

Preaching etc.

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [Sep 13, 2000](#) issue

Forty years ago this month, I took a job as a student pastor in a small nondenominational church in a blue-collar community south of Chicago. I was a middler at the University of Chicago Divinity School–Chicago Theological Seminary, married with an infant daughter, and broke. The church offered \$50 a week and a house with three bedrooms, bath and a real back yard.

We were, at the time, living in what was described as “married student housing.” There was no kitchen, just a hot plate and refrigerator. Water was carried in a bucket from the bathtub. The prospect of \$50 weekly and a house felt to us like an epiphany of Damascus Road proportions. Without thinking much about what I would be required to do in exchange for my salary and palatial quarters, we accepted the offer.

A few days later I stood up in a pulpit, faced a congregation of 50 or so, and preached the one sermon I had prepared. As I recall, it covered the entire sweep of biblical history and distilled the essence of two millennia of Christian thought. And then, seven days later, I did it again. I have been doing it for 40 years. Sometimes it has been easy. Mostly it has been difficult. Preparing sermons has been the focus of my life, my struggle, my joy, my preoccupation, my occupation and my vocation. I have been a pastor, and the privileged task of living with a congregation and attempting to express God’s gracious presence and unconditional love has been the grounding for the preparing of sermons.

Over the years, I have not found it easy to do much writing beyond the preparation of sermons. That has remained true since I became editor/publisher of the *Christian Century*. I continue to be pastor of the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago and to prepare sermons and preach regularly.

But after a year’s association with the *Christian Century* I want to set my hand to writing an occasional piece in this space. This week, as we introduce a new look for the magazine, seemed like a good time to begin. This kind of writing will be a new adventure for me, and a risky one.

Over the years, when the *Christian Century* arrived at my desk, I have opened it with the wonderful sense that I was part of a community of inquirers, thinkers and readers who value the life of the mind and are committed to the public ministry of the church of Jesus Christ. I look forward to engaging this community more directly, and I hope you will tell me what's on your mind and heart. I'll tell you what's on mine—after I finish next Sunday's sermon.