

PENNSYLVANIA Families

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Family Institute

Politically Speaking

Rev. Dr. JOHN GUEST
Passionately Preaching
on the Issues that
Impact Society

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We'd Love to Hear from You!

If you would like to comment on anything you find in this magazine, we encourage you to write. Send letters via e-mail or regular mail to us at the address below. We may not be able to print every letter we receive, but we value your comments and will give them serious consideration.

If you send a letter, please include your contact information — your name and phone number. We need to verify that you actually authored the letter. We might edit letters for clarity and spacing. Please try to keep your letters to 250 or fewer words. **We appreciate your feedback.**

Thank you for taking the time to read *Pennsylvania Families*. We hope you enjoy reading it, and pass it on to anyone who might benefit from it. ~ EDITOR

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Politically Speaking

BY AMY CLINGENSMITH

After four decades in ministry, John Guest is still passionately preaching on the issues that impact society.



The Rev. Dr. John Guest never saw himself as political.

Although one of the most passionate and outspoken spiritual leaders in Pittsburgh, the senior pastor of Sewickley's Christ Church at Grove Farm was not historically on the political bandwagon. In fact, he never even voted at home in Oxford, England.

Once educated and ordained, he came to America in 1964, having only been a Christian for a decade after making a commitment to Christ at a Billy Graham crusade. The '60s would prove to be

a life-changing time in Guest's life as he found his place in a turbulent America.

Guest formed one of the first Christian contemporary music groups, The Exkursions, and used music to encourage thousands to learn more about Christ. Out of that effort was born the Coalition for Christian Outreach, a thriving campus ministry today.

Then Guest was called into the ministry of the church and, in 1968, became the minister of youth at St. Stephens Church, Sewickley.

The young evangelist, married just a year earlier to Kathleen Heggar, was named senior pastor at St. Stephens four years later.

He remembers distinctly when political issues and words from the pulpit began to mix.

While at St. Stephens, Guest preached a sermon one Sunday after a conversation with a woman who suggested he look into the relationship between Christian values and abortion. She was strongly pro-life and light years ahead of most in the movement at that time.

"Once I examined the issues," he said, "it became my conviction, and it was based on Psalm 139 in particular, that abortion was the killing of a baby."

That Sunday, there was a mixed reaction to his message, although mostly positive. But that sermon opened doors for Guest and opened his eyes as well.

"I thought my job was purely to preach the word and to minister to people spiritually," he said.

After Guest's preaching changed focus, congregation members began exam-

ining their lives, and their faith took on a new meaning.

"People really began to be converted," Guest said. "A core of people became very visible, and my preaching became more well-known."

In 1990, Guest formed the John Guest Evangelistic Team, which conducted city-wide evangelistic crusades across America. Five years later, he began his current post at Christ Church at Grove Farm.

"The moment I became a Christian I became a flaming evangelist," Guest remembers. "I am no longer a flaming evangelist, but my main passion is to see people come to Christ."

Today, the father of four daughters finds himself an Englishman researching the tenets of America's founding fathers to help people discover the freedom within themselves to take a stand on important issues, without interference from the media, the secularization of society or a liberal bias.

"There is hardly an area of American life where there isn't conflict," Guest said. "You can't teach about creationism in our school systems. Appointments to the courts

have become political battles based on political agendas. So the Christian now has to be engaged more so than ever in the issues of the day.”

One of Guest's heroes is William Wilberforce, a British politician, philanthropist and abolitionist who led the parliamentary campaign against the slave trade. In fact, one of Guest's sermons on Wilberforce was a turning point in another man's life.

Mark Rodgers moved to Sewickley as a ninth-grader in 1979. Guest was his pastor, and Rodgers specifically remembers December 1984 as a time when Guest helped guide him vocationally and spiritually. Guest preached a sermon on Wilberforce's pursuit of justice and God's call in his life through politics. The sermon may have been meant to encourage Christian citizenship, but that story “connected the dots” for Rodgers, who built his vocation on that sermon and spent 16 years in senior leadership for then U.S. Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.).

Throughout the years, Rodgers and Guest have remained friends and allies, especially through work in Santorum's office.

But even through his involvement in political issues, Guest has stayed true to his pastor's role, Rodgers said, which he sees as addressing principles that help people become better informed on all facets of society. For example, he said, “Abortion is not a political issue but a moral issue that has a political dimension to it.”

Rodgers' good friend accomplishes this by helping people to understand the times by preaching on biblical principles and then bringing to light issues where those biblical principles are being compromised, whether it be poverty, sexuality, marital fidelity or the sanctity of life from abortion to euthanasia.

Guest agrees that a pastor's place is not at the polls but at the pulpit.

“The first thing is to preach the gospel,” he says. “The heart of our preaching is not politics or even moral issues but the gospel. And far too few preachers are preaching the gospel with a call for people to surrender to life in Christ.”

The second, he adds, is to preach the word relevantly to the culture. And that can be a challenge “because it takes courage There are very few

preachers today, I'm sad to say, who are willing to preach the Word to the culture in a relevant way.”

In a world of marketing and sound bites, many churches are literally working to fill pews, and therefore, missing the point of why people should be in church pews in the first place.

But “II Timothy 4:2 is like a neon light in my head as I preach Sunday after Sunday,” Guest said, “where it says to preach the word in season and out of season. That is when it is convenient and when it is not convenient, when they love you for it and when they hate you for it, when things are going well in the church and when they are not.

“One of the important things I have realized in preaching boldly to the issues,” he continues, “is to help the people in my church take a stand in their lives. And the most common response I get is ‘thank you.’”

Amy Clingensmith is a freelance communications consultant, writer and photographer living and working in western Pennsylvania. Her day job is director of communications for Grove City College, her alma mater.

The Rev. Dr. John Guest is involved in and has helped grow several ministries for young people and pastors. They include:

Coalition of Christian Outreach.

Guest founded the evangelistic organization that employs about 150 staff working on college campuses. The campus ministry partners with churches, colleges and organizations to develop men and women who live out their Christian faith in every area of life. For more information, www.ccojubilee.org.

Silver Ring Thing. Guest first became involved as a way to evangelize in high schools. The Silver Ring Thing is the fastest growing teen abstinence program in the United States. It is rapidly gaining international recognition for helping teens to understand that abstinence until marriage is not only God's plan for their lives, but also the best and only way to avoid the harmful physical and emotional effects of premarital sex.

In fact, he adds, 25 percent of those at a SRT concert will make a commitment to Christ and start a second virginity. For more information: www.silverringthing.com.

Family Research Council. Guest serves on its Pastor's Council, which encourages pastors to take an active role in preaching the issues that affect their congregations every day.

“There is a great need for pastors who will speak it boldly,” Guest said. “Pastors have to claim again their pulpit heritage to preach to the issues that impact the nation.”

FRC champions marriage and family as the foundation of civilization, while shaping public debate and formulating public policy that values human life and upholds the institutions of marriage and the family. For more information: www.frc.org.

Trinity Episcopal School of Ministry.

Founded by Guest, the Ambridge seminary seeks to form Christian leaders, both lay and ordained. It is a seminary in the Anglican tradition, especially serving the Episcopal Church as an evangelical “Great Commission” seminary. For more information: www.tesm.edu.

Books. Guest is the author of 10 books, including *Making Sense of Life When Our Real Home Is Heaven; Is Your Church Ready? Motivating Leaders to Live an Apologetic Life; Go for It! Accelerated Christian Growth; and Knowing You Are Loved: Conditioning the Habits of the Heart.*

Radio. Guest hosted the daily *New Life in Christ* on Pittsburgh WPIT-FM from 1983-90 and now is heard on Pittsburgh's WORD-FM (101.5) weekdays at 10:30 a.m. For more information: www.wordfm.com.