

## *How do people change?*

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### Dear Third family,

As we work our way through the Seven Deadly Sins, there is a good chance that you may be seeing things freshly about yourself that may not be pleasant. And if you're like me, as you see the pride, lust, greed, envy, etc within your heart, your first inclination may be to resolve to change. Try harder! Sin less! Be a better person!

Yet there are many things below the surface of our lives that can't be changed with just trying harder. As a pastor I am privileged to have a window into people's lives, but often these windows reveal cycles of addiction, destructive habits, and deep pain. Every one of us has things in our lives that seem out of our control, habits that we cannot seem to change, ways of thinking or acting that seem impossible to alter. All of us suffer with what the theologians called "besetting sins." These things threaten to kill us, or at the very least maim us and make us a shadow of the people God intends us to be.

So how can we change? As we continue through Lent, I'd like to suggest some simple patterns for personal change that we see in Scripture that we can apply to our lives.

**Find Vulnerable Community.** Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in his great book *Life Together*, "The pious fellowship permits no one to be a sinner. So everyone must conceal his sin from himself and from his fellowship." Don't let this happen in your life. Find people with whom you can openly share areas of struggle and brokenness. Pious, perfect people reflect a culture of performance; messy, broken people reflect a culture of grace. We want a culture of grace in our church, and that will inevitably mean being ruthlessly honest with one another about sin, especially those secrets sins that we cannot bear for anyone to see or know. Let there always be at least one person in your life who knows everything. And remember the point of sharing this information with others isn't mere confession- it is to give another permission to share your burden, to carry it with you, to ask you about it, to fight on your behalf.

**See the sin beneath the sin.** Behaviors are important, but remember that all of our behaviors issue forth from a deeper problem of the heart. "Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks," Jesus said (Matthew 12:34).

(Continued on page 2)

*Seven:  
Finding Freedom  
from the Darkness Within*



*Third —  
training disciples to  
love and transform  
the world through  
Jesus Christ.*

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Arielle Swarr  
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Editor's Note

Bring submissions for the  
newsletter to the church office  
by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Friday of the month  
or email to Vickie O'Dell  
[vodell@comcast.net]

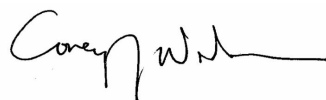
Try to examine not just what you are doing, but why. For example, if you have a constant habit of lying, what is the deeper idol or sin of the heart that is compelling you to distort the truth? Some people lie because they feel the need to get approval and so they exaggerate the truth in order to be seen in a better light. Other people don't care what other people think ; they may lie just to get out of difficult situations and to remain comfortable. We are called to repent, or turn away from our sin, but it is not enough to just turn from our behaviors. That will never work. We need to see the sin beneath the sins, the fear or the pride or the need for approval or the shame or sloth whatever it is beneath our habits, and seek to apply the good news of Jesus to that deeper need.

**Establish New Habits.** Jesus said that if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. He used very graphic and dramatic language to illustrate that sometimes it may take radical changes of habits to kill a destructive pattern in your life. Maybe you can't stop flirting with a colleague at work because you find such satisfaction in it; it may require requesting a new office or placement in which you literally cut off the opportunity and starve the destructive desire. Charles Duhigg writes in the book *The Power of Habit* that 40% of your life is directed by unconscious habit. How might you make some of those habits more conscious, and bring them under the direction of Jesus?

**Get help when needed.** Sometimes there are such deeply set habits in us, or others have caused such harm against us, that professional help is needed. Do not believe the lie that many Christians perpetuate that using therapy or counseling is not relying on God. There are many good counselors among us and they are gifts from God to the church. Talk to one of us about finding a person who can help.

**Depend on the Spirit.** God promises to bring about his new creation within us (2 Cor 5:17). Jesus has already risen and given you his resurrection power through the Spirit. Everything you need to be a new person is already in you through Jesus. Therefore there is no stopping his work of renewal in you, no matter how bad you think it may be. Trust him. Trust his work. Cooperate with him. Change comes not through trying harder, but depending more and more on Jesus' grace and Spirit. Take hope. Life has taken root in you.

**Yours in Christ Jesus,**



Corey

## Family Ministry Easter Activities



Families with children ages kindergarten and younger are invited to the **2<sup>nd</sup> annual Easter egg hunt** 10 am on March 28<sup>th</sup> at Christina and James Olmsted's farm, 1633 Devon Way, Manakin-Sabot. Children will search for candy-filled eggs and hear the story of Jesus' last week on earth. Bring a picnic lunch and stay for fellowship and fun. To register by March 24<sup>th</sup> or for more information, please contact Kathy White ([kathyw@thirdrva.org](mailto:kathyw@thirdrva.org)).

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Parents of Infant – Kindergartners: You are invited to **a social to get to know other parents in your same stage of life.** Check out the dates and places below. Just bring something sweet or savory to share and enjoy a night out!

Parent gathering for children in Infant and Toddler classes: Saturday, March 7<sup>th</sup>, 7 pm at Rachel and Stephen Gow's, 5501 Kingsbury Road\* Richmond, VA 23226

Parent gathering for children in Little Eagles and Kindergarten classes: Saturday, March 21<sup>st</sup>, 7 pm at Dana and Andrew Moore's, 404 Beechwood Drive\* Richmond, VA 23229

Parent gathering for children in Little Lambs & Little Lions classes: Friday, April 17<sup>th</sup>, 7 pm at Caroline & Rick Hutton's, 1004 Normandy Drive\* Richmond, VA 23229

\*Each of these locations is within 5-10 minutes of Third. Babysitting will be available in our nurseries for those who request it ahead of time.

To make a reservation and to request babysitting, contact Kathy White ([kathyw@thirdrva.org](mailto:kathyw@thirdrva.org)) at least 3 days prior to the event.



Looking for camps for your children this summer? Mark your calendar for this **Basketball, Soccer Sports Skills Camp and Kickball Showcase.** Sponsored by Third, The Christian Arabic Church and Community West, this fun-filled week offers time for your children to build sports skills and learn about the importance of Christian character from skilled college athletes affiliated with Sports Outreach Institute.

Monday-Friday, July 13-17 on the field at 2340 Pump Road. For Rising 1<sup>st</sup> – 12th graders. From 8:30–12 noon: multiple skill stations to help improve your game. 12–1: stay and eat with Sports Outreach athletes. 1–2: "Pick-up" games to test new skills

\$75 donation (second child – \$60, third child – \$50) Medical release form must be submitted. For more info and registration, go to [www.thirdrva.org](http://www.thirdrva.org).

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Children ages 4 through third grade will participate in a **special Palm Sunday worship service** on March 29<sup>th</sup> from 10:15–11:05 (during the Sunday school hour). Third member, Lori Welander, will share the message of Jesus' death and resurrection and children will be led in worship by Jimey Ames! We invite parents to attend this service with their children.

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Congrats to ISABELLE, who completed 10 stamps in her Passport for Kids' Jam. 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> graders who are attending **KIDS' JAM on Wednesday nights**



during Connect3 are learning about missionaries, along with the books of the Bible and the 10 commandments. As a project, they are encouraged to reach out to others in the church, local community and the world. Each child receives a sticker on their Passport when they do so, and as a result are learning to be missionaries right where they live! We are proud of you, Isabelle...continue to look for ways to serve others!



## *Small Group Ministry*

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*Lauren & Jon Hill  
Couples Small Group*

### **“Our Small Group Feels Like Family”**

We became members of Third in 2013 and we have been part of a couples' small group that meets each week. We have really felt God working through these Christian friendships to bring us closer to Him and strengthen our relationship with each other!

Since moving to Richmond five years ago, we have really felt the absence of having family nearby. We feel like God brought our small group into our lives to fill this need. We are truly walking through life together and our small group friends feel like family. We are there for each other as we raise our children, support our spouses, and grow deeper in our personal relationships with Christ. It is so comforting to know that we aren't alone, and God has blessed us with a new family that's right around the corner.

### **Small Group Recommendations**

Each Sunday afternoon we are posting questions on Third's website based on that Sunday morning's sermon. Use this opportunity to go deeper in applying scripture to your lives as you discuss the key points from the sermon in your small group. You will find these at [www.thirdrva.org](http://www.thirdrva.org) under Worship/Sermons.

We have several new groups forming in the West End and on the Southside. If you are interested in a small group, contact Beth Nichols at [bethn@thirdrva.org](mailto:bethn@thirdrva.org) or 282-4645 Ext. 124.

## *Newcomers Class*

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Interested in learning more about Third or would you like to consider membership? We'd love to get to know you and provide an opportunity for you to learn about Third's vision for worship, discipleship, community, serving and outreach. You will hear from Pastor Widmer and many Third leaders and lay people. You can attend the class to learn about Third and at the end of the class decide if God is calling you to membership at Third.

“What I found most helpful was meeting all of the other new members. I loved all of the speakers – full of valuable information with a sense of humor. I felt warmth and support from the staff.”

### **Our next Newcomers Class is:**

Sunday Morning, March 22 from 10:15-11:05 am

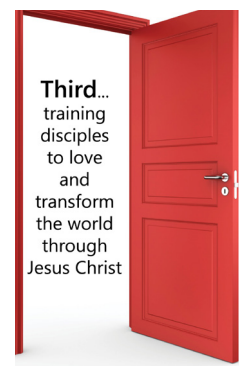
Friday Evening, March 27 from 6-9 pm

Saturday, March 28 from 9 am -3 pm

Childcare is provided with a reservation.

Sunday, March 29 at 11:15 am – Joining Service for those deciding to become members

Register with Beth Nichols ([bethn@thirdrva.org](mailto:bethn@thirdrva.org) or 282-4645 Ext. 124).



## *Women's Spring Event*

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### **Beyond a Cup of Sugar...building real relationships with your neighbors**

Saturday, March 21st, 9:30-11:30 am, Fellowship Hall

Brunch, Teaching and Discussion

Guest Speaker: **Sarah Widmer**

Cost: \$10/person

Register at [www.thirdrva.org](http://www.thirdrva.org) or at Third on Mar. 2, 6, or 16



## *Journey to the Cross*

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### **A personal experience of Jesus' final hours**

Friday, April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1:00-8:00 p.m.

This Good Friday, come take a prayerful and reflective walk through Christ's last hours. Start in the Steeple Corridor at 600 Forest Avenue, where you will pick up a guide that directs you to the indoor and outdoor artistic installations providing multi-sensory experiences and guided reflections suitable for adults and children. Building on the past two years "Journey to the Cross," these interpretations start in the Upper Room, and follow through the Garden of Gethsemane, betrayal, arrest, condemnation, scourging, crucifixion and entombment of Christ. Go at your own pace, asking God to speak to you through the solemn remembering of this series of events. This year will include special journey point posters for children.

Artistic representations created by Val Kling, Betsy McCray, Tracie Meadows, Beth Nichols, Holly Smith and Mark Sprinkle







*February Term*  
*10:15 AM Sunday*

*Desires:*  
*Who and What Do You Love?*

### **February Term Finale!**

Our 5 week mini-series, "Desires: Who and What Do You Love?" culminates with a visit and lecture from author and professor Dr. James K. A. Smith on March 1. If you missed a Sunday, please visit our web site for the audio and other helpful info [[www.thirdrva.org/blog/what-do-you-desire](http://www.thirdrva.org/blog/what-do-you-desire)].

### **Makers Series**

This edition of the Makers Series explores the lives and work of three makers for whom imagination provides the bridge between the already and the not yet: trumpeter **Taylor Barnett** composes and plays music that reveals connections between multiple genres and cultural traditions; medical illustrator **Paul Gross** uses multi-media artistry to help doctors, patients and their advocates see the human body in ways that imaging technology alone can not; and philosopher and cultural critic **Jamie Smith** proposes that what we imagine for the future shapes our concrete present. Meet them in the Fellowship Hall, Friday, March 1, 7 pm.

### **Our normal Sunday am Adult classes resume on March 8! Come join us!**

Our 8 adult Bible fellowship classes will resume in earnest on March 8. We have lots of great choices, teachers, and learning communities to choose from. Please go to [ThirdRVA.org](http://ThirdRVA.org)...Click on Connect...Click on Adults for the details.

### **Men's Annual Retreat: Redeeming Work: A New Vision for Monday to Friday**

Our annual retreat is a time of fellowship and deep biblical teaching. John Eldredge writes: "It is a dangerous thing to underestimate your role in God's redemptive story. You will lose heart and you will miss your cues. You are needed....and Jesus calls you to be his intimate ally once more." Join a band of brothers who exhort and enable each other to put Jesus Christ first at home, at work, and in the world.

Our speakers: Rev. Corey Widmer, Rev. Art Wood, and Kenney Grigg.

March 13, 6 - 8:45 pm and March 14, 2015, 8:30 am- 3:00 pm, Third's Fellowship Hall.

Please register on-line [[www.thirdrva.org/mens-annual-retreat](http://www.thirdrva.org/mens-annual-retreat)].

The Men's leadership team would greatly appreciate having your e-mail address as we have lots of good things to share with you via our bi-monthly e-mail blast that you can unsubscribe to at anytime. Subscribe on-line thru our web site or e-mail me ([TomB@ThirdRVA.org](mailto:TomB@ThirdRVA.org)) and I'll add you.

Last Call! Men's Softball. Cam Childress needs a few more players for the softball team. Please let him know if you are interested [[camchildress70@gmail.com](mailto:camchildress70@gmail.com)].

## *Reaching Out to the Persecuted Church in Iraq*

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*"Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."*  
Matthew 19:14

Generally, when you think of a VBS fundraiser, bake sales and lemonade stands raising several hundred dollars likely come to mind. That's not the case with the Christian Arabic Church in Richmond, Virginia, a new church development with the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO).

The 128 member church, made up of immigrants and refugees from the Middle East, decided to conduct a fundraiser during their August VBS program. After prayer and hearing about The Outreach Foundation's Iraq Relief Appeal at the ECO Synod meeting in Dallas, **they decided to help displaced Christian brothers and sisters in Iraq due to ISIS' takeover of Mosul. You see, many of the families of the 74 VBS students had also endured religious persecution in their countries. After coming to the U.S., they were free to worship Jesus without fear of violence and even death.** One family was from Iraq, and their relatives were caught up in the violence in Mosul. It was an easy decision to focus efforts on helping the displaced Christians in Iraq. Besides the usual crafts, games, drama, songs and storytelling (and of course snacks), raising money for Iraq relief was on their minds. For four days, they did everything possible to raise money, including competitions among themselves, parents matching what the children raised, head shaving and pies in the face if certain goals were reached, even emptying their own piggybanks.

Eight year old Merola was an inspiration to the group. She had been saving for several years in her "bank," which was a repurposed mixed nuts can. She brought her bank and, sacrificially, handed it over to church pastor Fakhri Yacoub, "giving it all" as she said.

Everyone was in suspense as Pastor Yacoub counted up the checks, wadded bills and assorted coins. To everyone's amazement, more than \$4,000 had been raised! But, it's difficult to stop a moving train—the children weren't finished even though VBS was. By Sunday at their evening worship, the total came to \$5,000. The entire congregation was joyful in sending this gift to The Outreach Foundation, destined to the vulnerable church in Iraq.

*Please visit the website ([www.theoutreachfoundation.org](http://www.theoutreachfoundation.org)) to learn more about the Iraq Appeal.*





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## *2014 – A Year That Bears Witness:* To God's Faithful Provision, To the Generosity of Third's Members and To Our Focus on Financial Stewardship

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, God commands His people to remember and to celebrate His faithful provision - provision for material needs and provision of His loving presence and saving grace.

At the Congregational Meeting on February 1, Corey guided those present through a time of looking back at 2014 to see, remember and celebrate God's amazing faithfulness and provision. For any of you who were not there, here is a list of God's financial provision we can celebrate as a congregation:

- Closed 2014 with a \$4,000 operating budget surplus, in spite of a midyear deficit of \$414,000.
- Repaid the PC(USA) dismissal loan of \$370,000 along with the \$50,000 associated legal fees.
- Refinanced the loan on 500 Forest Avenue, applying approximately \$215,000 in capital campaign funds towards principal reduction.
- Sold the house at 8005 Silverspring, reducing Third's indebtedness by an additional \$392,000.
- Exceeded operating budget of benevolences to total giving target (31.1% of total 2014 giving) and continued 10% capital campaign support to East End Ministries.

In summary, God relieved Third from the potential burden of a huge 2014 operating budget deficit, while also retiring \$977,000 in debt (with the result of a \$55,000+ reduction to annual mortgage payments for 2015 and forward). This truly is amazing! God's generosity to His people at Third Church resulted in a generous outpouring from them. We have much to praise Him for, to remember and to celebrate.

But God's provision did not only pertain to our financial needs. At the February 1 meeting we also remembered His faithful care of Third through the sacrificial leadership of Steve Hartman who with great care took Third through the difficult period of dismissal from the PCUSA, into our new denomination, A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO).

And then, just to cap off an incredible year of Holy provision, God gave us the gift of our new lead pastor, Corey Widmer. Looking back, we have much to be grateful for and looking forward, much to anticipate from our loving and gracious God 'who meets all our needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus', Phil 4:19.

**PRAISE GOD FROM WHOM  
ALL BLESSINGS FLOW!**