

# Carolina Compass

January 2018

## Feet in the vineyard

Margaret Cotton

By Prioleau Alexander

When her husband passed away at the age of 55, Margaret Cotton was understandably devastated. Struggling with countless questions and needing a support group, she found her way to an Alpha course — Alpha is a program that teaches the basics of Christianity, then allows participants to break into small groups to discuss the teaching presented. Interestingly, the course is specifically designed for sceptics, seekers and agnostics.

Clearly the course was a transforming experience, as Margaret went on to serve as an Alpha Small Group Facilitator for the next five years. In 2009, she was approached by the leaders of Alpha USA and asked to become the director of Alpha South Carolina. Leaving her career in advertising and accepting this position was certainly a leap of faith, as the job would require she serve as a “missionary,” raising all the necessary funds. Fortunately for South Carolina, Margaret accepted the job.

Recently, Margaret provided the Compass with an interview.

*How is Alpha doing in South Carolina?*

It’s been amazing. When I started there were only five or six churches in the state offering Alpha and over the past eight years that number has grown to close to 200. There are also courses running in prisons, campuses and workplaces. This past year, three of the ministries at The Citadel offered Alpha (Baptist, Methodist and Catholic) and we had close to 200 cadets participating.

*How did Alpha begin?*

Alpha started in the 1970s in London at Holy Trinity Brompton Church and spread organically for more than a decade; eventually requests for Alpha materials and training grew to the point where the team at Holy Trinity Brompton had to create an entire division to handle the demand. As the Holy Spirit has continued to bless the fruits of the program, the need for a bigger team has grown, as it’s now a global ministry. Incredibly, it is now offered in 169 countries in over 112 languages, crossing all denominational lines.

*What changes have you seen in the last few years?*

Traditionally the teaching sessions were presented as an on-stage recording of course-developer Nicky Gumbel speaking to an audience at Holy Trinity Brompton; it works because his wit and charm

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## Charleston Leadership Prayer Breakfast is changing lives



IMAGE BY VANESSA KAUFFMANN

A community united at the Charleston Leadership Prayer Breakfast.

By Kathryn Krogh

In November, more than 1,000 Lowcountry community members participated in what has become a local tradition that brings together the area’s Christian leaders to minister to the community and change lives. The Charleston Leadership Foundation (CLF), host of the Charleston Leadership Prayer Breakfast held each November, has become a symbol of unity, celebrating faith in Jesus Christ that brings Christians together no matter their race, denomination or political views.

What was most significant and confirming of the success of the prayer breakfast this year was the willingness of the Lord’s people to put into action what he was leading them to do. This opened up opportunities for transformation to happen. And happen it did! The Holy Spirit filled the room on the morning of Nov. 9.

“Surely the LORD was in this place...” Gen 28:16

The nearly-100-strong prayer team fasted and prayed for four weeks leading up to the prayer breakfast. In addition to all those in our community who purchased

tables and invited guests to be present to hear from the Lord, devout prayer intercessors prayed over every seat the night before the event and prayer ministers made themselves available at prayer stations to pray with people immediately after the breakfast. A number of those in attendance indicated they either accepted Christ or rededicated their lives to Christ and many went to the prayer minister stations or submitted prayer requests.

During the event the Lord

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## Shifting our time

By Jack Hoey

I don’t know if you are the kind of person who likes to make resolutions this time of year. Umberto Eco said that we love to make lists “because we don’t want to die.” Lists are our way of organizing an incomprehensible universe and of staving off the inevitable. If we always have a list of things to do, to see, to read, to make, then death feels a little bit further off.

Lists also help us feel like we’re actually making progress. How many times have you sat down, feeling overwhelmed with everything you had to get done and immediately felt better after writing them all down? Of course, the downside of this is that lists can help us feel like we’re making progress, without actually having to make progress. It’s easy to make an ambitious list of goals for the New Year, get excited about it and then promptly forget about it until January 1, 2019.

You can find thousands of lists online full of helpful suggestions for goals. Here at Seacoast Church, we’re beginning a new series designed to help people discover certain “Shifts” they can make in their lives that can have big impacts. But I thought I’d offer something different. Rather than give you some a list of things you can do, I’d like to recommend that you do more (a lot more) of just one thing in 2018: Waste time.

Yes, I mean that. I want you to spend some time doing nothing of any value whatsoever. Why? Because in my experience, we tend to think that things are only worth doing if they have some utility. We want even our time off to be “productive,” to be a “good use of time.” If we can’t see how a certain activity will benefit us, or produce something useful, we tend to view it as a “waste of time.”

Of course, that designation is purely subjective. From middle school until today, I’ve had to deal with

*Continued on page two.*

## 59 million dead: Upholding the sanctity of human life

By Dianne Miley

*“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”*

*Your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.*

*Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”*

— Psalm 139: 14-16

Historically, January marks a shift in our cultural viewpoint on the sanctity of human life. On January 22, 1973, the Supreme Court issued Roe v. Wade, a ruling that guaranteed women access to abortion. This law of the land for the last 45 years continues to create divided debate among Americans. Since 1973, an estimated 59 million babies have been aborted.

In 1984, as the country approached the 11th anniversary of Roe v. Wade, President Ronald Reagan issued a presidential proclamation to designate Sunday, January 22, 1984, as National Sanctity of Human Life Day. As a strong pro-life advocate, President Reagan designated National Sanctity of Human Life Day to be the closest Sunday to the anniversary. This year, Sanctity of Human Life Sunday is January 21, 2018.

In response to the Roe v. Wade ruling, pro-life pregnancy centers sprouted up across the nation

where women in unplanned pregnancies could find compassionate care and the encouragement to choose life for their babies.

Here in Charleston, Lowcountry Pregnancy Center opened in 1986 as a small office on Ashley Phosphate Road. The ministry has now grown to be one of the largest centers in South Carolina with three locations. In 2006, Lowcountry Pregnancy Center opened an office in West Ashley that later moved to a new building under the name DAZZ Medical Services. The DAZZ Orangeburg office opened in 2014 to serve Orangeburg County, which has had one of the highest abortion rates in our state.

Today, Lowcountry Pregnancy Center serves the community through over 7000 client visits per year. In addition to providing free pregnancy tests, ultrasounds and testing for sexually transmitted infections, the Because We Care program distributes diapers, formula and baby clothes. The center’s education department offers classes on parenting and fatherhood to support young parents. Relationship classes help women learn healthy boundaries within relationships.

While the mission of Lowcountry Pregnancy Center is to prevent abortion — and indeed local abortion rates have declined in recent years — there remains a great need to reach women who have experienced abortion. According to the Guttmacher

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Those who know, know the Mercury

## Vineyard, cont.

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quickly win over the toughest audience. The basic course “recipe” is still the same, but one new development is the addition of an instructional film series filmed all over the world. As a result, churches now have three DVD options: The “classic” Nicky presentations, the new Alpha Film Series and Alpha Youth. We’ve found the new film series appeals tremendously to the younger generation.

*Why do you think Alpha is so effective?*

Alpha is offered in an easy going, non-judgmental way, starting first with a free dinner. Conversations over a meal allow people to get to know one another and build new friendships. Members of the team are trained to assume every guest is a non-believer and thus the conversa-

tions focus on the guests’ personal interests; discussions about faith are left for the presentation and the small groups.

Each presentation deals with one of the concepts of the Christian faith, followed by small group discussions. Everyone in the group is treated as a VIP, regardless of their beliefs and all are encouraged to ask hard questions and seek satisfactory answers. There is never any pressure to speak and no question is off limits. People no longer want to be lectured to; they want to be listened to.

*What advice would you give a church thinking about starting Alpha?*

Check it out! I am happy to meet and discuss how best to run it, train the staff/leaders and provide coaching. The materials are free online and since I raise my own

funds, I offer my services free of charge. It’s the Alpha philosophy that churches can no longer sit back and expect people to come to them. Jesus tells us “to go.” If a church seriously wants to step into outreach or evangelism, Alpha provides one of the very best tools to do that.

Work in the Vineyard takes many forms — some plow, some plant and some gather in the harvest. Margaret Cotton’s calling and work with Alpha assists all these efforts in a unique way, as her work is that of teacher ... teaching others to plow, plant and reap. I hope all Compass readers will make 2018 a year to learn more about the Alpha Course.

*Margaret may be reached at [MargaretCotton@AlphaUSA.org](mailto:MargaretCotton@AlphaUSA.org).*

## What is fair?

By Don McLaurin

With all the recent news about the new tax legislation, there has been a lot said about income inequality and the fairness of “the rich” being included in any tax reduction. The Democrats railed about tax breaks for the rich and Republicans bent over backwards to assure us that the rich were not the beneficiaries of the plan. One might think that rich people should have to walk through town crying “unclean!”

It might be interesting to use this debate as a vehicle for thinking about a biblical view of fairness and income inequality. Recently we explored the eighth commandment, “you shall not steal”; however, the little mentioned tenth commandment is more applicable: “you shall not covet.” To covet is to have an inordinate desire for what belongs to another. This commandment extends the eighth by saying that not only should you not take other people’s stuff, you should not even want their stuff. It is from covetousness that greed and envy emanate.

The parables in Matthew where Jesus describes the Kingdom of Heaven give interesting insights into God’s view of fairness. In the parable of the laborers, Mathew 20:1-16, Jesus tells of a vineyard owner who early one morning hired some workers for his vineyard at an agreed upon compensation of one denarius for the day. Around noon he hired some more and promised to pay “whatever is right.” Late in



Don McLaurin.

IMAGE BY CAROLINA COMPASS STAFF

the afternoon he did the same with more workers. When the day ended and it was time to pay, this ensued:

“The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

“But he answered one of them, ‘I’m not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Are you envious because I am generous?’

“So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

While as with every parable, the primary

message is a spiritual one, we cannot ignore the context and the lessons taught about this world. The owner’s action does seem to violate our sense of fairness or justice, does it not?

But what principles are being taught? Well, the story reaffirms private property rights established in the eighth commandment when he asks if he is not allowed to do as he wants with what is his. Today, there are all sorts of wage regulations that restrict what and how business owners can pay workers.

Some of these legitimately protect workers, but many, in the name of fairness, restrict the rights of business owners and, paradoxically, hurt workers. They incentivize employers to reduce the number of workers or their hours worked. Countries that, in the name of worker protection, make it almost impossible to fire people end up with high unemployment. High minimum wage laws promote the use of automation to replace workers and reduce the number of entry-level jobs. Fast food restaurants are deploying auto-

*Those who crusade for income equality are making the same mistake. It hurts me not one bit if my neighbor gets a big raise, inherits a fortune or wins the lottery. Yet that is what many feel. Schadenfreude, the sin of deriving pleasure from the misfortune of others, is one manifestation of covetousness, but so is the opposite — to feel envy at the good fortune of others.*

mated ordering devices in reaction to such laws all over the country.

In the parable the owner points out that he paid the first workers exactly what they agreed to; therefore, doing them no wrong. The fact that others were paid differently did not “hurt” the first. Interestingly, the owner points out that the first worker is letting envy cloud his view of what the owner sees as generosity.

Those who crusade for income equality are making the same mistake. It hurts me not one bit if my neighbor gets a big raise, inherits a fortune or wins the lottery. Yet that is what many feel. Schadenfreude, the sin of deriving pleasure

from the misfortune of others, is one manifestation of covetousness, but so is the opposite — to feel envy at the good fortune of others.

I cannot find support in the Bible for the notion that we should expect equality of outcomes in life. We know that heaven itself is described in hierarchical terms — angels and archangels, for instance. Those who go through life vexed by the inequalities that are inherent in life end up miserable and less productive than they otherwise would be. While the vineyard owner’s action may not be the compensation scheme of choice in the modern, corporate world, neither

are rules that limit the judgment and flexibility of employers to force “fairness.”

We all need to avoid coveting and the negative attitudes it fosters.

*Don McLaurin’s professional background is in the business world, where he founded a successful IT company. A member of Second Presbyterian Church, Charleston, he is well respected on the topic of business ethics and is a founding member of the monthly businessmen’s lunch series at St. Philip’s Church. He is interested in your suggestions for future topics as well as comments about his thoughts: Contact him at [mclaurin@mindspring.com](mailto:mclaurin@mindspring.com).*

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