

# Epistle *to the Bonitians*



THE NEWSLETTER OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF BONITA SPRINGS | JUNE-JULY 2017

*"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you;  
and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem,  
and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

*Acts 1:8 NW*

*The Spirit of Truth*

## OUR MISSION

To welcome and nurture our community, help people grow as disciples of Christ,  
and present a positive witness in today's world.

**First Presbyterian Church of Bonita Springs**

*A BIBLICALLY-CENTERED CHURCH IN THE PRESBYTERIAN FELLOWSHIP*

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# Doug's Desk

Dear Members and Friends of First Church,

**T**he summer months in Southwest Florida bring daily rain, less-crowded roads and restaurants, and a slower pace of life. At First Church the summer months primarily bring the two “R’s”: **Renewal** and **Renovations**. The **Renewal** that comes for the staff and lay leadership of the church is the personal recharging of our physical and spiritual batteries after a busy season of giving out and leading so many different church programs and activities. Each of the pastors and directors of our ministries will be taking vacation time, and in several cases some study leave as well. (None of the full-time leaders of our church staff are able to take any vacation time in the busy winter season because it is a time of “all hands on deck.”) My executive assistant Donabeth Urick is going to take a much-deserved sabbatical in July and August. Dr. Al Barrow and his wife Pastor June are taking the summer off in their home in Indiana. Nearly 200 of us (staff and spouses, members and friends) will be intentionally renewing ourselves at our summer reunion held in early August at the Billy Graham conference center “The Cove” nestled in the Smoky Mountains outside Asheville, NC. Renewal is essential to all of us and is part of the rhythm of a healthy Christian life. My prayer is that you will personally have some renewal experiences in the months ahead.

And, on our church property, the summer months are the natural and appropriate time for **Renovations**. A large facility like ours needs constant repair, updating and maintenance to keep it beautiful and functional. Last year was a heavy renovation sequence during the off-season, resulting in improvements to the parking lot, Great Room and Sanctuary. This year, renovations will be less extensive but will certainly enhance our church home. Among the projects underway: (1) the repaving and replanting of the area between the Price Hall Chapel and the Great Room, which will become a beautiful Meditation Garden; (2) relocation of our lending library from the east part of the BookCenter to the Parlor next to the Chapel, allowing more shelf space for our popular retail bookstore; (3) improvement of lighting and sound in the Sanctuary. Our facilities staff will also be overseeing the usual repair and maintenance projects — tasks very hard to do in the fall/winter season, when our buildings are being used multiple times every day.



Rev. Dr. Doug Pratt

- A few items of breaking news at our church:
- The Session has voted to commit First Church to fully fund a project (estimated cost of \$70,000) to expand a multi-dimensional Child Development Center with Compassion International in the city of Boca Chica in the Dominican Republic. Fund-raising for this campaign began, appropriately, on Mother’s Day—because it has a powerful impact on mothers and children there. We will bring you updates on our progress and would love to speak personally to anyone who may be interested in contributing. Please contact Director of Missions Trusha Barner ([tbarner@fpcbonita.org](mailto:tbarner@fpcbonita.org); 239-992-3233 ext. 244).
  - Dr. Allen Walworth has agreed to return to First Church and serve on our pastoral staff from December 1 of this year through the following Easter. Allen and his wife Connie are now back in Dallas, where he continues his work as a church and non-profit consultant with clients nationwide.
  - Dave and Lynne Stauffer, after four years of service as Co-Managers of First Thrift Shop, are planning their retirement and stepping down from that role. A Thrift Shop Ministry Team is being formed to select new leadership, guide in the transition and act as an ongoing advisory team.

May God’s grace sustain you this summer, wherever you may be.

Yours in Christ,  
Pastor Doug Pratt

# Dr. Steven Grant

On May 25, 2017 Pastor Steven Grant received his Doctor of Ministry (D. Min.) degree from Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, PA.

“Next to marrying my wife, Nanette,” he said, “choosing to work on a doctoral degree from Westminster Seminary was the smartest thing I have ever done!” Besides being one of the most meaningful experiences of his life, Steven says that the course work and quality of the faculty “made the whole six-year process a joy from beginning to end.”

Pastor Grant’s dissertation project is a training program for ruling elders, a portion of which he has offered annually to new FPC elders for the past five years. He hopes to create a similar program for new deacons.

While working on this project, Steven worked closely with Westminster Seminary President Dr. Peter Lillback — his mentor and advisor throughout the doctoral process. Steven assisted Dr. Lillback with several Faith & Freedom tours in Philadelphia (sponsored by Providence Forum). They will also work on future writing projects, some together and others by Pastor Grant with Dr. Lillback’s editorial counsel.

Steven says the courses that made the greatest impact on him were Pastoral Theology (with Dr. Timothy Witmer), Theology of Missions (with Dr. John Leonard), Church Revitalization and Leadership (with Dr. Harry Reeder III), and Foundations for a Lifetime of Fruitful Preaching (with Dr. R. Kent Hughes).

Pastor Grant is profoundly grateful to Dr. Doug Pratt for his full support, encouragement and mentorship, and to the elders and congregation for allowing him the time to



pursue a D. Min. degree. He is also very thankful for Judi Van Cleave, who served as his tireless editor.

“All glory and thanks goes to Almighty God, for in His Providence and good grace. He made this possible and sustained me through this work,” Steven said. “The pursuit of such a degree is not an end in itself, but rather it is for the purpose of glorifying God by becoming a better minister and creating a ministry program to assist in building God’s church. It is my hope and prayer that God will use my humble efforts for His purpose and that our future elders will be more equipped to serve and become instruments in His hands.

“Second only to my gratitude to God for making this all possible, my greatest expression of gratitude is reserved for my dear wife, Nanette — for her unflinching support, love and encouragement. God could not have chosen for me a more perfect life companion.”

## “95 Theses” Sparks Revolution

This year marks 500 years since a stubborn German Augustinian monk and theologian, Martin Luther (1483-1547), published his “95 Theses.” Based mainly on the theology of Paul, it was his angry response to Pope Leo X’s practice of selling indulgences. Luther’s eventual hearings on charges of heresy before the Diet of Worms (1521) has been described by historians as the trial that led to the birth of the modern world... and certainly transformed people’s understanding of their relationship with God:

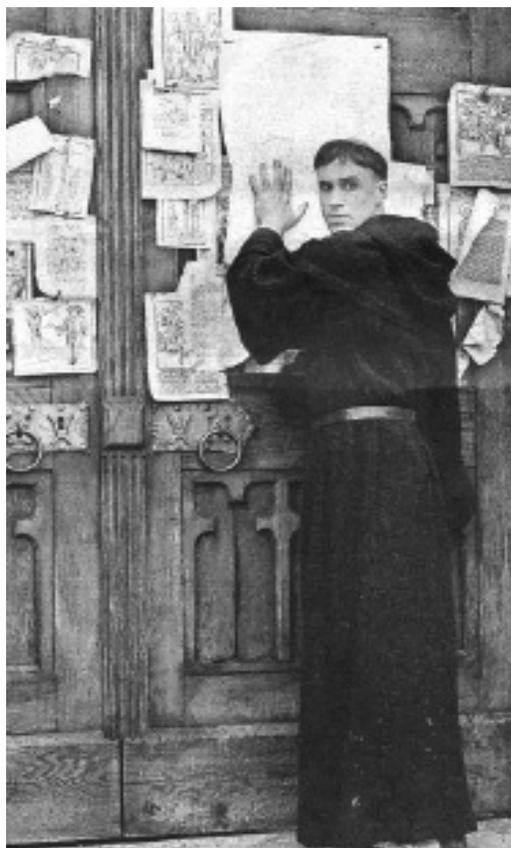
By holding steadfast to his interpretation of Scripture, Luther provided the impetus for the Reformation, a reform movement that would divide Europe into two regions, one Protestant and one Catholic, and that would set the scene for religious wars that would continue for more than a century, not ending until the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. – Douglas O. Linder, “The Trial of Martin Luther: An Account” (2010).

# The Letter that Lit the Fuse

It was a trip to Rome in 1510 that first prompted Luther in his quest for the truth. Already a biblical scholar, he witnessed scandalous actions of priests first-hand and wondered if they truly had the power to forgive the sins of others through the sacrament of confession.

Luther delved into the theology of the Apostle Paul and discovered “grace” in his letter to the Romans. Could forgiveness come through faith alone (not through a sacrament or indulgence) made possible through the sacrifice of Christ? Luther began to take on Paul’s beliefs as his own and inserted these revelations from God’s Word into his sermons. Neither priest nor pope could forgive that which only God could see in man’s heart; forgiveness was a gift of God’s grace. Thus began Luther’s lifelong battle with the Roman Catholic Church.

Considered by many to be the most sweeping and theologically rich of Paul’s letters, “Romans” was the primary biblical source and inspiration for Martin Luther and the reformers who launched the movement that changed the course of history.



In this scene from the film “Luther” (2003) starring Joseph Fiennes, Martin Luther nails his famous “95 Theses” to the door of Wittenberg Castle Church in Germany. (from Religion Blog #14, March 4, 2013 at [andreasinian.wordpress.com/author/andreasinian/page/4/](http://andreasinian.wordpress.com/author/andreasinian/page/4/))

“This letter is truly the most important piece in the New Testament. It is purest Gospel... the daily bread of the soul.”

— MARTIN LUTHER, “Preface to the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans” (1552)

Luther concludes that Paul’s letter reveals the core of Christianity:

We find in this letter, then, the richest possible teaching about what a Christian should know: the meaning of law, Gospel, sin, punishment, grace, faith, justice, Christ, God, good works, love, hope and the cross... Paul bases everything firmly on Scripture and proves his points with examples from his own experience and from the Prophets, so that nothing more could be desired. Therefore it seems that St. Paul, in writing this letter, wanted to compose a summary of the whole of Christian and evangelical teaching which would also be an introduction to the whole Old Testament. Without doubt, whoever takes this letter to heart possesses the light and power of the Old Testament. Therefore each and every Christian should make this letter the habitual and constant object of his study. God grant us his grace to do so. Amen.

Information in this article based on Douglas O. Linder’s “The Trial of Martin Luther: An Account” (2010) found online at [law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/luther/lutheraccount.html](http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/luther/lutheraccount.html).

Quotes from Martin Luther’s “Preface to the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans” (1552) are from the translation by Brother Andrew Thornton, OSB for the Saint Anselm College Humanities Program (©1983 Saint Anselm Abbey) found online at [ccel.org/luther/romans/pref\\_romans.html](http://ccel.org/luther/romans/pref_romans.html).



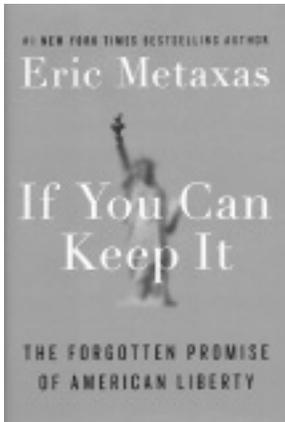
## The Book of Romans

Sundays • 8:45-9:45 AM  
Price Hall Chapel

## Summer Reading Challenge

### If You Can Keep It by Eric Metaxas

Each year, Pastor Doug Pratt and the CE Ministry select a book for members and friends to read and contemplate over the summer months then, in the fall, participate in a discussion with Pastor Doug.



We invite you to purchase a copy of *If You Can Keep It* from the FPC BookCenter and take up the challenge.

Ever wonder how our founding fathers would grade America for living up to their original intentions and lofty vision? *New York Times* best-selling author (and former Bonita Christian Forum speaker) Eric Metaxas

definitely has. He offers a critical analysis in his 2016 book chosen for our Summer Read:

*If You Can Keep It* is at once a thrilling review of America's uniqueness, and a sobering reminder that America's greatness cannot continue unless we truly understand what our founding fathers meant for us to be. The book includes a stirring call-to-action for every American to understand the ideals behind the "noble experiment in ordered liberty" that is America. It also paints a vivid picture of the tremendous fragility of that experiment and explains why that fragility has been dangerously forgotten—and in doing so it lays out our own responsibility to live those ideals and carry on those freedoms. Metaxas believes America is not a nation bounded by ethnic identity or geography, but rather by a radical and unprecedented idea, based upon liberty and freedom. It's time to reconnect to that idea before America loses the very foundation for what made it exceptional in the first place. (from [ericmetaxas.com/books.if-you-can-keep-it/](http://ericmetaxas.com/books.if-you-can-keep-it/))

For updates on Sunday morning CE classes be sure to read our *First Things First* announcement booklet in the Sunday bulletin.

### June Memory Verse

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

– Acts 1:8 NIV

These words of Jesus show, very simply, both the PURPOSE and the POWER of His followers. With intentionality and purpose, we show to the world, in words and actions, in service and generosity, the beauty and love and kindness of Christ.

Where are we to go as witnesses? To Judea—this was right in the neighborhood, love on a local level. We can think of Judea as our own family, friends, neighbors, and all who live nearby. It means being a local witness, as individuals and as a congregation. Our mission partnerships with Love INC and New Horizons demonstrate the love of Christ.

We are sent also “to the ends of the earth.” First Church, through our Missions Ministry, supports over 40 missionaries and mission organizations. This is our love sent far and wide through our going and giving.

Sometimes the most difficult part of the commission is the middle one — “in Samaria.” The Samaritans were a minority group, looked down upon, avoided. Yet Jesus singles them out as people with whom love and the gospel must be shared. What might that mean for each of us and for all of us as a congregation? Personally, it commands us to look past differences in backgrounds, position, income and race. It commands us to see those different from ourselves as people who need the love and mercy of God, as people loved and valued by God, just as we are. It calls every one of us to a deeper love for all people and a deeper love for Christ that any of us has naturally.

How can we do this? How can we grow in loving others and in being a witness to the power and love of Jesus? This is power beyond our own gifts and abilities. It comes to us divinely—through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is God with us... living in us, teaching us, guiding us, convicting us when we are off-track, reminding us, and opening opportunities to be loving witnesses of the loving Lord. Christ sends us out, but we do not go into the neighborhood or the world on our own strength, power or wisdom. We go in God's power. As we go and speak and give and serve, the Spirit works. He works in us and through us and He works in the people to whom we speak. We are the witnesses of God's great power and love. All of the power and love and wisdom and purpose belong to God!

## Sundays

First Church offers our “FirstLight” service at 8 AM in CenterPoint beginning June 4. It includes all the basic worship elements of music, message and Scripture—having the same preacher and message as the 10 AM service—but neatly packaged into a 40-minute time frame. CenterPoint offers more intimate worship in a casual atmosphere, with coffee and cookies available.

Our 10 AM service is held in the Sanctuary and includes a featured anthem from the Chancel Choir. A concurrent service experience is offered in CenterPoint by video and audio feed, with various seating options.

D.I.G. (Discover, Investigate, Grow) Bible study is held from 8:45 to 9:45 AM in the Chapel. During the 10 AM service, quality programs are held for children age 6 months through 5th grade. Children may be checked in at the Children’s Desk for both nursery and Neon Kids Sunday school.

“First Stop”—our fellowship time—takes place in McClure Hall following the 10 AM service. Join us for coffee and refreshments, enjoy fellowship with friends, and visit the kiosks for various ministry program and event information.

## Wherever you are...

You don’t have to miss a Sunday at FPC during the summer season! Visit the church website ([fpcbonita.org](http://fpcbonita.org)) to view the sermon webcast, listen to the podcast, or read the sermon manuscript.

**June 4**  
Pentecost/Communion Sunday

**June 18**  
Confirmation Sunday

**June 25**  
VBS Celebration

**July 16**  
Family Worship

**July 30**  
Communion Sunday

### A Time of Prayer & Communion

Sundays • 11 AM • Price Hall Chapel  
God is all about healing and grace so, in your hour of need, accept His invitation... and come pray with us.

Every Sunday following the 10 AM service, First Church offers a Time of Prayer & Communion (except on Sundays when the sacrament is shared during worship). All who feel a need for intercessory prayer for themselves or loved ones are invited.

During this special time, Communion is offered by one of our pastors.

The sacrament, together with anointing with oil and prayer, are all components of physical, spiritual and emotional healing. Jesus promised us the Holy Spirit, “Friend” and “Advocate” (John 14:16-17), to fortify and strengthen us. Oil is used, as a symbol of the Spirit, to anoint the forehead. While asking for God’s healing presence in the name of Jesus, prayer teams draw upon the faith of the whole church in believing intercession.

## In this issue...

Our content, for the most part, reveals a dual theme. At Pentecost, we focus our attention on the Holy Spirit—the mysterious Third Person of the Triune God promised by Jesus to all believers (Acts 1:8 on the cover). This was prophesied by John the Baptist when he said, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matthew 3:11). To be a Christian is to be “born of the Spirit” (John 3:18), the “Advocate, who will never leave you” (John 14:16).

This year marks the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther’s “95 Theses,” which ushered in a new era of spirituality and intimacy with God which was, before then, unimagined. In this issue, we become more familiar with Luther, whose life reflected unparalleled commitment to God’s Word. This series continues in upcoming issues.

## Epistle *to the Bonitians*

JUNE-JULY 2017

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# Saying Farewell...

Dear Members of First Church:

On behalf of my wife Barbara and myself, let me say how grateful we are for the ministry we have shared with you these past seven plus years. It has been a great privilege to teach, preach and minister among you. I am thankful for your generous support of our mission work and ministry with your prayers, finances and partnership in Christ.

During these past years, I've had the joy of teaching and preaching in Cuba, writing two books and producing the video with Medal of Honor recipient Robert Maxwell (now available online around the world). It has also been a joy to work with the CE Ministry on projects such as the Concerts of Prayer, Bible studies and our Breaking Bread Together gatherings.

Many of you may be unaware that, before Barb and I came to FPC, we were actually worshipping and ministering at First Presbyterian Church in Naples. Unfortunately, the pastor there was removed from the pulpit for various ethical reasons. As a result, I worked together with their Interim Pastor for a year and a half to get the congregation back on track and ready to call a new pastor. However when he came, one of the first things he did was make it clear to me that my theology and style of ministry were unacceptable to him and that there would be no place for me in worship. Moreover, anything I would teach there had to be approved first by him. Since the Presbytery required that as part of my mission work I give a portion of my time to a local congregation, Barb and I quickly found ourselves in both a ministerial and financial crisis.

I share this with you because the very day I found out we were being driven out of our church home, my path crossed with one Pastor Doug Pratt as he came out of the same building I was entering in North Naples. In all my years in Southwest Florida, our paths had never crossed; we were simply aware of each other as pastors in Peace River Presbytery. Doug looked at me and said, "So how are things going down there at First Pres. in Naples, John?" I told him that I'd like to meet with him to share my answer to that very timely question.



Doug graciously set up a time in which he and fellow FPC pastors listened to my situation. We discussed what I might offer at FPC Bonita and, to make a long story short, he and Session kindly invited me to be a part of the ministry team here. The rest is history.

Barb and I literally felt like spiritual refugees landing on Bonita Beach and being taken in by all of you. What a true and perfectly timed blessing from God!

At this point in our lives, God has opened doors for us to move closer to our family, which we look forward to doing. Come June 5 we are relocating to a suburb of Columbus, Georgia, located right across the river in Phenix City (without the "o"), Alabama. Our daughter Emily, son-in-law James, three-year-old grandson Elijah and my Mom all live in Columbus.

Barb and I would both appreciate your prayers as we begin this new adventure of setting up a new home in a new community. If there is ever anything I can personally do to serve you further, please feel free to contact me via email at [PastorJohn@integrity.com](mailto:PastorJohn@integrity.com). May the Lord bless you all in His grace as you continue seeking and serving Him.

Thankfully yours in Christ,  
Pastor John McWilliams

## Thank You...

*We thank Pastor John for being an integral part of our ministry team here at First Church for over seven years. Our prayers go with John and Barb as they transition to their new home in southeastern Alabama to be near family.*

# Breaking the Poverty Mindset

by Trusha Barner, Director of Missions

Recently I received a report from Compassion International thanking First Church for a year-end gift sent to them through our missions ministry. Here is an excerpt:

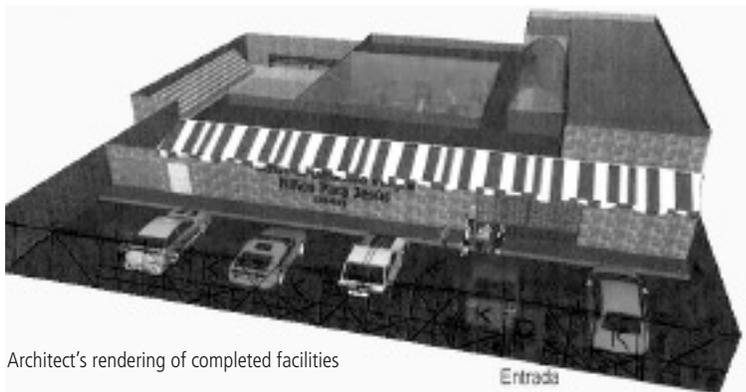
We are so grateful to you and your faithful partnership in helping those Jesus referred to as “the least of these.” It is because of your heart for the Dominican Republic’s most vulnerable children that we are excited to share with you how your 2016 gift of \$8,000 has impacted the future of children attending Compassion’s program at the Child Development Center in Boca Chica. Your support sparked a new vision at the local church to fully renovate their facilities to meet their long-term needs. The church is no longer living with a “poverty mindset” but is daring to dream big! It’s an exciting time and one that you helped encourage. Thank you!

First Church has been partnering with Compassion International in the DR since 2014 and it is so encouraging to hear that this alliance is breaking the “poverty mindset.” This is HOPE... and hope is what is needed to bring people out of the cycle of poverty. First Church is truly the hands and feet of Jesus in the DR!

The report goes on to outline the wider plan of this expansion project. In addition to funds already sent by First Missions and individual First Church members, approximately \$42,000 more is needed to bring this vision to fruition. This project directly impacts pregnant mothers and mothers with babies through this program.



Current facility



Architect's rendering of completed facilities

On Mother’s Day, Pastor Doug challenged the congregation to give toward this partnership in the Dominican Republic and allow God to use First Church to continue to provide hope. This is an amazing opportunity: one local church in Bonita Springs, Florida partnering with and uplifting another local church in Boca Chica, Dominican Republic.

Josefina Mercedes is pastor of the local church that oversees the Child Development Center in Boca Chica and has long been committed to serving the poorest families there. The expanded center will accommodate more mothers and babies through Compassion’s Child Survival Program and include space for counseling, medical consultation and vocational training. Pastor Josefina prays this will empower those living in this community by opening an even wider door for ministry of the Gospel.

If you have questions or would like more information, contact Director of Missions Trusha Barner ([tbarner@fpcbonita.org](mailto:tbarner@fpcbonita.org); 239-992-3233 ext. 244). To donate, checks may be written to First Presbyterian Church with “Compassion-DR Project” in the memo line.



# Dear First Church...

*After concluding a year-long pastoral internship at First Church, Christian Faux left Bonita Springs last September to attend Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary outside of Boston. He is grateful for the generosity of members and friends toward his first-year scholarship. Christian recently sent us this update and hopes we continue to pray for his spiritual development and academic success.*

To the Congregation of First Presbyterian Church of Bonita Springs, and especially those who have generously supported me in my preparation for ministry:

Can you tell I've been reading the letters of Paul from that opening? I have been! The whole New Testament is required reading for my New Testament Survey course, naturally. This class as well as its counterpart, Old Testament Survey, have been the most foundational classes I've taken so far. Going through the entirety of Scripture with a professor to guide us and provide historical context has been greatly enlightening and deepened my relationship with God.

The class on Spiritual Formation for Ministry has also had a profound impact. It has literally been a master's class



of spiritual awakening for me. I have always struggled with maintaining a consistent spiritual life. Now I feel I have the tools needed to establish a long-lasting and healthy one. There is a moment in particular I would like to share with you.

An event required for the class was the Soul Sabbath at a local nunnery. We were told very little about what would happen but encouraged to keep an open mind. So I left everything behind except that which I absolutely needed to get to the nunnery and back. Unfortunately, this included my Bible. So when time came for us to retire to our cell for a few hours, I had nothing to do and nothing on hand, not even my prayer journal. Inevitably I fell asleep and, in that sleep, dreamed. I had the single most vivid dream of my entire life. I dreamed I was bleeding from my ears and, while everyone was filled with concern and trying to get me to a hospital, all I wanted was to explain why the blood was green instead of red.

I believe God was trying to communicate to me that I often focus so much on the intellectual aspect of my relationship with Him that I overlook the emotional aspects. This spurred me on to seek a relationship with Him for its own sake rather than for intellectual enlightenment.

My other classes are going well. I moved off campus the week after Thanksgiving into an apartment less than five minutes from campus. The residence is attached to a house owned by a wealthy older woman who waives rent in exchange for a few hours of chores every week (more if it is snowing). It's a generous agreement and one of the greatest material blessings I have received since coming here. Another blessing is the great friends I have made, only some of whom are graduating and moving to a different continent this summer!

I want to conclude by thanking you again for your support and prayers for me and for everyone here at Gordon-Conwell. I humbly ask for your prayers to continue, that we may all remain focused on honoring God in both our academic and personal lives as we walk with Him through this very unique time in our lives.

Yours in Christ,  
Christian Faux

## The Paraclete

“But, child of God, I've got wonderful news: you are never alone. God cares immeasurably about you, He gave you His Spirit to be with you. When you came to know Christ, He took up His residence in and began living inside you. The very word *helper* (*parakletos*) means “one called alongside to help.” He enables you to face today's trials. He empowers you to meet tomorrow's demands... He is with you.

“Wherever you are—hospital room, dorm room, at home alone, in a difficult work environment, with a sick child, standing by a fresh grave—you have an inner Helper. He has “come alongside” to assist you. The Spirit of God has been provided to comfort as nobody else can. He loves you. He'll never leave you. He supports and strengthens you. And because of His indwelling presence, you have an amazing life open before you.”

– Charles R. Swindoll, *Embraced by the Spirit* (p. 34)

# Brad's Blessings

*"The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." John 3:18 (NIV)*

**M**y wife and I purchased our Florida home in November 2016. After the offer was made and accepted, a home inspector was hired to ensure that no surprises were invisibly lurking within its walls. Together we spent three hours investigating every outlet and faucet, all the nooks and crannies. During that time, I was introduced to an idea completely novel to me (having been from Northern Illinois)—the windstorm mitigation inspection. If you have purchased a home in Southwest Florida and invested in this test, you have admitted a Truth that is revealed in the pages of Scripture: you are not in control of the wind.

The wind blows wherever it pleases and, although we can see its effects, we cannot possess it. I remember seeing news footage of Hurricane Matthew last October; large, white-capped waves thrashed the shores, palm trees danced wildly and debris swirled through the air. Witnessing such powerless and uncertain moments, it is obvious that we cannot control the weather. Even as today's most advanced technology attempts to predict the direction and landfall of a hurricane, the wind still blows wherever it pleases. At times it can be gale force and powerful, with devastating effects. At other times the wind is a gentle breeze, providing much needed relief on a hot summer day.

A local pastor and respected church leader named Nicodemus came to Jesus under the cover of night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God..." (John 3:2). Jesus responded by challenging Nicodemus to be "born again." Confused, he wondered how someone could be born a second time. Jesus then spoke about being "born of the Spirit." His reply presented a truth that we in Southwest Florida have come to know intimately: "The wind blows wherever it pleases."

Interestingly, the word "wind" in the original language (Greek) of the Gospel of John is the same as the word for "Spirit." God's Spirit, like the wind, blows where it will. We cannot harness it, control it, suppress it or subdue it. At times, the Spirit is demonstrably present—like the tropical, gale force wind witnessed during Pentecost in Acts 2. Other times, the Spirit is like a gentle breeze, refreshing our souls and nearly going unnoticed. However, the Spirit of God is never in our control, as much as we long for it to be.

Nicodemus and other religious leaders sought control through religious devotion, so they attempted to system-



Rev. Brad Rogers

atize the Law of God. The Pharisees had come up with complex interpretations of the law in an attempt to harness control of the flesh, or perhaps even worse, to control their relationship with God. We think the same way today: "If I'm good enough or work hard enough, God will bless me. If my good deeds outweigh the bad, God will be happy with me. If I am more righteous than the average, I will have pleased God." However, the Apostle Paul claims that this manner of seeking control over our flesh and thereby our relationship with God is foundationally broken, because the law is "spiritual" (Romans 7:14).

God's intention through the law was always to point beyond itself to our dependence upon God's Spirit; therefore, simple obedience to the letter of the law fails to grasp its spiritual intent. We never receive the Spirit of God through good behavior or personal righteousness. We receive the Spirit of God not by our own control or effort but by the gift of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

"So what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:3).

Our good works do not gain God's favor, but God's grace empowers good works. Although we cannot predict where, when or how the wind will blow, we can still foresee its effects. In the same manner, we cannot predict where, when or how the Spirit of God will be at work, but His effect is predictable. Paul writes that this effect or, as he calls it, "fruit" of the Spirit is "love, joy, peace, forbearance,

*continued on next page*

# The Role of the Holy Spirit in Biblical Counseling

by Maria Karl, Biblical Counselor

*“But when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.” John 16:13 (NIRV)*

The Holy Spirit plays a major role in the believer’s life through the counseling process. During biblical counseling, we present and teach from Scripture and let the Spirit do the work of convicting and changing.

I always begin a session with a prayer to the Holy Spirit. He is invited to come and open our hearts and minds to accepting His input, teaching, correction, uplifting, guidance and counsel. When an individual starts to get hungry for the Word of God and begins to change direction toward God’s Will, I know I am seeing the work of the Spirit.

We are all dependent upon God’s Spirit to guide and enlighten us, and enable us to become more like Christ. When He works in us, our life bears “the fruit of the Spirit... love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23a).

## Brad’s Blessings *continued*

kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” These are not the ingredients to receive the Spirit but byproducts of life in the Spirit.

Have you given yourself a “Wind” (Spirit) Mitigation Test lately? How are you doing? Have you built up a hard exterior such that it’s going to take the gale force winds of the Spirit of God to reach the innermost rooms in your heart? Or will the gentle breeze of the Spirit be enough to draw you ever closer to the Father?

Though we cannot control the Spirit, the promise of Jesus in Scripture is that God generously gives the Spirit to those who ask (Luke 11:13). Let’s go to God in prayer and ask:

Heavenly Father, we pray that You would pour out Your Holy Spirit upon us and upon Your church. Help us to breath in Your Spirit and exhale Your praise. Animate us and help us to be born anew of Your Spirit. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Blessings,  
Pastor Brad Rogers

Counselees so often want those gifts right away, at microwave speed. We all want instant gratification—short-cuts and quick-fix-recipes are part of our culture. But it is often difficult to see when we are going against God’s Word. Satan also knows Scripture and tries to deceive us by twisting and changing it, sometimes just a tiny bit.

But as counselors, we totally depend on the Holy Spirit. I cannot assume I have the right answers for my counselee just because I read the Bible and apply it to my own life. My life is not their life. We are each individuals and decidedly subjective in a world full of temptations. Only God can know what is best for us and what His plan for us truly is. A Biblical Counselor always points toward God’s Word to help others discern His will for them. I am in the habit of giving “homework” to introduce God’s Word into lives that, perhaps, have not known it. Time spent becoming familiar with Scripture is time spent with the Spirit. He can then help us utilize its wisdom and truths, and insert them into our daily lives in practical ways.

John the Baptist said, “I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mark 1:8). Jesus promised each of us the Advocate, allowing God to dwell in us, justify us and sanctify us. The presence of the Spirit is life changing! I have seen amazing transformations—some very gradual, some like lightning—from selfishness to godliness.

The Holy Spirit is ready to help us be and do all that God asks, if we only let Him. A great reminder for me is this song: “Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me... fall afresh on me” (Daniel Iverson, 1926).



*Maria Karl is certified with the International Association of Biblical Counselors and available by appointment at the FPC Spiritual Development Center, 9696 Bonita Beach Road. To make an appointment for confidential counseling, contact her at [mkarl@fpcbonita.org](mailto:mkarl@fpcbonita.org) or call the Center at 239-221-8250.*

## The Winds Came...

Jesus said to His disciples: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:4-5). Soon after, He left—ascending into heaven before their eyes.

Can you imagine their confusion? Jesus had died on the cross, rose from the tomb, and visited them over the course of 40 days. And now He was gone, again. I suppose the disciples were hiding most of that time... hiding from the authorities, from acquaintances and non-believers. One could not help but think they were consumed with the fear of being found out and recognized as followers of a man crucified for heresy.

It was time for the festival. About 120 who believed in Jesus were gathered together for Shavuot. Traditionally they read the Torah and prayed. But this untraditional bunch of Jews were also mourning Jesus in their hearts. While He was alive, they had hope; but now, His absence was stagnating as they questioned the future. Had they forgotten all the glorious truths Jesus revealed to them?

Possibly they had reached new depths of doubt and fear, anxiety and bleakness. Can you imagine traveling with Jesus for three years and then, poof, He is taken away — twice? What loss they must have felt, what powerlessness. What emptiness without His comfort, without His wisdom, without His strength. Jesus was gone. What now?

They prayed. And suddenly a rumbling was heard, a quaking felt. An explosion of wind and light burst open the shackled windows and doors of the Upper Room. A rushing, a gusting from the heavens. A roaring and pouring down of fire. A gushing of the Spirit of God breathing and breaking through all the walls and all the barriers — those made of stone and wood, and of flesh and heart and mind. Of language, of nationality, of fear and brokenness.

A deafening and joyous whirling of noise descended and flowed into the disciples, then streamed out through their mouths in wondrous blessings. Words spoken brought hope of life resurrected. No more hiding; no more fear. Boldness flooded their hearts; a power filled their minds. A tsunami of wonder was heard; an avalanche of miracles seen. The Spirit of Truth had come, unequivocally, to dwell within each lover of Christ. A hailstorm, a hurricane, a windstorm of impossible strength poured out pure courage and confidence and universal love.

THAT was Pentecost. That was the power of God. That was the Spirit of Truth, the Advocate Jesus spoke of... the Friend Jesus promised.

*“He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”*

– Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16

# The Spirit of

## A Study of Pentecost

“Pentecost” (“fiftieth” in Greek) is the name given by the Greek-speaking Jews for the least known of the three major Jewish festivals. Shavuot or Festival of Weeks was established to declare God’s ownership of the land as the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai 50 days (seven weeks) after the first Passover (Exod. 19:1, Deut. 16:10). Since then and until the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., all adult males were required to gather there and offer the first fruits of their harvest.

Shavuot also commemorates the day on which Moses was given the Law. Some scholars connect the meaning and imagery of this ancient festival to the New Testament Pentecost in the Book of Acts.

Exodus 19:18 describes God’s Spirit as descending in fire on Mount Sinai, with smoke billowing and the mountain trembling. The entire nation of Israel was in mortal fear, seeing flames and lightning, hearing thunder and trumpets (Exodus 20:18-19). In Deuteronomy 4:11-13, Moses said: “You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain while it blazed with fire to the very heavens... Then the LORD spoke to you out of the fire... He declared to you his covenant, the Ten Commandments...”

Another ancient Jewish manuscript (a targum from the Cairo Geniza library) also describes the giving of the Law:

The first commandment, when it left the mouth of the Holy One... as meteors and lightning and torches of fire... which burst forth and flew in the air of the heavenly expanse; it proceeded to circle around the camp of Israel.<sup>1</sup>

# Truth

The relation of the Jewish Shavuot to the Christian Pentecost with its outpouring of the Spirit as an analogy is apparent. In their article “Did God Speak at Sinai?” Rabbis Coopersmith and Zeldman state: “The Torah’s claim is that the entire people heard God speak at Mount Sinai, experiencing national revelation. God did not just appear to Moses in a private rendezvous; He appeared to everyone, some 3 million people.”<sup>2</sup>



## **The Breath of God**

*When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*

*Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken.*

– Acts 2:1-6 (NIV)

Fast forward to Jesus’ time. God-fearing Jews from every nation gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate Shavuot fifty days after Passover—coming from as far away as Mesopotamia, Asia, Egypt, even Rome. In explaining Shavuot on their website, Jews for Jesus states:

In Acts 2 and 3, the New Covenant records that the Holy Spirit was poured out at Shavuot. As a result, 3,000 Jewish people recognized that Yeshua was indeed the Messiah, and they turned to God. These souls were the firstfruits of God’s gospel harvest.<sup>3</sup>

It makes perfect sense that God would send His Holy Spirit to Christ-followers on the same day He made a covenant with the nation of Israel, so many years earlier. This “new” covenant was prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31 and Joel 2:28. It was also promised by Jesus who said that, after He had gone, His Father would send “another Advocate... the Spirit of truth” (John 14:16-17) who would always be with them.

Jesus promised a new baptism of fire, of power, of Spirit! God’s Spirit infuses believers with the “heart” of the law—circumcising us inwardly, giving us the ability to express His spiritual gifts outwardly. On the day of the “new” Pentecost, our relationship with the Spirit of God evolved; it was unequivocally changed.

This difference exists because with the incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, God’s eternal plan of salvation is implemented—all that was previously hidden and mysterious, clothed in prophetic symbol, anticipated in prophetic ritual, and proclaimed but not understood in prophetic word—all of this is now in place... The final aspect of this new spiritual reality ushered in by Jesus Christ... is **the indwelling Spirit of God.**<sup>4</sup>

Statements in this article based on: Rich Robinson’s “Weak on Weeks? The Feast of Shavuot,” [cbn.com/weak-weeks-feast-shavuot-pentecost](http://cbn.com/weak-weeks-feast-shavuot-pentecost) and “Observations on Acts: The Meaning of Pentecost,” Jan. 21, 2011, [readingacts.com](http://readingacts.com).

<sup>1</sup> David Brickner, “The Day Pentecost was Fulfilled,” June 1, 2008, [jewishroots.net](http://jewishroots.net)

<sup>2</sup> [aish.com/jl/p/ph/Did\\_God\\_Speak\\_at\\_Sinai.html](http://aish.com/jl/p/ph/Did_God_Speak_at_Sinai.html)

<sup>3</sup> [jewsforjesus.org/jewish-resources/community/jewish-holidays/shavuot/](http://jewsforjesus.org/jewish-resources/community/jewish-holidays/shavuot/)

<sup>4</sup> Rosemary Bardsley, “The Holy Spirit Before Pentecost,” 2009, [godswordforyou.com](http://godswordforyou.com)

# Let Your Light Shine Brightly!



CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

At Neon Kids, our mission is to partner with parents to lead children into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Neon Kids provides quality programs for children ages 6 months through 5th grade. We invite you to visit us on Sunday mornings before worship. Check your children in at the Children's Desk for nursery or Neon Kids Sunday school. You can also visit us on the web at [neonkids.org](http://neonkids.org) to catch up on all the latest news.



As Wonder Years Preschool concludes the school year, we wish many blessings on our little ones as they become busy with summer activities. We pray that our teachers and staff have a wonderful summer with plenty of quality time with loved ones and quiet moments for spiritual renewal.



The students of Wonder Years celebrated Moms by creating wonderful gifts and cards for Mother's Day, and hosting their annual "Muffins with Mom" event in Café First. The VPK Graduation was a happy milestone, with each graduate receiving a children's Bible. Afterward, the end-of-year celebration included carnival games and treats for all students, toddlers to VPK.

## Lauren Hargis Earns Bachelor's Degree

Lauren Hargis quickly found her calling after joining the church staff as a children's Sunday school teacher in 2012. She has served as Assistant Teacher and intern for Wonder Years Preschool, Children's Ministry Assistant, and currently holds the position of Children's Ministry Coordinator.

*"I always knew that I wanted to work with children," Lauren said, "but it was not until I began working in Children's Ministry that God's plan for my life became clear. My time at First Church has helped me discover how we all have special gifts from God that can be used for His glory."*



After earning an Associate of Arts degree from Florida Southwestern State College in 2013, Lauren was determined to pursue a degree in education through a unique four-year program offered at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU). On May 6, 2017, Lauren received her Bachelor of Science degree in Child and Youth Studies. This program was designed to prepare graduates to work in applied settings with children and youth, including human service agencies, child care settings, and related positions in business, industry and government.

*"Completing this program has helped improve my skills and knowledge in working with children and youth," Lauren said. "It is my ambition to be a life-long learner in order to fulfill God's purpose for my life and to maintain the standards of the church's highly professional workforce. I will prayerfully continue to seek God's direction, and am eager to see God move in the lives of the children and families we serve."*

## Questions?

Contact Children's Ministry Coordinator Lauren Hargis at [lhargis@fpconita.org](mailto:lhargis@fpconita.org) or 239-992-3233.

*"In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."*

MATTHEW 5:16

# Welcome Chris McNamara

Our Family Ministry introduces Chris McNamara, our newest staff member who joined us in April. Serving as Student Ministry Coordinator, Chris is discipling our middle and high school youth, working under the guidance of Pastor Brad Rogers.

Chris grew up in a Christian home. In fact, his father was a pastor. Several years ago, Chris came to Southwest Florida to serve with a local mission organization called Ride Nature (currently supported by First Church). Through his work there using action sports as tools for outreach and evangelism, he developed a passion for teaching youth about Jesus. For the past 18 months, both Chris and his wife Sidney have been praying for guidance, deeply sensing a call to return to Florida and serve the youth of this community.

“From my first conversation with Chris,” said Pastor Brad, “I felt his heart was focused on pursuing the Spirit’s leading of his life. He ‘wowed’ the search committee with poise and maturity far beyond his 23 years. Chris is viewed as a hard worker, a man of integrity and a leader with a humble and teachable spirit.”

At the end of March, the McNamara family moved from Emerald Isle, NC to Fort Myers in pursuit of God’s call upon their lives. Soon after Easter, Chris was bumping elbows with our students and their parents, eager to move the Gospel forward in the boldness of the Spirit!

If you happen to see Chris on a Sunday morning, we encourage you to introduce yourself. In the meantime, the *Epistle* asked him a few questions to gain his acquaintance.

## **Q: What gives you the most joy in ministry?**

A: My greatest joy is being able to talk honestly about the God I serve and see how people are drastically changed by His power. I love sharing my testimony — that in the darkest point in my life, during my deepest struggles, God continued to seek me out and, by His grace and love, radically



saved me. Only by having the right people in my life to keep me accountable was I able to come to Jesus and be in ministry today! I want to be that for our middle and high schoolers, someone they can come to.

## **Q: Why have you chosen to work with middle and high school students?**

A: Our youth are the future of advancing the Gospel. I’ve always wanted to use my experiences and the gifts God gave me to help them know Jesus. I understand the pressures involved. Chasing the dream of being top dog in high school — baseball team captain for four years, homecoming king, State champion swimmer — I was in the lime light but still life was empty. So it is a joy to share with these students the truth behind life, that life is not worth living if Jesus isn’t the center of it.

## **Q: What do you want your ministry here to look like?**

A: I want to show students the true love and grace of our Lord and Savior. I want them to look forward to Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights because those are the nights that we get to worship our God and learn more about Jesus!

## **Q: With baby number two on the way, what are you most looking forward to concerning your family?**

A: I think what I am most excited about is for my first daughter to have a lifetime friend, but more importantly, a lifetime sister. I am eager to watch them grow and mature into young godly women who want nothing more in life than to glorify God.

## Chris McNamara... at a glance

**Born:** Hertford, North Carolina

**Hobbies:** Surfing, skateboarding, playing guitar

**Favorite beverage:** Coffee

**Favorite book:** *Dangerous Calling* by Paul David Tripp

**Favorite Scripture:** Acts 1:8

**Family:** Married to Sidney for three years; one daughter, Isla (18-months) and another on the way, due in June; they love traveling and going to the beach

# Men's Ministry Fellowship

Changing Men's Hearts One at a Time



## Seasons Turn as We Grow in Grace

by Bill Jones, MMF Chair

An often-quoted set of verses (even in the secular world) begins, "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven." Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 tells us there is a time for everything. The international hit "Turn! Turn! Turn" released by the Byrds in 1965, was actually adapted word-for-word from Scripture — the oldest lyrics in a #1 song ([wikipedia.org](http://wikipedia.org)).

Another season has come to an end in Southwest Florida. Where we had about 200 men in McClure Hall on Thursday mornings, it is now quiet. Those men who are still in the area now meet at Perkins restaurant every other Thursday morning for Christian fellowship, as well as eggs, bacon, waffles and pancakes. (Please see our summer schedule.) But wherever we go, we take with us a season of lessons learned during our Men's Ministry breakfast meetings and life at First Church.

### MMF SUMMER SCHEDULE

Fellowship Breakfast & Bible Study

**June through August**

(beginning June 8)

**Every other Thursday • 8 AM**

Perkins Restaurant, Bonita Springs

June 8 & 22, July 6 & 20, August 3 & 17

For more information, please contact Bill Jones ([wjones1352@bellsouth.net](mailto:wjones1352@bellsouth.net); 239-596-9141) or Steve Thompson ([smt4444@gmail.com](mailto:smt4444@gmail.com); 765-427-5299).

*"The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out."*

— Proverbs 20:5

**MMF VISION STATEMENT: To build relationships with men, to mutually encourage them, and bring them closer to Christ through fellowship and discipling.**

I recall on Maundy Thursday, Dr. Allen Walworth spoke about the humbleness that Christ taught us as He washed the feet of His disciples. The power of the Holy Spirit in the room was evident by the deafening silence when Allen finished. For the men in that room, the holiest weekend of the year started right then.

In Psalm 139:7-8, David writes about the Holy Spirit, saying:

Where can I go from your Spirit?  
Where can I flee from your presence?  
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;  
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

I think these words also apply to friends who are apart during the "in-between" season of summer. We miss being together but can fondly remember shared experiences, times of fellowship and spiritual awareness. Away from one another, we form new memories gleaned from lazy summer afternoons, family vacations, grandkids' summer camps and reading new books — which we will enjoy sharing with one another, once reunited with Florida friends in the fall.

There is something about autumn; it has always been my favorite season... time for a full schedule of growth and exciting activities. In my experience, the Men's Ministry here at First Church is truly unique. We meet weekly (during "season") to gain spiritual insight and renewal from gifted pastors, guest speakers and Christian friends. Our leadership team believes the Holy Spirit is indeed guiding us!

We look forward, come the fall, to a new season — seeing old friends, making new ones and sharing our summer experiences. I hope you will be part of it and bring a friend to share in this special fellowship.

"Fruit is always the miraculous, the created; it is never the result of willing, but always a growth. The fruit of the Spirit is a gift of God, and only He can produce it. They who bear it know as little about it as the tree knows of its fruit. They know only the power of Him on whom their life depends."

— DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

*The Cost of Discipleship*

# Filtering Our Pipes

*“Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.”*

*Philippians 4:8*

A couple years ago, the water department of a mid-size city in Michigan made a fateful blunder. To save some money, they hooked up their water supply to a new source that had not been carefully tested and screened. The result was that their pipes and pumping system became filled with water that had corrosive chemicals in it, and those chemicals began to damage the old pipes and release toxins into the water. People across the city started to notice discoloration and odor coming out of their taps. Before long, some consumers of the city water became sick from it.

etc. from the editor...

## The Same Spirit

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

*Now the earth was formless and empty,*

*darkness was over the surface of the deep,*

*and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*

*Genesis 1:1-2 (NIV)*

Contemplating this mysterious scene can take your breath away. God’s Spirit, the powerful love between the Father and Son, was there—at the beginning of Creation. His presence runs all through Scripture.

King David recognized our great dependence on “the breath of God” saying, “Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me” (Psalm 51:11). This Spirit came to Mary and she was overshadowed by the power of the Most High (Luke 1:35). When Jesus was baptized, “the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove” (Luke 3:22).

Jesus promised this “gift” from His Father to all of us. He said:

“If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the

*continued on page 22*

The state and federal governments stepped in and a massively expensive correction was ordered — essentially requiring the digging up and replacing of most of the city’s plumbing network. Until the solution is completed, which will take years and millions of dollars, some clever entrepreneurs came up with a short-term fix. They developed a water filtration unit that could be attached to each home where the city water comes in. Selling these filters has become a profitable business; and when properly installed, the filters allow families to drink and bathe in their tap water again.

I offer this real-life analogy as a comparison to the condition of the moral and spiritual climate of our nation in the early 21st century. We are living in a time of moral pollution and corruption. The “pipes” that carry the messages from our secular world into our minds include all the multimedia that constantly bombard our senses. The poison of bad attitudes and actions can easily come into our brains; it can corrupt and weaken our faith and that of our families. What we need, as a short-term solution (unless and until the long-term solution of a spiritual and moral revival comes to America), is to learn how to put a filter on our minds to purify what we think about.

The Apostle Paul in our text from Philippians 4 is clearly implying that what we think about is not just a matter of passively receiving input and ideas from the world around us. We can choose what we dwell on or dismiss. God’s Word gives us the mental filter we need. Though we may learn about negative things, we are not to dwell on them or let them shape us. God wants us to focus our thoughts and energies on the things that are “true, honorable, right, pure, lovely and admirable.”

I don’t believe it is a pastor’s job to tell each person in the congregation what they should and should not read, watch, listen to and consume. Those are personal decisions. But a faithful Christian, who takes the warning of Philippians 4 seriously to filter what they think about, will need to make decisions about how they use and consume media based on spiritual discernment. If something is dragging you down, filling you with stress and worry or weakening your values, you can choose to filter out that source. There may be some channels and networks on your television, some websites and other sources of information that you choose consciously to filter out of your life.

# Women's Connection

*The mission of the Women's Ministry of First Church is to help women of all ages reach UPWARD to a deeper relationship with Christ, reach INWARD to one another in love and fellowship, and reach OUTWARD to our community and world in service.*



## A Special Sisterhood

by Donna Tenfelde

The truest definition I found for the word “sisterhood” is: the affection and loyalty that women feel for other women who they have something in common with, from the *Collins English Dictionary*.

Our Women's Ministry has clever names for the Bible studies we offer: Manna for Monday, Working Women's Fellowship, Wednesday in the Word, Moore on Thursday. But “Summer Sisterhood” expresses the essence of them all — women of like minds coming together to study the Word.

In her devotional “Soul Sisters,” Julia Bettencourt uses these words to describe the Christian sisters in her life: inspiring, strong, real, silly, talkative, encouraging and saved. (<http://www.juliabettencourt.com/dev/soulsistersdev.html>). I think you will see all these qualities in the women who attend Summer Sisterhood, and experience all of them, too.

**Inspiring, Strong, Real.** Think about your sisters who inspire you spiritually. They may also encourage you in ways that make you stronger and more resilient to life's many “bumps in the road.” Something as simple as helping you get organized can boost self-confidence in very tangible ways. Many of our sister friends make it so easy to be real, to just be ourselves around them. I have a sister who prays at every meal—whether at home, in a restaurant or at an event—and welcomes all to join her. It is so real and inspiring to see how strong she is in her faith and love of the Lord.

*Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.*

– *Philippians 2:1-2 (NIV)*

**Silly, Talkative, Encouraging.** A little humor can be so comforting and draw you into a conversation. “A merry heart doeth good like medicine... (Proverbs 17:22).” In her devotional, Julia feels that this silliness comes from “the joy in their hearts” which the Lord has given them — “... it bubbles out of some more than others.” This joy is contagious and allows us to be a little silly too. This is not a bad thing; it can open our hearts. When we share joys and struggles with each other, it can be good for each of us. Christian sisters are great encouragers. They urge us to pray, to be Christ-like. God's Spirit is at work when He sends us a sister to be silly with, talk to and encourage us.

**Saved.** This is the most essential characteristic that all our sisters in the Lord have in common. We have been saved by the power of Christ's blood and are all one family. That's what makes our Sisterhood so special. We have the same Heavenly Father; we share the same Spirit; we call Jesus our Savior and King.

This summer, I invite you to come share these blessings with each other as we learn from the lessons of Summer Sisterhood. Let's pray and stay grounded in faith, fellowship and love.

*continued on next page*

For information on our current studies, please refer to *First Things First* in the Sunday bulletin.

If you have any questions, contact Women's Ministry Coordinator Donna Tenfelde (239-992-3233 ext. 293; [dtenfelde@fpcbonita.org](mailto:dtenfelde@fpcbonita.org)).

## From Favor to Fervor: Igniting a Passion for Prayer

Those who believe the Gospel receive the ultimate gift of God's favor: eternal life through Christ! This year's "Summer Sisterhood" is being offered to take us from favor to fervor by igniting in us a passion for prayer.

*New York Times* best-selling author Max Lucado has written a host of Christian inspirational books. Here is what he says about prayer:

When we invite God into our world, He walks in. He brings a host of gifts: joy, patience, resilience. Anxieties come, but they don't stick. Fears surface and then depart. Regrets land on the windshield, but then comes the wiper of prayer .... We speak, He listens. He speaks, we listen. This is prayer in its purest form. God changes his people through such moments. — from *Before Amen* by Max Lucado (2014, Thomas Nelson, p.9)

We need these moments! We depend on God for everything; prayer is our hope, our connection to Him. Through prayer, His Spirit can transform us. True prayer must be aflame! Nothing short of being red hot for God can keep the glow of heaven in our hearts.

Fervor is an intense emotion compelling action. What can we do to move from favor to fervor? Even Max Lucado admits, "Our prayers may be awkward," but then adds that "the power of prayer is in the one who hears it and not in the one who says it."

Jesus taught His disciples to pray. Others in the Bible can help us to pray also—Daniel, Paul, Peter and Mary. We can look at their prayers, each with its own purpose and clarity, and they can stretch us into a deeper spiritual life with sweeter revelation of God.

## Join the Summer Sisterhood and ignite your passion for prayer

June 7-July 12 • 9:30-11 AM • McClure Hall

All women are welcome!

## Cultivating Sacred Space

by Jeanne Hill

*For if a man belongs to Christ, he is a new person.*

*The old life is gone. New life has begun.*

– 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLV)

Spring and Summer... sunshine after winter, butterflies, children running, vegetables growing, flowers blooming, water splashing, picnics under a tree. Thank God for the "by design" reprieves in life. To have unending winter would be difficult to endure... especially for gardeners.

Gardens are God's great teachers. In the spring, we must first clean up—raking all the leaves and removing the unwanted remnants of winter. We soften the soil and add nutrients to make it an inviting place for budding flowers, fresh vegetables and savory herbs to grow. Minding the garden and caring for new life makes it easy to feel excited about the potential of new things ahead... especially the hope that my tomatoes will not be eaten by critters and my basil will be shared by many friends.

But life can be painful—sometimes for longer than we think we can even bear. Yet eventually there is a bend in the road, a bright moment, a call from a friend, a neighbor at the door with soup. The sun comes out. Spring arrives after a long winter.

Just like preparing the soil, digging through the problem areas in our life takes great effort and is downright painful sometimes. So much so, we might be tempted to ask, "God? How do I look now? I must be close to being weed-free and ready to blossom, 'cause You've been pulling those weeds out fairly vigorously lately!"

The Master Gardener knows what is best. I trust Him to get me ready for the garden He has in mind... down the road and around the corner. Whatever it takes, Lord, whatever it takes!

Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you” (John 14:15-18).

No matter what problems we face or challenges we struggle to overcome, we must consider ourselves greatly blessed—for we have two of God’s greatest gifts available to us. We have not only been given the sacrifice of Jesus that erases our sin, we also hold the power and presence of His Spirit. It resides in us always, offering strength, comfort, inspiration and transformation.

Paul tells us, “Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:19). He dwells within every believer. In *Embraced by the Spirit*, Charles R. Swindoll states:

We have an inner, “secret” chamber within our being; the Scriptures call it our “heart.” It’s where the Lord speaks to us (p.147)... The Spirit of God took up permanent residence within you... He brought you the full capacity of His power... and dynamic force (p.93).

Imagine... the same Spirit who hovered over the dark waters at the beginning of time... who spoke through the prophets... who was with David and Paul in their darkest hours... who blessed Mary with the Son of God... who led Jesus in His earthly life... that same Spirit lives within each of us. What an overwhelming mystery!

Can there be any doubt that this Spirit was also responsible for overshadowing the heart and mind of Martin Luther as he contemplated Scripture in his monastic cell? Did the Spirit not lead Luther to question the authority of the Pope and inspire his questions in order to put God’s universal Church back on track?

Exhibited by the monumental task of translating God’s Word from Latin into the language of the people, Luther “got it.” He reminds us that Scripture is “God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16) and that the grace of salvation is for every man, through faith alone in Jesus.

Luther was a man on fire, tirelessly preaching and debating that every believer is an instrument of the Spirit. This is the concept that transformed the world... and today, still continues to change lives — one believer at a time.

*The human spirit is the lamp of the LORD  
that sheds light on one’s inmost being.  
Proverbs 20:27*

## In Our Thoughts & Prayers

### **Our heartfelt Christian sympathy extends to:**

Joan Braun on the death of her son, Jeffrey M. Braun, on February 28; Nancie Pyle on the death of her husband, Bill Pyle, on March 5; the family of Wilma Sell who died on March 11; the family of Jim Elder who died on March 13; Judy Klobucher on the death of her husband, Ray Klobucher, on March 18; Karel Schurdell on the death of her husband, Ted Schurdell, on March 25; Fran Usher on the death of her husband, Bill Usher, on March 28 in Virginia; Tindy Simon on the death of her husband, Kenny Simon, on March 29; John Nicholson on the death of his wife, Cheryl Nicholson, on April 5; Carol Prevost on the death of her husband, Dan Prevost, on April 6; Delores Bender on the death of her husband, Robert (Bob) Bender, on April 13 in Indiana; Jim & Sandi Hess on the death of Jim’s sister, Irene, on April 22; Donna Hagy on the death of her husband, Robert (Bob) Hagy, on April 24 in Georgia; Duane Joseph on the death of his wife, Peggy Joseph, on April 25; Roger & Mimi Holly on the death of Roger’s mother, Dorothy Patten, on May 2; the family of Dorothy Hall, who died on May 2; and Dawn Poinsett on the death of her husband, Richard Poinsett, on May 5.

### **Please remember loved ones in the military**

These individuals, loved ones to members and friends of our church, are currently serving our country. Please pray for their physical, emotional and spiritual well-being, and their safe return to their families. Names with an asterisk are currently deployed. Steven Adams, Andrew Bean, Gideon Bernthal, Cpt. David Cullen, Christian Dobush, Brian Eifler, David Guiles\*, Andrew Hannebaum, Aaron M. Haynes, Lee Moffett, Paul J. Najarian, Catherine Oakley, Miles Oakley, Katie Payne, Andrew Pratt, Patrick Ryan, Sarah Ryan, Barrett Schake, Dylan Michael Sipos, Kristin D. Stahl\*, Thayne Stahlacker, John Stanton, Trevor S. Thrasher, Jeffrey Tolbert, Tyler Van Kampen, Eric Williams, Zach Williams, Deisy Wolfe, Matthew C. Wolfe, John N. Yacos, Kyle York.

# Church Directory

All of our staff are committed to the mission of First Presbyterian Church and would like to make ourselves available to assist you in whatever way we can. The directory listing below, although not comprehensive, includes contact information that may be helpful to you.

## PASTORS

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## 2017 SESSION

Moderator  
Rev. Dr. Douglas G. Pratt

Clerk of Session  
Dave Nichols

## ELDERS

Ken Baldwin  
John Cardwell  
Janice Croley  
Judy Graham  
Mike Greene  
Lynn Heinold  
John Holdeman  
GR Houck  
Carl Johansen  
Stevie Joslin  
Doug Mehle  
Sharon Morrison  
Gary Norbo  
Lin Rhode  
Nelson Robbins  
Paul Spinka  
Jack Wallace  
Sharon Weisenauer

## 2017 DEACONS

Moderator  
Leslie Durling

Betty Cardwell  
Leslie Durling  
Linda Faas  
John Fisher  
Sandy Flaig  
Jim Gelhaar  
Barb Goff  
Karen Hatten  
Polly Grafton  
Bob Lorenz  
Loren Luppess  
Ron Maki  
Jerry Meier  
Elaine Morton  
Wendi Owens  
Joan Robinson  
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First Thrift Shop: (239) 992-0285

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Wonder Years Preschool: (239) 948-6677

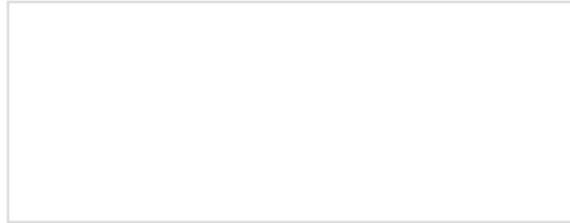
Ticket Office: (239) 992-3410 x250

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# VBS 2017

The Brightest 2 Weeks of the Summer!

**Preschool VBS:** June 12-16 • 9 AM-12 Noon • for ages 3-6

**Elementary VBS:** June 19-23 • 9 AM-12 Noon • for ages 6-11

Join us at MAKER FUN FACTORY where curious kids become hands-on inventors who discover they are lovingly crafted by God.

Maker Fun Factory is filled with incredible Bible-learning experiences to see, hear, touch, and even taste! Sciency-Fun Gizmos™, team-building games, cool Bible songs and tasty treats are just a few of the exciting VBS activities. Kids will also participate in a hands-on Kid-to-Kid™ mission project to show God's mighty love to needy remote villages in Peru.

VBS is open to FPC families & friends, as well as the community.

## Register Online

<https://vbspro.events/p/preschool>

or

<https://vbspro.events/p/elementary>

