

# THE SPIRE



*Your  
Church  
Magazine*

May / June 2023



# NURTURE FAITH

**by Dr. Doug Hood**

Senior Pastor

## AUDACIOUS PRAYER

*“Finally, let’s draw near to the throne of favor with confidence so that we can receive mercy and find grace when we need help.”*

Hebrews 4:16 (Common English Bible)

A simple story, that is repeated often each day throughout the world, is that of a father seated in his home, reading a book, a magazine, or a newspaper. A young son enters the room and climbs up into his father’s lap. The father, with a warm heart, asks, “Well, what can I do for you?” “Nothing,” replies the son. “I just want to be with you.” Prayer may be many things. Yet, in the final analysis, prayer—true prayer—is not the utterance of words, nor the advance of desires, but the desire to be with God. Prayer is not a formal, religious exercise or a vocal performance before others. It is deeper than that. Prayer is spiritual communion with the creator of heaven and earth. From beginning to end, prayer’s aim is to experience the presence, affirmation, and love of one greater and stronger than us. To know we are safe in their arms.

The Book of Hebrews teaches us that access to God is only possible through Jesus. Prayer will not prevail without the Son of God who made possible the removal of the veil that separated us from the holy throne of God. John Calvin, an early leader of the Christian faith, asserts that prayer is fundamentally acknowledging the continuing intercession of Jesus Christ.<sup>i</sup> Jesus must go with us as we draw near the “throne of favor”, the seat of almighty God. Without Jesus we remain shut out from the living God. As Jesus taught us in The Lord’s Prayer, prayer must always begin with the acknowledgement that we come to a holy, sacred place, “uphold the holiness of your name”. (Matthew 6:9) We must not forget this. Therefore, when we pray, we come not only before a heavenly Father, but we also come into a royal place of power.

If we come to a throne, our posture must be that of deep reverence. Continuing today is the demonstration of respect and reverence as world leaders come before a king or queen— reverence demonstrated by a

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## THE SPIRE MAGAZINE

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**If you or a family member are hospitalized, please notify the church office.**

**Even if you give the name of the church upon admission, the hospital will NOT notify us.**

simple bow. It may be a bow of the head or a bow from the waist. Yet, what is expected is that any approach before royalty is accompanied by homage and honor. In the instance of prayer, the royal one we approach is the highest of all royalty, the King of Kings, says the prophet, Isaiah. Thomas Long, a wise interpreter of Scripture, writes that sometimes contemporary Christians, schooled on a tame and domesticated picture of God, forget the sheer audaciousness of human beings daring to approach the holy, and thus we engage in prayer with all the casual nonchalance of ordering at a fast-food restaurant.<sup>ii</sup>

**T**hough we come before “the throne of favor” with humility and reverence, we do come before a throne. Small change found in the sofa and leftover crumbs are not dispensed in a place of royalty. More, we are present before God at God’s invitation; we are called God’s children. That knowledge removes any hesitancy to ask God for anything. That knowledge also removes any expectation that all we can hope for are small favors—small coins or breadcrumbs. God’s invitation suggests that we are to appear with enlarged expectations! Yet, beware of imagining that God’s thoughts are our thoughts or that God’s ways are our ways. Ask for great things because you stand before a great God. But always pray as Jesus prayed, “let it be what you want.” (Matthew 26:42) ●

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i Karl Barth, *Prayer: 50th Anniversary Edition* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2022) xiii.

ii Thomas G. Long: *Hebrews: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, John Knox Press, 1997) 64.

## WHY WEAR RED FOR PENTECOST?

**F**or Christians, Pentecost is a holiday on which we commemorate the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the early followers of Jesus. From historical and spiritual points of view, Pentecost is the day on which the church was started, and therefore considered the church’s birthday.

**F**ive colors are used to differentiate liturgical seasons: Purple, White, Black, Red, and Green. Red symbolizes the joy and power of the Holy Spirit, and is therefore used on Pentecost since the Spirit brings the church into existence and enlivens it.

**J**oin us on Sunday, May 28th as we celebrate the church’s birthday. We encourage you to wear red that morning, whether worshiping in person or online. ●

*Joy  
and  
Power  
of the  
Holy Spirit*

**by Grace Cameron Hood**

*Director of Children and  
Family Ministry*



## FIRST FAMILIES MINISTRIES

### Vacation Bible School

June 12 – 16, 2023

9 a.m. to noon



**T**his year the children will be going on an adventure as they meet Daniel and hear of his courage. They will also visit a Babylonian Marketplace and have a chance to do wonderful activities. There will be music, Bible Time, hands-on activities, a Palace Playground, snacks and more!

**K**athy Baldwin, Grace Hood, and Birgit Djupedal Fioravante are partnering up to make this a wonderful experience for our volunteers and children.

**T**he age range for children is 3 years old (potty trained...limit 10) to those who have completed 5th grade. All the ages will be together at different times! The registration forms may be picked up in the Lobby of the church, or you can register on the church website. There is no charge for the children. A free will offering will be accepted.

**T**here is no age limit for volunteers!! Many hands will be needed in the Marketplace. The shops will be offering many opportunities. There will be a shop to create a hidden-message jewel, a mosaic box, a hanging garden project, a flute-making shop, a planet, and a food shop. The list goes on! Each shop will be telling the story of the followers of God as they lived in a Babylonian society. One unusual shop could be The Royal Animal Courtyard. If you have a well-socialized rabbit, goat, pig, dog, cat, or bird, they could be part of this adventure into a forgotten world! The owner of these animals would need to be present.

**E**ven if you cannot participate during VBS, you can still help contribute to the success of this great week by donating or loaning items needed by the planning team, or by making a donation to help cover the cost of supplies.

***Here are some of the needed items:***



- For the shops: beach or camping cabanas, canopy pole tents (will be returned)
- Old bedding (sheets, large cushions or pillows), old throw rugs, old cotton bathrobes, old artificial plastic greenery/foilage
- Large empty boxes (refrigerator or appliance size)
- Empty paper towel rolls (not toilet paper size)
- Jump ropes, tennis balls, flicker lights (working battery-operated tea candles)
- Metal and rubber hammers (will be returned, please label)
- Potting soil, peat pots, grass seed

**I**f your imagination and creative sides have been piqued and you would like to be part of this fun and exciting event (whether through donations, lending items, or volunteering), please contact Grace Hood ([gracehood@firstdelray.com](mailto:gracehood@firstdelray.com)). ●

*Thank You for Everything  
You Do for the Children!*

## SESSION REPORT

**D**uring February and March, the Session approved new members and a baptism. They also elected Mary Martínéz as Clerk of Session and Carl Fedde as Treasurer for a one-year term. The Session approved First Presbyterian Church of Boynton Beach's food pantry as the recipient of the 2023 One Great Hour of Sharing offering. ●

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## GIFTS TO OUR CHURCH

**Music Fund** from the Ambrecht Family Foundation; and from Berridge Copen.

**Operating Fund** from Margaret Ridolphi, in honor of Dick and DoAnn Falk.

**Remembrance Fund** from Mary Martínéz, the McCormick family, Keith and Mira Nolan, and PAR Government Systems, in loving memory of David Lewis; and from the estate of David Lewis. ●

*Giving  
Our  
Gifts*

## NEW MEMBERS

Paul Check

Valerie Check

Donna Curran

John Dragisic

Bart McKenzie



## WELCOME!

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## ETERNAL LIVES

Our Deepest Sympathies as a congregation are extended to the families of the following members upon the death of their loved ones:

William Talen – February 26, 2023

David Lewis – March 1, 2023

Susanne Emery – March 4, 2023

Joseph Hall – March 17, 2023

Carol (Gay) Dewart – March 29, 2023

Ruth Johnson – March 30, 2023

by Ann Gill

## MISSION OUTREACH MINISTRY TEAM *Pajama and Book Drive a Huge Success!*

Dear Members and Friends of First Presbyterian Church,

Thank you so very much for your generous contributions to our pajama and book drive for the Boys and Girls Club of Delray Beach. We were excited to receive pajamas and books from an online viewer of our services from Kentucky, 100 books from the Literacy Coalition of Palm Beach County, as well as pajamas and books from many of you. Generous financial donations enabled us to purchase the additional sizes needed for the children and teens at the club.

We were able to donate 139 pairs of pajamas and 10 pairs of pajama pants and 174 books to the club. Each student received a pair of pajamas and a book. Extra books will be used in the library at the Boys and Girls Club.

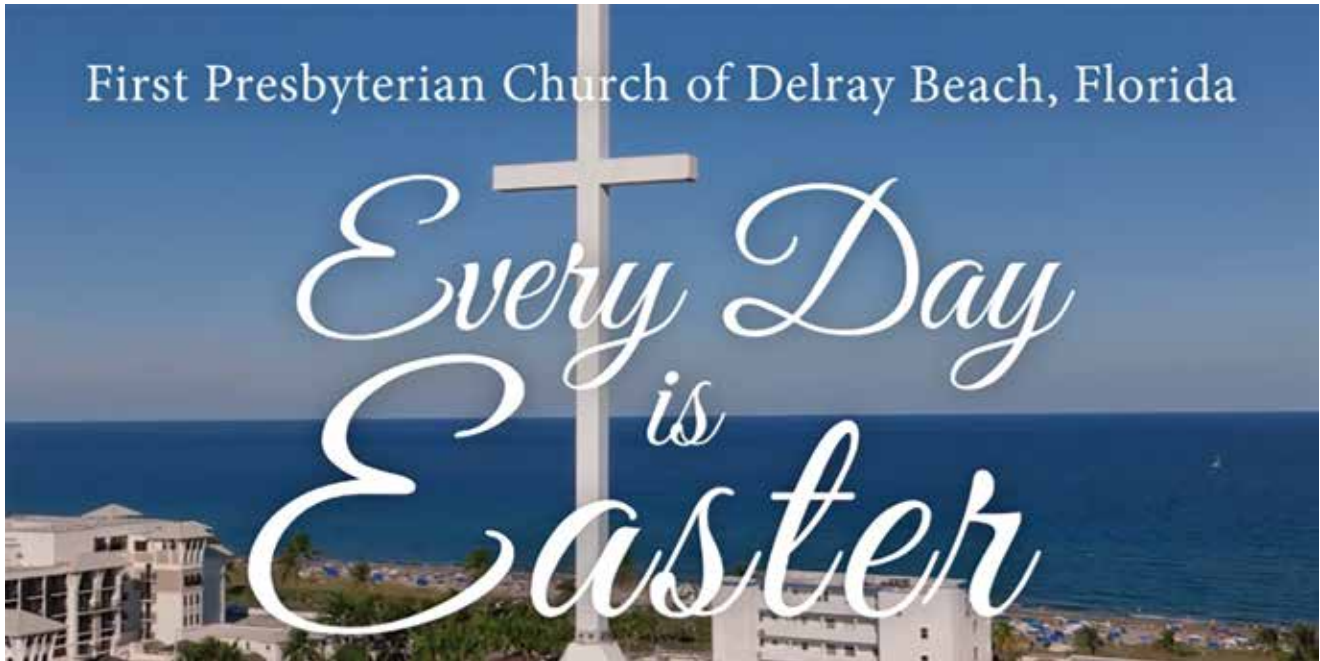
Thank you for partnering with us as we serve others in the name of Jesus Christ! ●

*Ann Gill and the  
Mission Outreach Team*



# EVERY DAY IS EASTER

ABC affiliates nationwide and US territories showed *Every Day Is Easter* on Easter Sunday. This special was taped in our church in late February. DVD copies of the program are available for a donation of \$15. You may visit our website or contact Nancy Fine if you would like one. ●



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## MOTHER'S DAY RECITAL SUNDAY, MAY 14, 2023 4 P.M. – 6 P.M.

Join us on Sunday, May 14th at 4 p.m. for a celebratory recital for Mother's Day. The event is free, and all are welcome. ●

**by Dr. Michael B. Brown**

Guest Preacher



## HOW OLD IS TOO OLD? (Thoughts About Faith and Aging)

**A sermon preached on March 19, 2023 by Dr. Michael B. Brown  
Genesis 12:1-5**

*“The Lord said to Abram, ‘Leave your land, your family, and your father’s household for the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation and will bless you. I will make your name respected, and you will be a blessing.*

*I will bless those who bless you, those who curse you I will curse;  
all the families of the earth will be blessed because of you.’*

*Abram left just as the Lord told him, and Lot went with him. Now Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all of their possessions, and those who became members of their household in Haran; and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in Canaan...”*

Genesis 12:1-5 (Common English Bible)

The passage you just heard read is more or less the introduction to the story of Abraham and Sarah. In fact, at this point Abraham is still known as “Abram.” All the most important and impressive things he and Sarah have to do are still out in front of them. As we read together, God comes to Abram and calls him to take his wife, his nephew, and what few things they can carry and to set off to a new place (Canaan) to do a new thing (give birth to the nation of Israel). When this occurs,

Abram is seventy-five years old, and Sarah is sixty-five. Most of their golfing buddies are browsing through brochures, shopping for a nice gated retirement community with good food and pretty croquet courts. But not Abram and Sarah! They are not yet ready for applesauce, rocking chairs, and a life of remembering. In fact, if you fast forward twenty-five years, they have a baby ... and not by adoption! In the passage we read, when God calls them to go to a new place and begin a new

thing, the story says: “And Abram did as the Lord directed him ... He and Sarah set out for Canaan.” Had you asked them, “How old is too old to be faithful to God and to make a difference in the world?” they would’ve answered, “We don’t know. We’ll tell you when we get there!”

How old is too old ... to be an athlete, for example? Was Tom Brady too old at age forty-five? His statistics were better than most of the other NFL quarterbacks half

his age. Was Fred Couples too old to win a PGA tournament at age sixty-three? A few months ago he won the SAS Tournament with a closing round of 60. Of course, Hale Irwin (who still plays the tour competitively at age seventy-seven) would say Couples is just a kid. Was the female Irish racecar driver, Rosemary Smith, too old to drive a Formula One car at 220 miles per hour? She did so at age seventy-nine.

**H**ow old is too old ... to be an entertainer? Did you watch the Grammys this year? If so, you saw the “new” country album of the year award go to Willie Nelson (age eighty-nine). And the song of the year went to Bonnie Raitt (age seventy-three). Johnny Mathis has just begun his 2023 national tour at age eighty-seven. Then there are the actors: Harrison Ford who at eighty has a TV series as well as a new *Indiana Jones* action thriller coming out this summer, Rita Moreno who at ninety just starred in a new movie, and William Shatner who at ninety-one has a weekly TV show. Also, Shatner, who portrayed Captain Kirk in *Star Trek* sixty years ago, last year, at ninety, actually did board a rocket and travel into outer space.

**H**ow old is too old ... to be a student? You may remember the name Nola Ochs, who a few years ago received her Bachelor’s degree



from Ft. Hayes State University in Kansas at age ninety-five. But she wasn’t finished yet, so she went on and earned her Master’s degree at age ninety-eight.

**H**ow old is too old ... to enjoy exercise? I’m not a runner (though I do jog three times a day from the den to the kitchen). But, you runners probably know the name Faujah Singh. Some time ago he completed the twenty-six-mile-long Mumbai Marathon at age one hundred and four.

**A**sk any of those people, “How old is too old?,” and like Abraham and Sarah (and other biblical characters like Moses and Noah and Naomi and Anna and Simeon) they will answer, “We don’t know. We’ll tell you when we get there!”

**A**dmittedly, as time passes

there are things our bodies do not do as quickly, or as easily, or sometimes at all. Last summer my ophthalmologist said, “Did you know you have droopy eyelids?” I didn’t know that was a thing medically, nor was I sure how to answer. So, I just said, “If you think my eyelids are droopy, you ought to see my biceps!” Unlike Faujah Singh, I have also noticed that on the rare occasions when I try to jog, for me the only difference between jogging and walking is what I do with my arms. Either way, my feet move at the same speed.

**H**owever, though certain things are curtailed or deleted as time passes, time also compensates us with other things we were not equipped to do when we were younger. Before returning to North Carolina from New York City, I confessed to Marianne

Williamson that I feared I would become irrelevant, obsolete. She looked across the lunch table and said, “There are things we can only possess by living long enough. At the top of that list is Experience. Experience properly interpreted equals Wisdom. What does our world need more than wisdom born of the experience of the years? If you want to take your years and experiences and wisdom and bury it all in a hole, that’s up to you. As for me, I’m going to run for President.” And, she did. I tell you that not to tiptoe into anything political, but rather to say that her words about aging, experience, and wisdom were absolutely biblical. Abram and Sarah would’ve said the same thing.

So, let me offer three brief suggestions related to faith-and-aging.

**[1] Keep Learning.** Abram and Sarah had to do that. No one comes into the world with an inherent understanding of how to give birth to a new nation. They had to be good students in order to be faithful servants.

As I walked into a bookstore, a woman in her early nineties walked out. She had a cane in one hand and a bag of books (plural) in the other. Spotting me, she said, “Are you Michael Brown?” I assured her that I was, though

I didn’t recognize her at the moment. She told me her name, and it all came back. Her son and I had been friends when we were just starting out in the ministry. He had known my family, and I had known his. A lot of years had passed since those days. She looked at me for a moment and then said, “Wow! You’ve really gotten old!” It does something to your ego when a person in their nineties tells you how old you look. I quickly changed the subject. Pointing to the bag of books she was carrying, I said, “Apparently you are still a student of life.” She answered, “When you stop learning, you begin to die.” I have read a lot of books from that store over the years, but I don’t think any have taught me a more important lesson. “When you stop learning, you begin to die.”

Learning opportunities are ever-present. There are community events, seminars, and lectures. There are church study programs. There is the Internet. You can go on YouTube and take university courses or be instructed on how to develop new hobbies (from painting to dancing to cooking to playing a musical instrument to countless others). You can see the Seven Wonders of the World this afternoon in front of your laptop. You can tour the great museums or attend magnificent concerts. Learn the lesson of

Abram and Sarah and that woman at the bookstore. “When you stop learning, you begin to die.”

**[2] Keep Doing.** By that I am referring to things that bring you joy, that add value and meaning to your life. A dear friend of mine who lives in New York City is a performer each evening, a voice coach during the day, and a composer, as well (having just completed a new opera at age sixty-nine). I asked him recently if he ever thinks of retiring. He answered, “Why would I? I love my music, and apparently there are folks who enjoy hearing it. Anyway, what would I do – sit around and wait for the end to come?” He sounded much like the woman at the bookstore.

If there are things you enjoy, keep at them. Jesus said he wants that for us. *I have come that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.* (John 15:11) From hiking to biking to golfing to gardening to bridge to baking to a hundred other things that bring you joy, throw yourself into them. And they will throw happiness back into you.

**[3] Keep Serving.** “And Abram did as the Lord directed him ... He and Sarah set out for Canaan” to build a new home for God’s people.

Walking down a city street, I bumped into a man whom I had not seen for several months. He was the CEO of a Fortune 500 company. Wildly successful in business, he was also one of the most tense and intense persons you could ever meet. However, when we saw each other that day everything about him seemed different. He was smiling, relaxed, and laid back. I asked what was going on that made him seem new, and he told me he had begun leaving his office early two to three afternoons each week in order to volunteer at a local rehab hospital. He was not a CEO there. Instead, they knew him as the man who would feed them dinner, roll

their wheelchairs outside where they could feel the warmth of the sun, brush their hair, read their mail to them, listen to their stories, or tell them stories if they were unable to talk. He said he saw love and appreciation in their eyes and smiles. “I wish someone had told me forty years ago,” he said, “that you find life by giving it away.” Jesus said that. You remember? *Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever gives his life away for my sake, the same shall find it.* (Matthew 16:25)

The more you do to make life better for others, the better your own life will become in the process. Abram and Sarah kept

servicing God and people, and in so doing they experienced life with depth and meaning.

“And Abram did as the Lord directed him ... He and Sarah set out for Canaan.” They didn’t take their years, experience, and wisdom and bury them in a hole. Instead, they decided to use those gifts to serve God and to enhance life for others, and in so doing they found authentic life for themselves. Had you asked them, “How old is too old?” they would have answered with words we need to embrace as our own. “We don’t know. We’ll tell you when we get there!” ●



**by Nancy Fine**

*Business Administrator*

## SUMMER WORSHIP SCHEDULE

As in years past, we transition to one Sunday morning worship service at 10 a.m. on the first Sunday of May. This summer schedule runs through the end of October.

Several years ago, a member commented to me that they loved that we “split the difference between the two worship services” that we normally have ‘in season’. They said that by holding one worship service, it “allowed the 9 o’clockers and the 11 o’clockers a chance to meet and bond.” I always remember that statement when I witness the joy in the faces of our congregants the first time they see each other during our summer worship schedule.

If you are unable to attend in person, remember that you can still join us in worship via our online services. They are available to stream live on the church website, or may be watched at any other time convenient for you for the next several months. ●

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**by Maria Graham**

## MONDAY MORNING WOMEN’S BIBLE STUDY

During the month of May, the Monday Morning Women’s Bible Study will complete the second half of our study of *Epic* by Pastor Tim Challies. We will learn about the spread of Christianity in Australia and New Zealand; Zambia and Zimbabwe; India; China, Philippines, South Korea; and the United States.

In June, we will begin a new study: The God of the How and When by Kathie Lee Gifford with Rabbi Jason Sobel. The Bible reveals that God’s plans are greater than our own and that he executes those plans in his own timing. However, often we want to know all the details of exactly *how* God is working and *when* he will deliver. Kathie Lee and Rabbi Jason tell the stories of Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Joshua, and Mary (the mother of Jesus), who also wondered how and when God would come through for them. By studying their stories, we hope to discover what it means for us to trust that God’s ways are higher than our own – and what it takes to step out in faith. Each session includes clips from *The God of the Way* oratorios that bring the Scripture stories to life with contemporary orchestral arrangements.

We would love for you to come learn, laugh, and pray with us. We meet Mondays at 10 a.m. on Zoom – contact Maria Graham (mmg2352@gmail.com) for an email invitation. ●

by Nathanael Hood



## A STILL SMALL VOICE

A Movie Review by Nathanael Hood, MA, New York University

In his 1987 film *Wings of Desire*, director Wim Wenders imagines a Cold War Berlin inhabited by angels. These angels, invisible and incorporate to the humans among them, have watched over the city eons before it was even a city. They serve not as guardians, but as observers, eternal witnesses to the humans around them, privy to their innermost thoughts and feelings. In one heartbreaking scene, one of the angels named Cassiel (Otto Sander) watches helplessly as a young man commits suicide, hearing his every thought, sharing his every agony. The angel, sitting beside him until the last—head on his shoulder, hand on his back—howls in impotent, unheard agony as the young man falls out of his grasp off the side of a tall building.

I used to think that no other moment in film better captured my experiences as a hospital

chaplain than this one. Coming from every walk of life and faith tradition, we chaplains aren't called to heal or even intervene in the lives of our patients. There are doctors, therapists, and lawyers for that. When we enter the rooms of the sick, the dead, and the dying, we do so knowing we will ultimately be as helpless as Cassiel to save them. Though I've only completed one of the two necessary residencies to become a board-certified chaplain, I've already seen more than my share of death. I've prayed over the bodies of braindead car accident victims on life-support. I've held strangers in my arms as they shrieked and wailed mere feet from where their loved ones were actively coding. I've looked husbands, wives, sons, and daughters in the eyes as they learned those closest to them in this life have slipped away into the next. All I could do—all we chaplains can

do—is be present in the moment and offer what religious help we can. We are there, like Wenders' angels, to look, listen, and bear witness to the suffering humanity around us. We walk beside our patients in their pain, help them acknowledge their thoughts and feelings, and provide company when there is no other company to be had. Sometimes we talk about God. But most often, in my experience, we don't. And that's okay.

Not all chaplains are Christian, but I am, and in my tradition we call this work a "ministry of presence." Though some might reject this as superstitious nonsense, it's no snake oil pseudoscience. A landmark, oft-cited 2014 study in the *Journal of Palliative Medicine* proved that hospital spiritual care both improves recovery rates and patient quality of life. Our work is necessary and transformative.

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But it's hard. It exhausts the body and mind. It's heartbreaking, soul-wearying work. And what's worse, there aren't enough of us to go around. In 2019, more than one-third of American hospitals didn't have chaplains on their staff. Now, four years later, I can only imagine how our ranks must have been further diminished by COVID-19. (I caught the disease myself for the first time while working with COVID patients. Despite being young, relatively healthy, and triple-vaccinated, the disease incapacitated me for nearly a week.)

**B**ut now, a new documentary has arrived which supplants *Wings of Desire* as the most honest depiction of what hospital chaplaincy work feels like: Luke Lorentzen's *A Still Small Voice*. The film follows 150 days in the life of Margaret (Mati) Engel as she nears the end of her chaplaincy residency program at The Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City. Filmed amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the film accompanies Mati as she visits patients, participates in group discussions with members of her residency cohort, and reflects upon the stresses of her work. A third generation Holocaust

survivor, Engel never shies away from her conflicted feelings about God as a practicing Jew. She's open with her colleagues and patients about her difficulties having what she calls an "adult relationship with the divine." She quotes a prayer from Maimonides one moment only to question the idea of an "imminent God" the next.

**N**ot that this disqualifies her from chaplaincy. Quite the opposite, in fact. I can testify from my own experience that patients more often than not want and appreciate honesty about our convictions and doubts about God. This is evidenced in one powerful scene in the film where Mati talks with a bereaved family member of a recently deceased patient over the phone. When they ask her what Jews believe about life after death, she answers that she can only speak from her own experience. Quite simply, she doesn't know. She admits that death is scary. But she explains that she believes that "when a soul is finished with its work...death is okay." And though we can't see the relative's face, we can hear the relief and reassurance in her voice over the phone.

**L**orentzen's last film *Midnight Family* (2019) likewise examined people working on the fringes of an overworked healthcare system, following a family of paramedics operating a private ambulance service in Mexico City. As in that film, Lorentzen spends relatively little time focusing on things audiences might find "exciting." There are no breathless sprints to flatlining patients, no dramatic bedside conversions, no interviews with patients sporting grotesque injuries or exotic diseases. The one exception is a scene where Mati blows up at her supervisor after he confronts her for showing up several hours late for a shift without properly notifying anyone. But even this confrontation, though painful, is brief and quickly moved on from. As with *Midnight Family*, Lorentzen is more interested in the job's less glamorous moments of stillness and sheer, full-bodied exhaustion. Many of the shots see Mati leaning against the walls of empty hallways, sprawling on the bed in what I assume to be either her apartment or her hospital's

on-call suite, or sitting in silent reflection in group meetings. Personally, I'm glad Lorentzen took this approach; any attempt to glamorize what we do or ignore the toll it takes would be disingenuous.

Wenders' *Wings of Desire* ends with Daniel (Bruno Ganz), one of Berlin's angels, rejecting his immortality and becoming human. The end of *A Still Small Voice* reveals that Mati, too, left hospital chaplaincy after completing her residency. She now, ironically enough, lives in Cassiel and Daniel's home city of Berlin, working as a "performance artist, theologian and spiritual care practitioner." All I can say is that I understand and wish her well. Our profession can be a meatgrinder that leaves nobody, even the ones who stick around, unscathed. So why do we do it? I think Mati herself inadvertently answers this question in the film when she admits that religion can be used as a "psychological crutch" some people use instead of confronting reality. "But then," she continues, "at the same time I can't throw all of this out because there's too much here that is nourishing." Nourishing

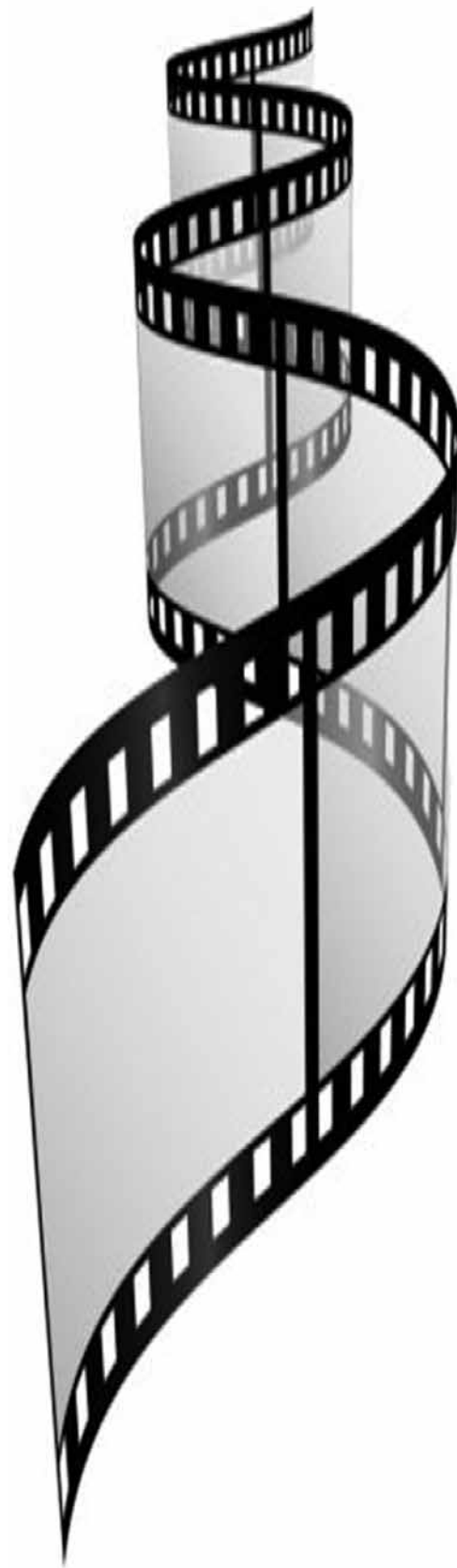
for her patients? Or somehow, I wonder, nourishing for her as well? I have my suspicions. And I think anyone else who watches this magnificent film will have them, too. ●

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<sup>1</sup> Puchalski, Christina M et al. "Improving the spiritual dimension of whole person care: reaching national and international consensus." *Journal of palliative medicine* vol. 17,6 (2014): 642-56. doi:10.1089/jpm.2014.9427

<sup>2</sup> Abrams, Amanda. "Hospital Chaplains Stick to the Heart of the Job amid Health Care Industry Changes." Religion News Service, May 31, 2019. <https://religionnews.com/2019/05/28/hospital-chaplains-stick-to-the-heart-of-the-job-amid-health-care-industry-changes/>.

<sup>3</sup> Engel, Mati. Mati Esther Engel. Accessed April 12, 2023. <https://www.matiestherengel.com/>.



Prayer Ministry Team

## GOD COMMANDS US TO PRAY FOR OTHERS

I don't have an answer to this question—only more questions. Is COVID a test of our faith? If so, why don't we hear that preached? Is God taking the broadbrush view? *Too many people for this earth to support? I'll randomly winnow out the population a bit.* Does COVID have nothing to do with us individually and our personal relationship to God? If we appeal to God in prayer, will he answer us? Is the problem that we haven't been listening?

**B**e still and know that I am God. My daughter's favorite Bible verse, Psalm 46:10, comes to mind, as does a famous quote by Evelyn Underhill (St. Evelyn) that Pastor Doug reminded me of the other day: "If God were small enough to be understood, He would not be big enough to be worshipped."

**T**oday, here in Fern Forrest, it is enough to stand silently in awe of God's creation. To be engulfed in ferns that are older than the dinosaurs. To know that, ages ago, mammoths walked where we are walking.

**E**nough to just be still and feel God's presence here with me now, and to accept his promise that he will remain with me—even to the end of the age. ●

**P**raying for others is not only a blessing for us to do, but it is also a vital part of living the Christian life. We are commanded to carry one another's burdens. One way we do this is by praying for one another. A prayer that is prayed on behalf of someone else is called intercessory prayer. Praying for another strengthens our bond with them, and it also strengthens our relationship with the Lord.

*"Carry each other's burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ."*

Galatians 6:2 (Common English Bible)

*"Keep on praying and guard your prayers with thanksgiving."*

Colossians 4:2 (Common English Bible)

**P**rayer requests come through the church office and are then distributed to team members. Each request is carefully and thoughtfully lifted up in prayer with respect and confidentiality. Please call Nancy Fine in the church office (561-276-6338) for more information or if you are interested in joining. ●



## WALKS WITH THOUGHTS

Who would have believed in Spring 2020 that the COVID-19 pandemic would still be creating havoc among us three years later? Just last month my husband and I finally succumbed to COVID. Our daughter and her husband far off in Illinois soon followed suit. COVID next felled our other daughter in Tennessee—her second experience with the disease. We were several states apart and none of us had seen each other since Christmas. Today I spoke with Pastor Doug, whose cough lingers not quite a month after he first tested positive. If you, like us, are recovering from COVID and its attendant imposed isolation, I have just the place to shake off the doldrums and enjoy God's creation without the worry of transmitting or becoming reinfected with COVID: Fern Forrest Nature Center.

Fern Forrest lies in Coconut

Creek, just west of Pompano Beach. With its 30+ species of ferns, it is a throwback to early 20th century Florida, before the Everglades were drained and the current system of canals dug. After a half-hour drive south from Delray Beach, we turn left at the entrance off Lyons Road. Leaving our car in the spacious parking area, my husband and I walk south to the boardwalk entrance, where we find ourselves in the tropical hardwood hammock. As we continue along the boardwalk, giant leather ferns and wild coffee plants rise above us; hardwood trees—pond apples and Laurel Oaks—form a canopy overhead.

We pass the Nature Center and cross over the Butterfly Bridge to the Cypress Creek Boardwalk. The swampy area below us and to our right is filled with what appear to this native Midwesterner to be ripe deep

purple elderberries. When we next look down, the marsh below us is a mass of ferns and leaves. On closer examination, we catch glimpses of the rocky banks of the original Cypress Creek which flowed freely through this forest at the beginnings of the last century.

My husband coughs and my mind wanders back to my early morning musings about COVID. Will we never be free of this plague? Yes, plague. I recall Exodus and the 10 plagues God sent upon the Egyptians. Sent from God for a reason. And yet all through this current epidemic, I have not heard anyone speak of it as I imagine those Israelites would have—as a punishment from God. I'm not a Biblical scholar, have never taken a class on religion other than an overview course of World religions when I was in college some 50 years ago. However, I am struck by the thought that something like COVID would have made it into the Old Testament and been related to the workings of God and his mood or plan.

I hesitate to even share my thoughts on this subject. Afraid that you or my pastor daughter and son-in-law will see it as, if not heresy, then at least as unsound theology. But if we thank God for the beauty around us, why not blame him for the plagues, too?



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by Rev. Greg Rapier

Associate Pastor



## IN THE WORLD ... CONNECTING CHURCH AND CULTURE

### FOOTSTEPS

When I first met Jim, I had no idea how much we had in common. In fairness, when I first met Jim, we didn't have that much in common—other than our faith. But as I aged and grew into my call, that changed. Jim was the long-tenured Associate Pastor at my church in Sacramento. That church was a purple church—equal mix of red and blue voters—and the church was among the largest in the Presbytery. Kind of like First Delray. Before becoming a pastor, Jim studied English, and he had a passion for writing and film, and when it came to religion, he came at things slant. Stop me at any point if this sounds like someone else you know.

Jim's also the one who introduced me to the Camino de Santiago, a hiking pilgrimage that crosses the French Pyrenees before extending 500 miles across Spain. Jim first told me about the pilgrimage a couple years before his retirement, then, when he retired, he and his wife sojourned together.

As soon as Jim told me about the Camino, I knew I'd like to go someday. I figured—like Jim—my Camino would have to wait until retirement. Then a grant opened up for my sabbatical next year—which I applied for—and in the process of writing that grant, I decided even if I didn't get the grant, I would find a way to go.

I shared all this to Jim a few months ago over the phone. I could hear his excitement, and I'm sure he could hear mine. Jim started rattling off tips: *"Bring walking poles, Greg—on those long 20-mile days, they'll save your knees...But, don't pack too much, ten percent of your body weight, if that...Oh, and when you arrive in France, you've got to stay at the Beilari—That's B-E-I-L-A-R-I. They serve a big communal dinner with all the pilgrims, and the hosts are just lovely—there's no better way to begin your walk."*

Jim and I next talked after the grant was complete. He was just as excited as before, but also a bit distracted. Hesitation in

his voice. I pressed him a bit, gently—the same way he pressed me when I was his congregant. After a while, he admitted his day had been rougher than expected. But he didn't elaborate.

When he died, a month later, of a cancer diagnosis he received one month prior, I realized what exactly had occurred that day over the phone. The diagnosis. My heart broke but also filled with gratitude—for the time Jim carved out for me. For the time Jim always carved out for me.

My first night of the Camino, I'm staying at the Beilari. That's B-E-I-L-A-R-I. The website's saved on my computer. Sixty euros for a bed, breakfast, and, of course, a grand, communal dinner. That first night, before beginning the Camino, before my first mile or even my first meal, when I sit down at that dinner table, as I bow my head and prepare to eat, I'm going to say a prayer. For Jim. ●

# FIRST PRESBYTERIAN

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## **Sunday Morning Worship Service**

**10 a.m.**

