



Christian Action Ministry Newsletter

Involving the Christian in Community Action

Jan.—Feb. 2025★ Vol. 35, Number 01

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please email us at [cam-
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or
contact our website
(see back page)



Legislative bills

Are you interested in becoming involved? CAM is looking for interested and active people to act as liaisons to their church, helping to keep the Christian community informed. Contact us at camnetVT@gmail.com.

Both Sides of the Tracks

By
Lauston Stephens

In last year's May/June issue, we took a break from covering what is happening in the larger culture and ran an article on a "domestic" issue that can affect our communities' spiritual and moral well-being. This is another.

When I was a kid, many people regarded our church as "from the wrong side of the railroad tracks." Today, if you estimate the book value of the church parking lot on a Sunday morning, you will have to say that is no longer true. Your experience may have been similar. This happens partly because when people come to faith, their spending habits change, but mostly because of how following Jesus changes our character. We become better workers and better stewards of the things that God places in our care. However, God does not call us to be from the "right side of the railroad tracks" but from both sides. This is harder.

"Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who are secure on the

mountain of Samaria, ... Who lie on beds of ivory, and stretch themselves on their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; who strum on the strings of a harp; who invent for themselves instruments of music, like David; who drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the best oils; but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Therefore, they will now go captive with the first who go captive; and the feasting and lounging will end."—Amos 6:1-7 WEB.

There are many prophecies against God's people getting too comfortable and forgetting about the needs of others. How does this happen and how can we guard against it?

It is just ordinary human nature to prefer a congregation of people like us. Rabbinic tradition claims there were some 430 synagogues in Jerusalem in the first century. In that culture, marriages were arranged and seen as between two families, not just two individuals. Peo-

ple naturally formed synagogues (congregations) along ethnic and socio-economic lines. We get a glimpse of this in Acts 6:9, "But some of those who were of the synagogue called 'The Libertines,' and of the Cyrenians, of the Alexandrians, and of those of Cilicia and Asia arose, disputing with Stephen."

The deacons were tending to all believers' needs, regardless of their social or economic background, which upset the normal ways of doing things. If we are following Jesus, we are going to rock some boats, including our own.

Many churches easily remember others less fortunate than themselves by supporting a ministry or missionary in another country. Churches with income greater than their expenses may "tithe" to missionaries without any extra sacrifice. This can become a painless, out-of-sight, out-of-mind way to fulfill the letter of "remember the poor" (Gal. 2:10) without

any personal or emotional interaction and discomfort. It really doesn't rock their boat. Don't you want something more than that to show when you meet your Lord?

Some Vermont churches are large enough that their attendance reflects a broad range of social and economic backgrounds. People are inclined to stick with their own as they would in a crowd at a concert by a recording artist or a game in a professional sport. The healthiest large churches have many small groups. This is where we need to stretch out of our comfort zones. "Up and outers" and "down and outers" can take time to grow together in the family of God.

Prison Fellowship founder Chuck Colson told of a bible study group he was part of in prison. It included, "three dope thieves, one swindler, one car thief, one moonshiner, and one former special counsel to the President of the United States." Before meeting, they may have all thought lightly of the others they now recognized as brothers in faith. Thinking, acting, and fellowshiping outside of our comfort zone can be difficult. It needs to be done and done intentionally

with simplicity and humility.

Many Vermont Christian congregations could be described as "Philadelphia, Folk." Like the church of Philadelphia we read about in Revelation 3:7-13, they "have a little strength." Prayers are answered, and the Gospel is quietly shared with others.

The atmosphere among people in these smaller congregations is "folksy," perhaps like at a Little League baseball game. Everyone knows one another or who one another is. It is very easy to take comfort in our routines and not stretch out of our comfort zones.



Vermont's rural nature works towards small congregations, but small congregations can have an impact beyond their size.

The church my wife attended as a child can seat about 100 people, but in recent years, they have been able to help sponsor students attending a Christian school. This is better than just sending money to faraway places because there can be face-to-face contact with those who are helped (II John 1:12).

A church in one Vermont town has 125 more Facebook followers than the 2020 census reports there were residents in the town. This illustrates the potential we all have today through social media, but person-to-person contact is still best.

"But let the brother in humble circumstances glory in his high position; and the rich, in that he is made humble, because like the flower in the grass, he will pass away." - James 1:9-10 WEB.

When James wrote that, did he expect those in "humble circumstances" and the rich to be in two different congregations or in one? What does our Lord expect?

Lauston Stephens is a Director of the Christian Action Ministry and attends Roadside Chapel in Rutland, VT.

Carry Overs From 2024?

Last Spring, we wrote, "There were two bills that were of interest to people of faith that remained in committee at the time of adjournment last May.

"Senate Bill 16 proposed to remove the exemption for clergy on reporting child abuse. The bill was referred to the judiciary committee and they received testimony from witnesses on two occasions last year. The bill remained in commit-

tee throughout this year. We will watch to see if it is reintroduced in the new biennium next year.

"House Bill 113 proposed that "churches and other public, pious, or charitable organizations are not eligible for the State property tax exemption if those organizations engage in any lobbying or other political activity on their property. Churches and nonprofits will also be required under this bill to certify

annually to the Vermont Department of Taxes that the organization does not conduct any lobbying or political activity on the property that would disqualify the organization from the exemption."

We concluded, "If the same legislators return for the next biennium, we can expect the worldview reflected in these bills will return also."

The principal sponsor of Senate Bill 16 from the last biennium was Benn-

-ington's Richard Sears, long-time chair of the Senate judiciary committee. He has passed away. That does not rule out the possibility that someone else will reintroduce the bill. Any such bill would face church and state constitutional challenges and without the experienced shepherding of Senator Sears through the legislative process, a new sponsor might not expect much success. Attorney and freshman Senator Nader Hashim of Windham County served as vice chair of the judiciary committee in the last biennium. He easily won reelection and may

ascend to the chairmanship of the Judiciary Committee.

Child abuse is a real evil and Christians should not want clergy to just absolve sins and forget about it. We should be prepared to offer other approaches if we do not want the Church to become an arm of the State.

The principal sponsor of House Bill 113 was Rep. Laura Sibilia. She was reelected without opposition. The State legislature website states, "Her legislative focus includes telecom,

energy, climate change, rural economic development, and education finance." The bill was referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means. It appears that the goal of this bill was to find another revenue source for ever-growing state spending. The change in the makeup of the state legislature has been seen by many as a rebuke of the high spending. We will be watching to see if the rebuke has been received.

- Editor

At the Polls, 2024

By
Lauston Stephens

I had the privilege of serving as a ballot clerk for the November General Election this past year. Some don't serve for the entire day, but I was at the polls before they opened, stayed until they closed, and helped with the hand counting afterward. A long day, but not something anyone does every month.

Even though ballots were mailed to voters by the Vermont Secretary of State office, the return addresses on the envelopes were the local town offices. This led to some misunderstanding. One elderly couple who had not requested absentee ballots did not want to use them. The mailed ballots were identical to the ones we had at the polls, but the routine was different, and change can become more stressful as we age.

Because the state made an effort to mail one ballot to every voter, they also required that anyone who didn't bring that ballot to the polls must sign an affidavit that they had not mailed it in so we could give them another. The checklist already showed if a ballot

had been received in the mail, so this precaution would only be of value if their ballot came in the mail on election day. The affidavits were extra work both for the voters and the ballot clerks. Though many ballot clerks are also notaries, none of the affidavits were notarized. This raises doubt on the legal value of the forms.

This extra work of dubious value was created by the decision to go to the expense of the state mailing out ballots to every registered voter. Some ballots were mailed to people who were in the military and overseas.

One voter who did not receive a ballot in the mail declared that he was not going to sign anything and he shouldn't have to do that to be able to vote. He told us to check our records, again suggesting that it appeared that the town clerk had mailed out the ballots. He attempted to call the office of the Secretary of State, but the office was closed on election day! I was polite and understanding. The voter calmed down, signed the form, and voted.

The town clerk hoped that most people who had not mailed in their ballots would bring them on election day because the state had not sent as many as usual. Some did, some did not. We had enough.

For the ballots that need hand counting after the polls close, ballot clerks work in pairs, usually one (D) and one (R). This assures that everything is above board and proper. I was paired with someone who had been a next-door neighbor years ago. It was her first time and she referred to her candidate by first name and the other candidate by last name. In my view, this is in poor form for maintaining civil discourse and a civil society but I did not point that out. She will catch on or another member of her party may point it out. I made a point to ask about her kids and grandkids and to mention changes in the neighborhood since she had moved. These are things of life that matter regardless of who is in Montpelier or Washington. My advice for those who sit outside the electoral process and have suspicions is, "Get involved. Be part of the solution."



The only title in our democracy superior to that of President is the title of citizen.

- Louis Brandeis, associate justice on the Supreme Court of the United States, 1916-1939

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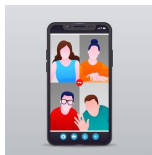
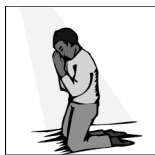
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Action Min-
istry Network.

here to
now.

What Can I Do?



***Faith without
works is dead***
James 2:17

Email: camnetvt@gmail.com
or use our website
<https://christianactionministry.org/>



CAM Network, Inc.
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Next Meeting

Jan. 14, 7:00 pm
Zoom

Feb. 11, 7:00 P.M.
Parkinson home
Hinesburg, Vt.

camnetvt@gmail.com
*Email to confirm date and
location*

**Make A Difference
In Vermont!**