

Stromsburg Cov News

A WORD FROM THE PASTOR

My first official church ministry position occurred as the result of a seminary internship program that connected me up with a quality youth pastor and a large Covenant church in Northern California, but I wouldn't have gotten there without a bevy of cardboard pictures with stuff written on the back.

I have collected sports cards of all kinds since I was five years old, the vast majority of the Topps baseball variety. I still have a green bin full of full boxes from various seasons in the 1980s and 90s, but the best of the bunch – in my mind – are long gone, though for a good cause.

As a kid, I'd collect baseball cards by the package, 15 cents apiece, 10 or a dozen cards in each, along with a cardboard-like piece of pink bubble gum that I'd usually toss in water to soften up before I chomped on it the rest of the day. I had my share of weekly chores, got paid a fair bit, and used most of that money for cards, as I tried every year to procure the 660-card set Topps put out. From 1971 through the end of high school, I got every card to every set, along with any number of doubles, triplicates and even 10 or 11 of some unknown player like Enzo Hernandez of the San Diego Padres.

Often, I'd take those cards out of the baseball locker cardboard card holder I'd purchased, re-shuffling and re-ordering them all over our living room floor. My mother would come home, threaten to throw all my cards away, and I'd clean them up with a grimace; thankfully, mom never did toss my cards away and we were all thankful for that in the summer of 1990.

I had been working as a hospital chaplain as part of my seminary degree program – you worked full-time for 12 weeks for no money, but plenty of experience visiting folks and then talking about it with half a dozen other seminary students who were

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The LORD
makes firm
the steps
of the one
who delights
in him.

PSALM 37:23; NIV

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A WORD...(CONTINUED)

broke. My internship at Hillside Covenant Church in Walnut Creek, CA started in September, but while I received a stipend once I got there, getting out west was on my dime. So I bit the bullet, selling every baseball, football, basketball and hockey card I had from 1969 to 1982 to a local card collector for \$1,100. The key selling point was a card I'd gotten from a neighbor kid whose mother got rid of his cards by giving them to me – a Nolan Ryan rookie card that would've been worth \$300 on its own. Who knew that a bunch of cardboard would fetch that sum of money?

As Mary and I begin our ministry in Stromsburg, NE, that question resonates, though with different wording from a pastor type from long ago. Once upon a time, a man who considered himself the worst sinner on earth (mere cardboard in terms of value to the world) had his world turned upside down on the road to Damascus. He was a persecutor of Christ followers, but encountered Jesus one day. For three days, his eyes were blinded, but he gained sight of the savior he needed to know. Eventually, Paul became an apostle of Jesus because he knew that even his flawed past wasn't too fallible to be used by the Lord for good. As he wrote about his own decrepit body and his transformed mind, he said this in 2 Corinthians 4:7 of the Bible's New Testament:

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.”

This is good news to me. On my best days in ministry, I'd like to think I'm a treasure to people, but make no mistake, I'm very human and housed in a clay jar of a body. I'm a mistake-filled being, called by God to be faithful to a task that – more often than not – I feel inadequate for. But I'm a child of God and my cardboard efforts are more valuable to Him every day because He continues to use me and his grace has become more and more sufficient as I grow in trust.

You are those same kinds of treasures here in Nebraska, just as I ministered to similar saints in Ohio, Illinois, and Iowa over 18 years of marriage to Mary (who ministered as God led her in those places). We will make our best efforts to value you like I valued those cards of my childhood (hopefully, I won't fray your edges too much from overuse or wear and tear). And, with God's help, we won't sell anyone short and we'll grow in value as a congregation exponentially as we give ourselves away to this community.

It is to God's glory and to humanity's good that we make this attempt together.

IN CHRIST,

Pastor Craig

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.” II Cor. 4:7

CHURCH FAMILY



Lucas Nuttelman	Feb 2
Brian Hier	Feb 3
Zachariah Bowerman	Feb 9
Nate Hutchins-Peterson	Feb 12
James Hennessy	Feb 13
Mark Hanson	Feb 17
Amy Bowerman	Feb 22

IMPORTANT DATES IN FEBRUARY

Sunday, Feb. 3

Super Bowl Party at Pinleys'

5:00 p.m.

Bring a snack to share! Come even if you don't like football!



Tuesday, Feb. 12

Annual Sweetheart Banquet at ECC

5:30 p.m.

Couples who have celebrated 50 years of marriage or more are invited. RSVP to Gary & Jean Waller 764-7171 or Jim & Dee Anderson 366-9977 by Feb 5.



Saturday, Feb. 16

Leadership Retreat at ECC

Noon—3:15 p.m.

Leadership Teams and anyone else interested in planning and participating in church ministries!



Wednesday, Feb 20

Stromsburg Senior Center Luncheon

Noon

Menu: Ham, Mashed potatoes and gravy, green beans, and vanilla pudding



IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW

Prayer Warriors! We need you! We will be starting a weekly prayer time. If you are interested in being part of this vital ministry please contact Pastor Mary. We would like to find the best time for everyone to meet.

Coffee! We are still selling coffee to support our youth ministries. Guatemalan coffee roasted by Top of the Lake Coffee Roasters is on sale for \$14. See Dianne Nielsen if you are interested.

Newsletter! If you have items for next month's newsletter please email them to the office at office@stromsburgcov.org or contact Pastor Mary at the church office or her cell at 217-721-3846. Please have items in by February 21st. Thank you!

Ministry Teams! We would like to see every active member on a ministry team. What are your gifts? See below for a list of ministry teams. Where is your heart? We will be sharing more about each team coming up.



Strengthen Faith,
Cultivate Community,
Care for Neighbors



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