europe was on the cusp of the Renaissance. Just 25 years before Aquinas' birth, the University of Paris received its royal charter. Paris was the first university in the sense that we now use that term: an institution that teaches a variety of disciplines to both undergraduate and graduate students. And with the rise of educational institutions not run by the Roman Catholic Church, the relationship between Christian faith and human reason was undergoing its first major reevaluation in nearly a millennia. Aquinas would play a key role in that project.

As a monk in the recently formed Dominican order, Aquinas spent most of his ministry as a teacher, including at the University of Paris. A great deal of his work, in the classroom and his writings, intended to show the Church and the world that the truths of human reason, those demonstrable by the observations of the senses and the exercise of logic, are compatible with the truths of revelation, those that have been divinely disclosed by God to his human creation.

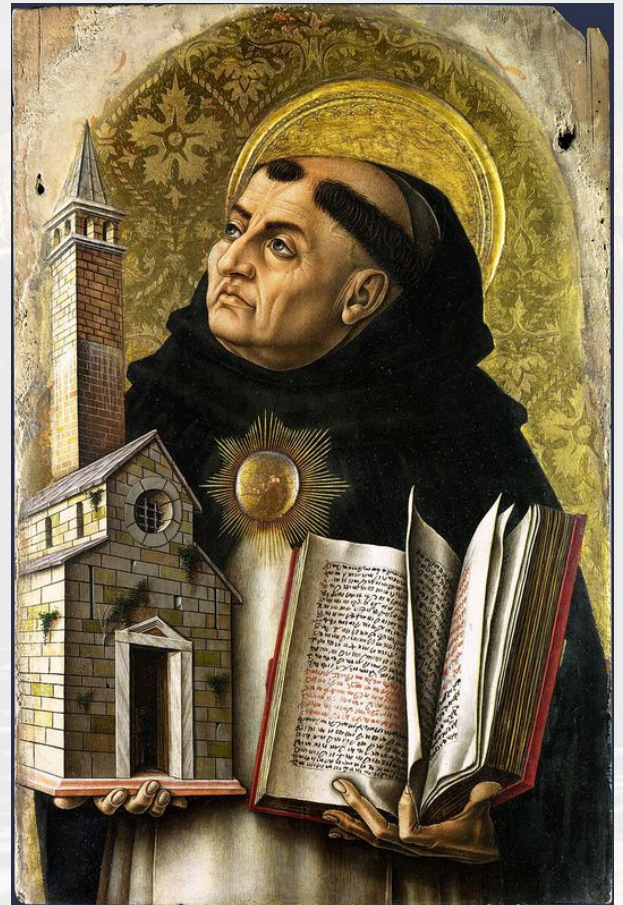
Today, Aquinas is also recognized as the culminating figure of Scholasticism. The primary aim of the late-medieval Scholastics, who were both philosophers and theologians, was to correlate Christian doctrine with human reason. The Scholastics wanted to show the reasonableness of God's teachings. They also wanted to explain why those doctrines were important to the daily life of every Christian regardless of occupation or level of education. The Scholastics recognized Christian religion and contemporary science aren't enemies. Rather, they saw them as complementary ways of learning about God and his world.

And yet, from the Renaissance through the Enlightenment and the Modern era, powerful forces have been trying to separate religious faith from human reason. Those forces are now waning and their centuries-old project is in peril. Most notably, the farther back in time scientists are able to see, the more their observations begin to sound like Aquinas' articulations of his arguments for the existence and nature of God.

In his 1978 book God and the Astronomers, Robert Jastrow, founder of NASA's Goddard Institute and an atheist, explained:

For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.

Aquinas, I suspect, has a seat on the front row. Christians from all traditions, along with those who share his concerns if not our faith, can continue to learn from his work and celebrate his life – even if we're not quite sure about his birthday.





# AMHERST COUNTY ALPHA

## INTEREST MEETING, WEDNESDAY SEPT 24, 6:30PM

We are grateful for Pastor David's support for our first county-wide event on Wednesday, September 24, at the Madison Heights Community Center from 6:30-8:30pm. This is an invitational meeting where interested persons come and partake of the ALPHA experience- a safe place to express oneself and to learn. During the evening there will be a simple meal, a presentation, 'Is there more to life than this?' and a time to share in small groups. This provides people who are searching for a deeper and more meaningful life a way to ask their questions, begin to find some answers, and assist them on their faith journey. No pressure to continue but that opportunity will be offered.

Alpha provides a way to reach out into the community- inviting friends, neighbors, or other interested people and welcoming them into a safe place to be curious. These persons are found inside the church as well as outside, or those who might label themselves as atheists or agnostics, or a once a long time ago church goer or even a member of a local church or a neighbor or family member. When local church members volunteer (this could be you!) as greeters, servers, etc., they can share God's love and be energized by the ways God is working in people's lives. Relationships are formed. Life is enhanced.



The poster has a red background. At the top, the text 'at the table' is written in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font. To the right of this text is a white speech bubble containing the text 'everyone welcome' in red, and below it, 'What do you think?' in red. Below the main title, the text 'Curious about faith?' is written in a white, sans-serif font. Underneath this, a small paragraph in white text reads: 'At Alpha, you can ask anything—it's a safe space to question life, faith, and meaning. Everyone is welcome. You're invited no matter your background or beliefs. Alpha is free, and there's no pressure to come back.' Below the text is a photograph of four people (three men and one woman) sitting around a table, smiling and talking. At the bottom of the poster, there is a white box containing the Alpha logo (a red question mark with a white 'A' inside) on the left, and the text 'Wednesday September 24 | 6:30pm', 'Madison Heights Community Center', and 'amherstcountyalpha.org' on the right.



After the Invitational meeting, for those who choose to go on, there is a ten-week series on Wednesday evenings, same time and place, that explores the essentials that make up the Christian faith-*who is Jesus? Why did Jesus die? Is the Bible reliable and true? Who is Holy Spirit and how does Holy Spirit work? as well as other topics-* using the same format as in the invitational meeting.

You can find out more information about our ministry at **amherstcountyalpha.org**. Jesus gives to us an abundant life, filled to overflowing. We desire, and pray you do too, that everyone lives such a life...that is God's will.

We invite you to attend this invitational meeting and/or to volunteer to help us at this opening event. If you do desire to respond, please do so through our webpage. Also, we will have a shared booth at the Amherst County Fair- September 4-7. Stop by and say "hi," and learn more about ALPHA! We are sharing a tent with Fellowship of Christian Athletes and Y2Believe, two other ministries working in our county for Christ to be known and followed and to further the kingdom of God.

Jeff and Joan Porter



# 3 CIRCLES EVANGELISM TRAINING BEGINS SUNDAY, SEPT. 28, 9:30 AM

We live in a broken world and the Gospel is how God puts broken people back together again. Once we repent and believe in Jesus, God's Spirit helps us recover and pursue His design. God is the one who created the world and every human being in it.

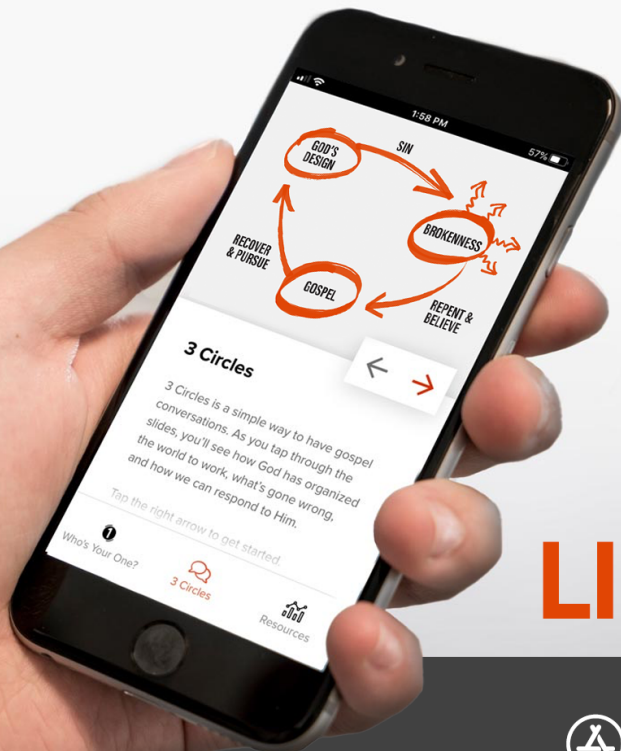
Through this 6-week course, we will introduce you to a method of sharing the gospel that has been tested in the real world. *Turning Everyday Conversations Into Gospel Conversations* is a simple strategy to train new and seasoned believers to join God in His reconciliation work. *Turning Everyday Conversations Into Gospel Conversations* equips believers to use the innovative "3 Circles," a user-friendly evangelistic tool for a new generation. You'll learn how to incorporate the biblical metanarrative, as well as your own personal stories, to tell the good news that Jesus has made a way out of the broken places we find ourselves.

Churches around the world are training people to share the gospel using this method. It has proven appeal across generations and cultures. They've heard stories about an eight-year-old boy leading his twenty-six-year-old cousin to repent and believe in Jesus and a seventy-plus-year-old church member, who had never before shared his faith, leading his Spanish-speaking neighbor to Christ. It's been used to train the Mixtec in Mexico, Maasai Warriors in Kenya, and prisoners in America. It's been presented on napkins, in concrete, in the sand, and using tortillas. The 3 Circles works, and this course will train you in how to use it.

It doesn't matter if you have been a Christian for decades or days, you can learn to do what God asks us to do – to make His appeal to others through us (2 Corinthians 5:20). This 6 week course will empower and inspire you to turn everyday conversations into gospel conversations.



Scan this QR code with your phone to sign up today!



Get tools to  
share your faith  
on the go!

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