

THE SPIRE



*Your
Church
Magazine*

November / December 2023



NURTURE FAITH

by **Dr. Doug Hood**

Senior Pastor

SUMMONS TO GRATITUDE

“Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure of heart.”

Psalm 73:1 (Common English Bible)

The creation story of Genesis summons God’s people to gratitude. The Lord took Adam, the first man of God’s creation, and placed him in the Garden of Eden to farm and take care of it. Additionally, Adam is invited to “Eat your fill from all of the garden’s trees.” (Genesis 2:16b). Yet God’s abundance did not end with an orchard. God realized that being well-fed isn’t enough. God declared it was not good for Adam to be alone. So, God fashioned a woman and brought the woman to Adam, who embraced her as his wife. Together, they would share in the goodness and abundance of God. For this, Adam and his wife were created. For this, Adam and his wife were summoned to gratitude, and in this gratitude, they would find their happiness. Gratitude is how we measure what is made available to us, however much or little it may be. It is a spirit that positively shapes us and folds us into a life of faith.

The Seventy-third Psalm celebrates this summons with a ringing declaration, “Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.” But as the psalmist continues to write, we discover that gratitude had nearly been lost for a moment. Immediately after the bold declaration of the first verse, there is a confession that the psalmist’s feet had almost stumbled. The cause is quickly identified: human eyes turned away from what God is providing to look upon the prosperity of another. Comparison is measured between what we have and what another enjoys. The result of this comparison is a perceived imbalance—the other has more! Jealousy poisons the heart, and bitterness, or anger, or both presses against a heart once pure. This sight of another’s prosperity created a sickness of heart and fueled a cynical spirit. And the psalmist’s feet nearly stumble beneath.

The antidote to this sickness, to this cynicism, is then announced: The

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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.

psalmist went into the sanctuary of God. Eyes were directed away from another, and their prosperity to see God once again. In prayer, in reading the Bible, and in worship, we are reminded once again that we deserve nothing. Yet, in God's grace, we have. We may have little or much, as the apostle Paul declares in one of his letters, but we have. Eyes directed back to God returns to us a true perspective—to view life, as it were, through the eyes of God. In the creation story of Genesis, Adam is placed in an orchard. Yet, careful attention to the story reveals that Adam is not to eat of one tree. Though this detail holds rich theological implications, let this one thing be understood: we were never created to have it all. Eyes turned away from God strive for much. But eyes turned toward God release gratitude for what we already have.

The Bible's summons to gratitude does not minimize the pain of loss and disappointment. Each is experienced during life, though some may experience both in greater measure than others. There are people who have longed to marry and never do. Others have wrestled with the loss of marriage, either through divorce or the death of a spouse. Health challenges or the loss of a child challenge the maintenance of a robust faith. The apostle Paul speaks of an unnamed "thorn in the flesh" and asks God on three occasions that God remove this pain from him. God does not. What is important is that Paul turns his attention from his struggle to focus on something beyond himself—the building of the church. Paul demonstrates that experiencing gratitude is possible only when one can direct attention from what one lacks to the presence of God. And God promised Paul that God's grace continued to abide. ●

NO ROCK TO HIDE UNDER...

Dear friends,

As many of you have heard through a letter or from the pulpit, as good stewards of the church, we are starting the process of planning for Dr. Hood's retirement in approximately four years. The process selected is a co-pastor model for Dr. Hood and Rev. Rapier. Here are some questions that we have received so far:

1. **Why now?** While it is sometimes comforting to put our heads in the sand and ignore a change we can see ahead, the future is coming regardless—and we need to prepare! Dr. Hood, as a good steward of the church, has been transparent in his wish to retire around four years from now and wants, as do we all, a smooth transition to new pastoral leadership.

2. **Why co-pastoring?** You have likely heard Session members and Dr. Hood say that the talent pool for experienced pastors who have anywhere near the talents of Rev. Rapier is almost non-existent. And it is important to know that other churches have taken a keen interest in Rev. Rapier.

Co-pastoring is the sole option available to us as a Presbyterian Church congregation that will enable Rev. Rapier to automatically and immediately become our pastor upon Dr. Hood's retirement. We want to keep our wonderful Rev. Rapier at First Presbyterian—it's as simple as that!

3. **What will change for me, as a congregant or friend of First Presbyterian?** There is no change for you. Your relationship with the pastors does not change. You may see more of Rev. Rapier in the pulpit, and perhaps other shifts in their sharing of church leadership tasks, but they are both accessible to you as before.

4. **How can I help?** You can help by joining us

for the town halls. Ask questions. Come to the Congregational meeting in March 2024, where congregants will vote to approve the recommendation to the Presbytery to have Dr. Hood and Rev. Rapier be co-pastors. And, most importantly, support our pastors as we make this transition. You can do this by keeping our pastors and our congregation in your prayers and offering them your personal encouragement in the coming months.

5. **Who can answer any questions I have?** Besides the opportunities offered by the town halls, you can also address questions by writing, calling, or speaking to our Business Administrator, Nancy Fine, and she will forward them to the Co-Pastoring Committee consisting of Mary Martinéz, Megan Buck, and Anne Gaudree—and they will get back to you.

We are truly blessed at First Presbyterian to have two wonderful pastors who are dedicated to the current and the future success of our church! Let's make them shine even brighter in the next few years as co-pastors by giving them our full support! ●



by Grace Cameron Hood

Director of Children and Family Ministry

SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS

Starting November 5th, Sunday School and Bible Bunch will be only during the second service at 11 a.m. Nursery will be provided at both services.

Sunday School is revved up and going well. The Nursery (Birth – 3) is lovingly attended by a group of wonderful caretakers. Bible Bunch (3 through Kindergarten) continues with the creative and careful Alice Barrett and Iva Branscombe. Sandy McGilvray joyfully leads the Primary Class (First Grade through Fourth Grade) and Grace Hood challenges the God Squad (Fifth Grade on up). At the present Sandy and Grace are using 13 Very Big Mistakes People Made and What God Did About Them. All children are welcome to join!

All children are also invited to join the Children's Choir. Work is progressing on a Christmas Pageant that will

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take place on Sunday, December 10th at 6 p.m. The older children, 5th grade and up, are learning to play the chimes. If your child is interested in either, please contact Birgit Fioravante (birgit@firstdelray.com).

Some future information:

This year, Christmas Eve is on a Sunday. We will be having three services at 5 p.m., 7 p.m., and 9:30 p.m. The 5 p.m. service, *Candles and Carols*, will have a special Time for the Children. The 7 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. are *Traditional Candlelight* services. There will be a special Time with the Children at the 7 p.m. service only.

On Christmas Eve Day and New Year's Eve Day, there will be only one service at 11 a.m. and there will be no Sunday School. ●

MEET THE CHILDREN'S LEADERS

SANDY MCGILVRAY

I am so blessed to be the 1st through 4th grade Sunday School teacher at First Presbyterian. Actually, I think it is the children who teach me.

One of my not-so-pleasant childhood memories was being in Sunday School and feeling so out of place. I would sit in class in the back row, hugging the wall, praying I would not be called on. It is amazing how God can take a bad experience and turn it into something great. It is from that memory that I decided I never wanted another child to feel so lost and uncertain in church. God set my course and led me through my journey of teaching.

My return on investment has been immeasurable. My compensation is hugs, smiles, laughter, and wonderful prayer time. Each child through the years has impacted my life in a way they will never know.

Thank you, First Presbyterian parents, for your support, and thank you, Grace Hood, for blessing me with this ministry. ●



Stay tuned to the next issue to meet more of our wonderful team.

by *Connie Timmons*

HOLLY HOUSE HOLIDAY BAZAAR

Bazaar Update! First off, thank you for your continued support of the ministry of Holly House and the Holiday Bazaar. We met many of you at our Open House in October. We continue to welcome you to Holly House for your holiday shopping. Stop by to see items you may have missed and new items on display.

Holly House hours are 10 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Saturday shopping from 10 a.m. to noon begins the Saturday after Thanksgiving, November 25th. The last day for shopping is Thursday, December 21st. It is also possible to shop by appointment by contacting Linda Prior (Linda.Prior42@gmail.com, 561-702-0245).

Check your lists! Hope to see you soon!

First Presbyterian Church of Delray
Enter the long church driveway.
Follow the signs to Holly House.
Enter the door where there is handicapped parking.

Check out our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/CleverCrafter> ●

Holly House is a mission of the First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach.



by Nathanael Hood



MY BIG FAT GREEK WEDDING 3

A Movie Review by Nathanael Hood, MA, New York University;
MDiv, Princeton Theological Seminary

It's been over twenty years since the Portokalos family stole our hearts in Joel Zwick's *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, and the years have not been particularly kind to everyone's favorite Greek-American family. Both Michael Constantine and Bess Meisler, the actors who portrayed Gus, the family's lovably stubborn patriarch, and Yiayia, their cat-like, perpetually-cowled grandmother, have passed away. The actors who once played children have grown into young adults, and the formerly young adults are now deep into middle age. There was never a question of whether there would be another film in this beloved franchise—not after the first film made over \$360 million on a \$5 million budget, and the sequel a hefty profit too, thank you very much. The question, instead, was how the franchise would deal with the loss of two of its most beloved characters.

But now, two decades later, lead actress Nia Vardalos has rallied the troops one last time for this latest, and possibly last, installment in the Portokalos saga, helming the director's chair for the first time in the

franchise she created. And though the story and comedy are as soufflé-light and baklava-sweet as the first two films, there's an unmistakable pall of sadness and wistfulness hovering above it all. Consider Lainie Kazan's performance as Maria, the family's materfamilias—the self-described neck to her late husband's head of the family—whose sparkle has been dimmed by the early stages of dementia. Kazan, now well into her eighties, only appears in two scenes, one near the beginning, the other near the middle. But her quiet dignity and gravitas in both scenes as she struggles to communicate with her adult children suffices for her to emerge as the heart and soul of the film.

What, then, is the story? It hardly matters, honestly, as little more than an excuse to get the extended cast on a plane to a small island in Greece where they can bounce off each other. It seems Gus has left a diary of his life after he immigrated to the States as a young man, and his final wish was for his children to deliver it to his three childhood friends

in the Old Country. There's a family reunion, a wedding, and a colorful cast of new characters to annoy and ultimately endear themselves to the Portokalos clan. (Newcomer Melina Kotselou in particular steals the show as the island's exasperatingly chipper non-binary mayor.) But still the sadness pervades as they find the once thriving village depopulated and empty. Skeletons emerge from more than one closet, and while we trust that the family will ultimately weather the storm as they always have, the going is unsteady.

If there's one moment that truly defines the film, it's Kazan's second scene where she responds to the news that her late husband had a son hidden from the rest of the family for decades. Though obviously confused and heartbroken, she says with the steely resolve that served her and her family for years that “we always have room for more love in the family.” That, indeed, is the conviction that raises this film from a tourism ad for Greece into something more vital, immediate, and moving. May it be so for all the rest of us, too. ●

DEACONS' CORNER

Food pantries, medical research, alumni giving, humanitarian aid—so many charities deserve our donations. **BUT**, Christmas is coming, and that means gifts under the tree for children. The Deacons' Christmas Tree Project has contributed to five local organizations for over fifty years. They are:

Achievement Centers for Children & Families

Adopt-A-Family of the Palm Beaches

AVDA (Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse)

Boys and Girls Clubs of Palm Beach County

Milagro Center

These groups, in turn, distribute 300 gift cards to underserved families. Please look for a Deacon by the decorated tree in the Lobby following church services from November 19th through December 10th. They will be holding a large red package to receive your generous gifts. Thank you!

There are three ways to participate:

1. Mail a check to the church office with "Deacons' Xmas Tree" on the memo line.
2. Drop off a check with "Deacons' Xmas Tree" on the memo line in the Lobby offering box before or after either church service.
3. Make an online donation on the church website. Please include "Deacons' Xmas Tree" in the notes section.

The deadline for all gifts to be received is Sunday, December 10th. ●

by Maryann Rana

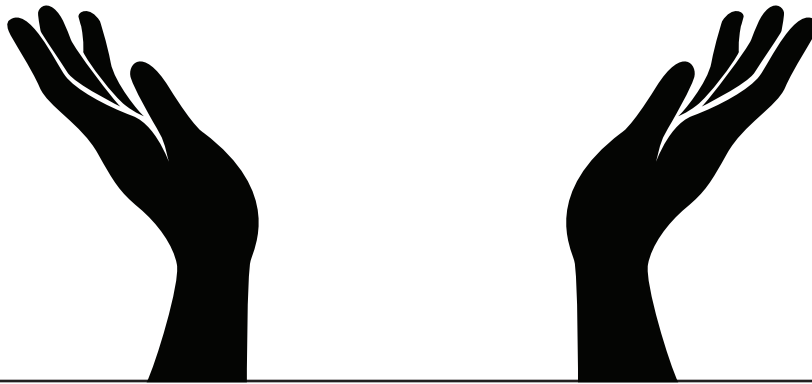
Prayer Ministry Team

PRAYING FOR OTHERS

It's very obvious in scripture that the Lord wants us to pray for others as we are given many commands concerning prayer to do so. In Jeremiah 33:6, the Lord proclaims, "but now I will heal and mend them. I will make them whole and bless them with an abundance of peace and security." Philippians 4:6-7 says, "Don't be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus."

The Prayer Team of First Presbyterian of Delray Beach prays for you and with you. We pray for your concerns whatever they may be. We pray for someone or for something, a need in your life or the life of another.

Prayer 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. ●



by Jeanne Heavilin

BACK TO BASICS ANGEL PROGRAM

Our congregation has been supporting the Back to Basics Angel Program for over 22 years.

Back to Basics is an all-volunteer organization whose mission is to enable children to go to school with dignity and to be ready to learn. This program was started in 1984 when its founder, Beverly Perham, realized that there were many children in our community that don't even have the basic necessities, and became determined to provide basics to some of these children during the Holidays.

Initially operating out of her home, the program has grown and now provides brand new sneakers, socks, underwear, and a toy to over 10,000 children in Palm Beach County each year.

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Without this, these children can't even participate in physical education.

80-85% of these gifts are provided by congregations and organizations throughout the county. Donations allow Back to Basics to purchase the rest. Our Mission Outreach Ministry commits to serving 70 students at Pine Grove Elementary School in Delray Beach. Each year our team receives Angel tags identifying local students and their sizes so we can personalize our shopping for them. Each student receives a large holiday gift bag containing a pair of brand new sneakers, 5 pairs of socks, 5 pairs of underpants, and a toy, individually wrapped and tagged for delivery.

Your generous giving allows us to include this in the Mission Outreach Ministry budget each year. On behalf of 70 grateful children in Delray, Thank You!!! ●

 Back to Basics



WORSHIP SERVICE TIME CHANGE

It is that time of year when we transition to our “in-season” Sunday morning worship schedule. Beginning November 5th and continuing through the end of April, we are holding two services at 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. They are identical except for adding the Time with the Children at the 11 a.m. service. Children’s Sunday School is during the 11 a.m. service only. Nursery care is available for both services.

Don’t forget to change your clocks and “fall back” on Sunday, November 5th.

Make note that on Sunday, December 24th, and Sunday, December 31st, as done previously, there is only one worship service at 11 a.m. ●

CHRISTMAS EVE

Celebrate the birth of the Christ Child on Sunday, December 24th. There are four worship opportunities that day.

Join us for our Christmas Eve morning worship service at 11 a.m. [Make note that there is no 9 a.m. service.]

Then, the joyous evening will begin with our 5 p.m. *Candles and Carols* service. Rev. Greg Rapier will lead the service with a special time for the children.

At 7 p.m., Dr. Doug Hood will lead a *Traditional Candlelight* service, with a special time for the children.

And lastly, the evening concludes with the 9:30 p.m. *Traditional Candlelight* service, led by Dr. Doug Hood.

All services will be livestreamed. ●

BEWARE OF GIFT CARD SCAMS

It is that time of year when people's hearts are full of generosity. Scammers know this and try hard to exploit good people's intentions.

Have you ever received an email asking, "Are you free now? Let me know ASAP." Or, "Can you do me a favor?" When you respond, the reply asks you to purchase gift cards and give them the card numbers. These types of emails are called spoofing.

The most widely used spoofing attacks occur when the sender forges email headers to look like the correspondence is from a legitimate source. Emails like these generally appear to come from the heads of organizations, like the professional staff of nonprofits. Because the email request looks like it comes from a name people know, they are more apt to trust the contents.

There are ways to tell if an email is legitimate. First, always check the email address of the sender. These cybercriminals are excellent at using email addresses similar to the organization they are impersonating. Our professional staff have email addresses that end in firstdelray.com. The church staff will NEVER ASK FOR GIFT CARDS OR MONEY by email. If you are in doubt, take a few minutes and call the church office for verification. ●

YOUR TRAVEL-SIZE HYGIENE KIT DONATIONS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

We have all traveled, staying in a hotel room or a cruise ship cabin. In the bathroom is an arrangement of items to make our stay easier: a bar of soap, and small bottles of shampoo, conditioner, and lotion. We may have brought our favorite product from home without needing the complimentary items provided to us. So, we put them in our suitcase and bring them home.

Or, after our dental visit, the dental office gives us a new toothbrush, toothpaste, dental floss, or mouthwash. We take them home, put them in a cabinet in our bathroom, and forget about them.

For years, First Presbyterian has been collecting these items. We collect these travel-size things in the basket at the Welcome Center in the Lobby. Then, our children sort them into bins in a storage room. Once we have a generous supply, the Children's Sunday School gathers from each category and makes hygiene kits for the under-resourced in our community.

We are partnering with First Presbyterian Church of Boynton Beach's Food Pantry to distribute these kits. This sister church in our neighboring community provides food to approximately 50 families each week. By giving these kits to them, donated by our generous members and assembled by our children, we are making a difference to people who need a helping hand. ●

WHAT'S BETTER THAN ONE FELLOWSHIP BY THE SEA.....

TWO FELLOWSHIPS BY THE SEA!

That is exactly what we will have starting on Sunday, November 5th, when we return to our schedule of two Sunday services. Since we relaunched our Fellowship Hour as Fellowship by the Sea on September 10th, many of you have expressed your happiness at returning to the warmth and sense of community that our time of fellowship provides. Since our 9 a.m. service goers haven't had the opportunity to share these special times with us in past years, the various Ministries of First Delray are collaborating to provide two opportunities for fellowship each Sunday as our two-service schedule begins. The Fellowship Team is coordinating the effort, but it is truly a wonderful team effort including all our Ministries.



So...PLEASE!

- Stay after the 9 a.m. service for coffee and snacks!
- Come early for the 11 a.m. service for coffee and snacks!
- Stay after the 11 a.m. service for heartier snacks, punch, iced tea and water!

Come early...stay late...and enjoy fellowship and refreshments with your First Delray family. ●



OUR 2024 ANNUAL DINNER AND DISTINGUISHED PREACHER

Our 2024 Annual Dinner and Distinguished Preacher program are coming in early January. On Friday, January 5th, our Annual Dinner is at Benvenuto Restaurant (1730 N. Federal Hwy, Boynton Beach).

Our guest speaker for the dinner is Rev. Susan Sparks. She is an ex-trial lawyer turned standup comedian and Baptist minister and is America's only female comedian with a pulpit. Rev. Sparks, a North Carolina native, has been featured in O Magazine, the New York Times, and several television networks.

Our evening includes a social hour, a sit-down dinner, a thought-provoking speaker, and live entertainment coordinated by Don Cannarozzi. The cost to attend this much-anticipated event is \$40 per person. Both the church and Benvenuto Restaurant underwrite this event. We provide scholarships for deserving parishioners who may not otherwise be able to attend. We would be grateful if you could help offset these costs.

Then, on Sunday morning, January 7th, Rev. Sparks will deliver a message from the pulpit. Make sure to mark your calendars and invite your friends and neighbors to hear her sermon on gratitude. ●



THE CENTER FOR CHRISTIAN STUDIES PRESENTS DR. MICHAEL B. BROWN

Join us on Sunday, March 19th, as Dr. Michael B. Brown returns to our pulpit as part of our Center for Christian Studies program. Dr. Brown is a favorite of our congregation and will be preaching on gratitude. Make sure to mark this date down on your 2024 calendar. ●



by Birgit Fioravante

THE CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

Come one, come all!

On Sunday, December 10th at 6 p.m. you are invited to join the Children's Choir in celebrating Jesus' birthday from a child's point of view. You will hear the story that never grows old along with some of your favorite carols, and see the children dressed up as all the characters from that first Christmas night, including the animals!

And if you stick around for our reception afterward, you can congratulate the players and enjoy a piece of birthday cake in honor of Jesus.

Hope to see you there! ●



Christmas Pageant, December 11, 2022

CHRISTMAS EVE OFFERING FOR MILAGRO CENTER “STORYMAKERS” PROGRAM

We look across our local and international communities each year to identify people in extreme need. This year, let us share the miracle of Christmas with our Christmas Eve Offering as we help at-risk children in our community who continue to struggle with learning losses after missing two years in the classroom during the pandemic.

What is Milagro? Milagro means “miracle” in Spanish, and Milagro Center in Delray Beach was founded in 1997 to produce miracles, helping at-risk children in the community succeed in school and move on to productive, self-sufficient lives. They serve 150 K-12th grade students and their families year-round in their fully transitional after-school and summer camp programs. Their programs combine academic support, cultural arts, mentoring, life skills, and career exploration in a small, supportive environment.

The New Need: The experienced staff at Milagro has assessed the additional challenge of bridging the learning gap of these post-pandemic K-5th grade students, improving their literacy skills, ensuring they are reading on or above grade level, developing writing skills, and stimulating their creativity. In response, they have developed “StoryMakers”, a program to bridge this gap and open their minds to new worlds, new adventures, and new ideas through their creativity. This program is designed to get kids to write and enjoy the process as they conceive, write, and illustrate their own storybooks. Their books will be professionally published and given to the student author, their family, and the Milagro Library and Center donors. Imagine the excitement of being a published author and boosting their self-confidence and self-esteem that it fosters!

StoryMakers will be integrated into Milagro’s existing, successful K-5th grade S.T.A.R.S. (Standing Together Achieving Recognition and Success) curriculum of Academics, Cultural Arts, and Mentoring, featuring daily lessons in Language Arts, Creative Writing, and Illustration.

Currently serving 43 K-5th grade students, StoryMakers will require funding (\$25,000) to cover the additional staff to spearhead and guide the project, purchase book supplies, and cover the publication and distribution costs of the student’s books. While the total amount may be beyond our reach, we aim to raise some needed funds.

What better way to share the “Miracle of Christmas” than to give these students the gift of literacy and creativity, tools that will serve them for the rest of their lives? ●



by Dr. Doug Hood

Senior Pastor

*The following is from **Confronting Life's Challenges: Sermons on the Struggles We Face** which features sermons by Doug Hood, Greg Rapier, and John "Skip" Randolph*

ARE YOU STRUGGLING WITH GUILT?

1 John 1:5-9

Listen for God's Word:

"If we claim, 'We don't have any sin,' we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."

1 John 1:8 (Common English Bible)

In January of 2000, I stood in the pulpit in Irving, Texas and said, "Thank you" for the privilege that had been mine for nearly six years to be the pastor of that church. That past week the membership of that church had received in the mail my resignation as their pastor. I had now accepted a call to Pennsylvania.

Following that service, a man and woman approached me and asked to join the church. I asked, "Did you hear that I am leaving as the pastor?" "Yes!" was their reply. "That is why we are ready to join!"

That is not what they really said. What they said was that

they did hear that I was leaving and that they were sorry to see me go. Nonetheless, they had been visiting for several months and had fallen in love with the membership of the church. They asked again if I would receive them into membership.

When someone wishes to join a Presbyterian Church there are a few simple questions that must be asked. These questions help to determine how an individual will join. "Have both of you been baptized?" "Yes." "Are you now an active member of another church?" "No." Their answers indicated that they would join by Reaffirmation of Faith. "What's that?" they asked. It's an honest question and one

that is often asked. "The first question," I responded, "is do you acknowledge your need for God's forgiveness in the person of Jesus Christ?" "No," they answered. "What?" I asked them somewhat surprised. "No, we do not need God's forgiveness." "Pastor, my wife and I love Jesus very much and are disciplined in how we live. We live in a manner that is consistent with what God asks. We simply do not disobey God."

After I caught my spiritual balance I said to them how sorry I was but that I just remembered that the next Sunday the leaders of the church received new members was the first Sunday after I had left.

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Pay attention to our lesson this morning. The Bible tells us clearly, in both the Old and New Testament, that if we claim that we are innocent before God we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. God calls us to reach down to the bottom of the human soul, to cast a light in the dark places where our sin is hidden, so God can deal with it.

My friend, Howard Edington once said, honesty brings healing; secrets bring shame. God wants to remove our shame. That is accomplished by our honesty with God. It is not necessary to tell any other person. But, you have to be honest before God, to reach down to the hidden places of your soul and give your stories to God. God will take your stories; the stories that bring you shame, and nail them to the cross. And, God will then give you another story, a story of forgiveness and honor.

The great actor and film director Woody Allen claims to be an atheist. On one occasion he was asked the question, “If there is a God, and if that God should speak to you, what would you most want to hear him say?” Woody Allen’s answer speaks for all people. He said, “If there is a God who should speak to me, I would most want to hear him say three words, ‘You are

forgiven.’” John says the only way you will ever hear from God the words “you are forgiven” is if you speak the words, “I have sinned.”⁵

When the King of Prussia visited a Berlin prison in the 17th century all the inmates crowded around him professing their innocence. Each one claimed they had not committed the crimes for which they were imprisoned. Everyone made the same claim, everyone except one man. He remained in his cell and never spoke. The King was intrigued by that. He approached the prisoner and asked, “What are you charged with?” “Theft,” answered the prisoner. “Are you guilty?” asked the King. “Yes, my Lord, I am guilty. I am receiving what I deserve.” The King then turned to the guards and said, with considerable urgency, get this man out of here and release him! I don’t want him contaminating all these innocent people. Well, that speaks to our teaching from John this morning, doesn’t it? There is something about being honest with God that sets us free from yesterday’s failures.

How does Jesus do that? Jesus takes the blame, the responsibility for our sins. Understand, someone has to take the blame and responsibility. If no one does, then it is no different

than a declaration that the offense was no big deal. Make no mistake, friends. Sin is a big deal. Think about your own sin that you have tucked away from everyone. How does it make you feel? Do you need further convincing that your sins are a big deal? Sin sours our life, poisons the soul, and consumes us with darkness.

Life is diminished by our sin and we live with the weight of guilt and shame. Sin is serious because it has serious consequences upon the quality of our life. So, God takes our sin seriously. That is because God takes us seriously. God wants for us a life unfettered by guilt and shame, a life that is lived in the daylight, a life that is lived in joy. So in his Son, Jesus, God says, “I take the blame, I take the consequences, all the way to the cross where they are destroyed.”

Sometime ago a historian writing for *The Atlantic* magazine suggested that June 6, 1944 is the most significant day in modern history. That was the day of the Normandy invasion where thousands of lives were lost. But, did you know that the full responsibility for that massive invasion fell squarely upon the shoulders of General Dwight D. Eisenhower? The night before the

invasion, this four-star General spent hours visiting the young soldiers under his command. He spoke to them with affection, like a father to a son: like he was speaking to each of them for the last time. Then as wave after wave of planes and boats and troops headed off into the darkness Eisenhower stood transfixed, his eyes filled with tears.

Eisenhower then returned to his quarters and with his own hand wrote a message that was to be delivered to the White House in the event the invasion failed. Of

course, the invasion didn't fail so the message was never delivered to the White House. But, it did make it into history. Here is what Eisenhower wrote: "Our landings have failed. The troops, the air, the navy did all that bravery and devotion to duty could do. If any blame attaches to this event, it is mine alone."

Of all the bravery that day, this may have been the bravest of them all, argues the historian. The General took the blame before the blame needed to be taken. That is

what we see in the life of Jesus. Jesus says, "I know you are going to fail. It is serious. It can darken your life forever. Come to me. I take the blame, all of it." It is, my dear friends, the only way we can ever hope to move past the guilt and shame of our brokenness and enjoy God forever. Amen. ●

⁵David L. Allen, *Preaching the Word: 1-3 John: Fellowship in God's Family*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2013), 31.

SESSION REPORT

During August and September, the Session received five new members. They also approved the schedule for serving communion in 2024. Additionally, Session approved the Christmas Eve worship schedule: 5 p.m.—led by Rev. Greg Rapier (Candles and Carols with a special time for the children); 7 p.m.—led by Dr. Doug Hood (Traditional Candlelight with a special time for the children); and 9:30 p.m.—led by Dr. Doug Hood (Traditional Candlelight). They also approved that there will be only one worship service at 11 a.m. on Sundays, December 24th and December 31st. ●

GIFTS TO OUR CHURCH

Holly House from Mary Claire Ged and Daniel Mallett, in loving memory of Mary Farah Ged.

Memorial Garden Fund in loving memory of John J. and Janet M. Loennecker, by daughter Karen and son-in-law, Don Carter.

Music Fund from Jean Irwin.

Operating Fund from Mary and Brian Sullivan, in loving memory of Glenn B. Sullivan.

Remembrance Fund from the estate of Susanne Emery. ●

*Giving
Our Gifts*

NEW MEMBERS

Lori Fetizanan

Pat Fetizanan

Benjamin McCaul

Sandra McCaul



WELCOME!



ETERNAL LIVES

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

– **Keith Walker** –
July 20, 2023

– **Carole Bierly** –
September 20, 2023

– **Lorna Rogers** –
September 25, 2023

– **Lawrence Betsill** –
October 15, 2023

– **Marie Buss** –
October 15, 2023

by Glenn Barton

REFLECTIONS FROM THE CHURCH'S HOLY LAND TRIP

September 6, 2023 — Day 1

Day One of our Holy Land Tour with First Pres of Delray Beach was amazing! We met our charming and extremely knowledgeable tour guide, Leo, who would be with us every day in Israel. First stop was Qumran, the home of the Essenes, who wrote and protected the Dead Sea Scrolls. Then Pastor Greg reaffirmed our baptisms in the Jordan River in the same spot where John baptized Jesus (Qasr al-Yahud). We visited the oldest city of the world, Jericho, and saw the history of the walls, then went to the Sycamore tree where Zacchaeus found Jesus, where we reflected upon when each of us found Jesus in our own ways. The day finished with a dip in the Dead Sea, the lowest point on earth. We felt the majesty around us as we were floating like a cork and looked up to the heavens under the clouds and mist.



Reaffirming Baptism in the Jordan River

September 7, 2023 — Day 2

This morning we climbed to the top of Herodium, King Herod's Palace and final resting place just outside of, and overlooking, Bethlehem. It is located at a strategic high point from where he could survey Jericho and all the lands around. It was an outstanding hike to the top where we were surrounded by the over 2000+ year old construction. From there we went just a few miles to Shepherds Fields, where the angels of the Lord came and announced the news of the Messiah's birth to the family of shepherds, 3 generations—grandfather, father, and pre-teen son. We stood at the site of the fields, and our guide Leo pointed out the Church of the Nativity less than 3 miles away. We imagined a beam of light coming down from the stars to mark the holy spot, and how fast they must have run to see the good news! Pastor Greg led us in a reading of Luke 2, verses 8-20 with our eyes closed and we focused on specific words or phrases that we meditated on individually, "Lectio Divina" style.

We had the good fortune of driving the short and hilly distance to the Church of the Nativity, and revered the Greek and Byzantine adornments at the site of the birth of our Lord. We waited with many other groups of pilgrims for a moment to touch the spot of the birth of Christ marked with a star on the floor of the cave. A moving and joyous day with healthy and safe trekking!



Herodium

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September 8, 2023 — Day Three

First stop this morning was Caesarea National Park (Caesarea by the Sea), where we took in another of King Herod's great building accomplishments. This city still has a functioning amphitheater, and remarkable ruins of Herod's Palace directly on the water that is believed to be used by Pontus Pilate after Herod's death. We stood in the hippodrome where racing chariots used to take death-defying turns at top speed and felt the rush of the horses fighting for position as they make the final turn. From there we went to Mount Carmel, where we took in the panoramic views of the Mediterranean and the Galilee valley and reflected on the 1 Kings scripture of Elijah's "Bar B Que challenge" against the prophets of Baal. The final stop of today was Megiddo and its 20+ layers of civilization, and a sacrificial altar dating back to 2500 BC...still standing but no longer in use! Megiddo overlooks the lush and beautiful valley of Armageddon. We contemplated the rich history of violent battles there, including the future final battle on earth before the second coming of Christ. Megiddo has a secret underground water tunnel to access a nearby stream in the event of a siege. We walked 200+ steps down the side of the giant cistern to the entrance of the tunnel, and then through the tunnel and up the other side outside of the complex. It was a dark, rock cut, cave-like tunnel with a steep decline, and we all felt an overwhelming sense of accomplishment having finished the trek. We brushed ourselves off and headed to our new hotel overlooking the Sea of Galilee for some dinner and rest before we head out tomorrow to where Christ's ministry begins...Capernaum!



Caesarea National Park



Megiddo Water Tunnel

September 9, 2023 — Day Four

Today we truly walked in the footsteps of Jesus. We toured the northern crown of the Sea of Galilee and walked through the towns where Jesus did most of his teaching and healing. We peered into a 1st century synagogue at Magdala and pictured Jesus on the floor with scrolls open over the stone table. At Tabgha we went to the site of the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand (loaves and fishes) and walked on the stone stairs where it happened. Capernaum was a hot spot for miracles and the site of Peter's house where Jesus stayed when teaching. After lunch we took a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee. Halfway around our sail, the captain cut off the engines so we could focus on the word of God as a gentle warm breeze accompanied us. We finished the day atop the Mount of Beatitudes where Pastor Greg read the Beatitudes

continued from page 22

to us. Today's tour gave us a clear understanding of the proximity of these holy sites. We clearly imagined the people of these cities following Jesus from town to town to witness the miracles, thereby swelling to the crowds we read about and how he delivered the word standing in a boat off the shore. Amazing day!



Tabgha



Capernaum



Sea of Galilee Boat

September 10, 2023 — Day Five

Today we slowed down the pace a bit and focused on experiencing the beauty and lushness of the northern Galilee area. We started with a hike through Tel Dan where we saw the amazing 4000-year-old mud brick “Gate of Abraham” that is referred to in several Old Testament writings. Then we continued to Caesarea Philippi where Peter declared Jesus the Messiah, and Jesus replied that he would build the church “upon this rock.” We sat on a rock bench and Pastor Greg led us through a complete First Pres Delray Sunday Service. He sermoned that Jesus changed everything in the way that people could access God, and that anyone can have a truly deep and meaningful individual relationship with Him. We climbed up to the Greek Temple of Pan and marveled at the 1st century AD rock cut alcoves that once held pagan idols. The day concluded with an exhilarating hike to the top of Mount Bental in the Golan Heights, where we took in beautiful panoramic views of the landscape and pasted them in our mind’s Bible so they will always pop up when we read or reflect on the Word of God.

September 11, 2023 — Day Six

Today we completed our tour of the northern Galilee territory. First stop was the Cana Catholic Wedding Church, the site of the first recorded miracle...turning water into wine at a wedding. We listened to the Gospel of the wedding as Pastor Greg read to us standing next to a 1st century AD wine jug at the site of the miracle. From there we went on to the Stella Maris Monastery which is a beautiful Carmelite church where the altar is built directly over the exposed cave that Elijah lived in. We had a quick stop at the top of Mount Carmel in Haifa and took in the beauty of the Baha’i Garden, and then moved onto the unbelievable Church of the Annunciation built on the site where the angel Gabriel came to Mary and announced that she would give birth to Jesus. The exact point where Gabriel descended into Mary’s house is marked with an altar inside the actual cave/house where Mary lived. Above Mary’s house is a huge opening in the floor to the sanctuary above. It is an incredible feeling to be walking on and touching holy ground where

continued on page 24

miracles occurred and angels appeared! The church receives beautiful mosaic murals of Mary from all the countries of the world, and they are prominently displayed throughout the church and around the grounds. The day wrapped up with a bus ride into Jerusalem where tomorrow we start our two-day tour tracing the last week of Christ's life.



Greg Reading at Wine Jug at Cana Catholic Church



Virgin Mary's House at Church of the Annunciation

September 12, 2023 — Day Seven

Today we started to trace the steps of Jesus during Holy Week. It's amazing to walk from holy site to holy site and realize how fast everything happened that week. These sites are literally steps away from each other; and walking from site to site gives one an idea of the timeline of events. We started at the top of the Mount of Olives and took in the majesty of the walled City of Peace. The Dome of the Rock is the centerpiece of the skyline, but the Wall of Jerusalem is the remarkable monument to the struggles and wars that the Jews faced for thousands of years.

From there we started the Palm Sunday path down a steep hill to the Garden of Gethsemane which is only about 1/4 mile directly below the Mount of Olives. There we walked the gardens, from which Jesus prayed and became distraught over the events that were about to unfurl.

As we know, Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane to prepare himself for the passion, and he asked his disciples to stay nearby in prayer, but they fell asleep on a rock instead. The rock they slept on is called the Rock of Agony and is the focal point of the Basilica of the Agony that houses it. There was no mass when we were there, so we went inside and took in the international dome art, touched the Rock of Agony, and empathized with Jesus, who was alone when he needed support from his disciples. We continued to the base of the Wall of Jerusalem and entered through the Dung Gate into the most recently excavated area directly underneath "Robinson's Arch". Robinson's Arch is a fragment of an arch that once held a flight of stairs for VIPs like Herod and high priests to enter the Holy City. The scale of the wall and its height is greater than I imagined. The section under Robinson's Arch has been

continued from page 24

excavated recently (last 40 years) to reveal the Cardo (Main Street leading to the Temple), foundational ruins of buildings outside of the wall, and the Teaching Stairs where Jesus addressed his disciples, where we enjoyed a reading from John that Pastor Greg delivered. The wall that surrounds the city today is Ottoman, but the famous Western Wall is the only surviving section of the 2nd temple (built 516 BC). The Western Wall is the epicenter of the Jewish religion, and we were able to offer our prayers alongside of the devout Jewish men and women who are reading and praying at the foot of the Wall every day. A girls' school is in the same plaza, and we were surrounded by beautiful young female students in their uniforms as we were leaving the vicinity of the Wall. This timeless monument is part of these girls' daily landscape!

A few more steps into the city and we were able to experience two more remarkable sites. We entered the Upper Room and touched the solid stone table of the Last Supper, and just a few steps from there we entered the Tomb of David and touched the sarcophagus of King David.

Tomorrow we trace the last steps of Christ as we travel the Via Dolorosa and complete our tour at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.



First Pres Explorers at Top of Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem



Temple Teaching Stairs

September 13, 2023 — Day 8

Today was our final day in Jerusalem. We walked the Via Dolorosa and experienced the 14 stations of the cross exactly where they happened. I cannot emphasize enough the proximity of all these locations...literally steps away from each other. It is a sad and moving journey marching upwards from the Chapel of the Condemnation, which includes some remains of the Antonia Fortress where Jesus was sentenced by Pilate, all the way to the climatic Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which envelopes both the crucifixion site (Golgotha) and the Tomb of Christ. To do this walk carrying a heavy cross, and after being beaten and flogged, would be physically and emotional draining.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre contains the final four stations of the cross (crucifixion to burial and removal

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and preparation of the dead body). This is the holiest place on earth for Christians. It is encased with beautiful mosaics and iconic paintings from many periods and many countries depicting scenes from the passion. The stand-out piece of art is the enormous Greek mosaic in the entry vestibule depicting (from right to left) Christ being removed from the Cross, the Marys and other women preparing his body, and Joseph of Arimathea with other disciples placing him in the tomb. The Chapel of Adam (where a skull was found that is said to be that of Adam) is directly below the spot where tradition asserts that the cross of Jesus was planted into the rocky side of Golgotha (place of the skull). We were able to reach down under the spot of the cross and touch the stone that Jesus was crucified on. Below, in the Chapel of Adam, there is a window that shows the rock of Golgotha, split when the earth shook at the moment of Jesus' death.

The Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre (built by the Crusaders) stands squarely, and solitarily, in the middle of the church, directly under the grey/black dome that we saw behind the Dome of the Rock from atop the Mount of Olives yesterday. The line is never-ending to go in and touch the rock where the angels came down to explain to the Marys that Jesus has risen, and then, deeper inside the Basilica, the rock on which Jesus' body was laid to rest. Time didn't allow us to wait the 3+ hours to get inside, but the entire building emits all the emotions of grief, agony, and hopelessness. The most devout followers are openly prostrating themselves at the stations and weeping. Once I settled into my comfort zone I was able to admire in awe all the art, architecture, and archeology of this overwhelming site. We said a prayer of gratitude and commitment and left truly believing that we have a real connection with God through Jesus.

After lunch we went to the Garden Tomb. This is an alternate location for the crucifixion and burial of Jesus. There are good arguments for this location, including the fact that it has always been outside of the city (consistent with scripture). Additionally, there is a rocky palisade called the place of the skull, which was a common site for crucifixions as it was on the main road leading into Jerusalem. The Garden Tomb was the location of privately owned tombs such as Joseph's of Arimathea. We found a nice spot in the garden where Pastor Greg read John 20 and led us in a "Lectio Divina" meditation.

This is the amazing conclusion to the Israel portion of the trip. Most of our group will head back to the states tomorrow, but six of us will combine with two other groups and start a 3-day bus ride as we trace the path of the Holy Family through the Sinai Desert to Cairo.



Church of the Sepulchre Entry Mosaic

September 14, 15, and 16, 2023 — Days 9, 10, and 11

These past few days have been long travel days on a bus, tracing in reverse the route of the Exodus as we proceeded from Jerusalem to Cairo. After we passed the border on Thursday 9/14, we had a relaxing lunch at a beach club on the Red Sea. Dinner was Bedouin-style in a tent at our overnight resting place at the foot of Mount Sinai. We are now a group of 19. There is a warm and extremely knowledgeable 78-year-old retired USAF Chaplain and civilian minister who has been leading us in prayers and readings.

Catherine, Cherie, and Haiden took a 6-hour hike starting at 1 a.m. Friday morning to the top of Mount Moses and back.

Catherine's journal from the hike:

Early morning trek to the top of Mt Sinai—

With a shot of Turkish coffee in my system, I boarded the bus to St Catherine's monastery. Initially the walk from the bus was on a nicely lit plaza-like walkway. After a mile the terrain got a little rockier and we approached the base of the mountain. I mounted my camel and held tightly on to the knob in front of my saddle. The camel behaved politely as he led us up the trail he walks daily. It was cold and dark, after one hour of bobbing and swaying on my ride we came to the 750-step marker. It was on foot from there, climbing to the top of the mount where the Lord delivered the Ten Commandments to Moses. Awe-inspiring in the cold crisp nighttime air. Back down all the way on foot...sunrise at the halfway point! By 7:30 am we were heading back to the Morganlender for breakfast.

Just a couple of hours after our explorers got back from hiking Mount Sinai, we had a tour of St. Catherine's Monastery, including a lovely indoor courtyard with a bushy shrub grown from a branch from the Burning Bush. A reading from Deuteronomy from the pastor outlining the commandments and God's bidding for us to embrace this life in his name prepared us to walk through the grounds. We all went into the Church of the Transfiguration, had a prayer by burning bush, and saw the original well where Moses met his wife, Deborah. We checked out of Morganlender and proceeded to Sharm el-Sheikh for a ride on a glass-bottomed boat in the Red Sea and a solid deep sleep.

Up and on the road again this morning Saturday 9/16 for the final 8 hours of our tour around the Sinai Peninsula to arrive in Cairo. We checked into Movenpick, which is a very nice hotel chain, and by far the most luxurious accommodations we've had to date.

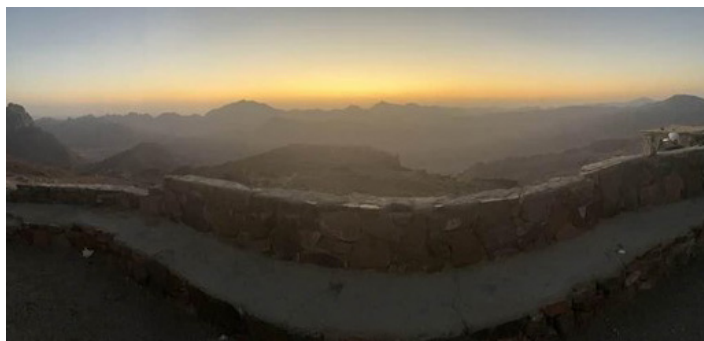


continued from page 27

The bus ride went pretty quickly; the changing terrain of rocky mountains to sandy mountains provides ample visual stimulus, and we took a nearly two-hour lunch break at another beach club on the Red Sea. We traveled under the Suez Canal to reach the outskirts of Cairo and caught a nice view of tomorrow's adventure—The Great Pyramids of Giza!



Catherine at the Top of Mount Moses for Sunrise



Sunrise on top of Mount Moses

September 17, 2023 — Day 12

Today we visited several ancient sites in Cairo. We started in Memphis, the oldest capital city dating back to 2900 BC built by King Menes who united the kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt. There we saw a marvelous 30-ft statue of the beloved King Ramses II, who ruled for 80 years in the 1200s BC.

After Memphis we hit Saqqara which has the oldest limestone construction in the world, the Step Pyramid of Djoser, completed in the 2500s BC. Catherine went inside the narrow tunnel to the burial chamber which boasted amazing hieroglyphics and other carved details.

We had a fascinating trip to the Egyptian Carpet School. They had an impressive amount of handmade rugs in production when we were there. The conditions were surprisingly pleasant, and the people couldn't be nicer. Glenn really enjoyed watching them knot and weave in front of our eyes.

We concluded another 10,000+ step day by being dwarfed and humbled by the Great Pyramids of Giza. The largest, Khufu, took 27 years to build in the 26th century BC. We climbed on the tremendous stones at the base, and marveled how such a perfect structure was constructed with only physical, manual labor. We didn't get quite as close to the Sphinx, and I couldn't figure out if I thought it would be



Saqqara



Great Pyramids of Giza

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bigger or smaller than I imagined. Built in the 2500s BC, it is considered the oldest structure in Egypt. It was built for Khafre, who built the second pyramid.

Tomorrow is our final day on this incredible journey. We will be visiting the Egyptian Museum of Antiquities to enjoy their unique collection of Pharaonic art, and of course the treasure of King Tut!

September 18 and 19, 2023 — Days 13 and 14

Our last day of this amazing journey morphed into our 24-hour travel day back home. The touring started with the (current) Egyptian Museum of Antiquities. I say current because they are building a brand-new modern facility to hold this global treasure of treasures. This is the museum that displays King Tut's treasures as a permanent collection. No photos allowed in King Tut's gallery, but getting up close to see all the details of the hammered gold head and body covers as well as all the pectoral and other adornments is awe-inspiring. Vibrant colors still shining, and crisp carvings and embossments enduring some 3300 years is mind boggling. We also saw some partially unveiled mummies and learned a lot about the customs and traditions of preparing royalty for the afterlife in the Dynastic periods of ancient Egypt.

From there we proceeded to Abu Serga (aka the Cavern Church of Saints Segius and Bacchus). This church is built on the site where the Holy Family lived when they fled Israel to hide from Herod's hunt for Jesus. The church is built over the stone cavern Jesus, Mary, and Joseph called home, and the well they pulled water from. It's a beautiful basilica with a great collection of icons from the 1200s to 1800s AD. We settled into a set of pews as our retired Air Force Chaplain led us in a reading and reflection on the importance of the Holy Family's retreat to Egypt to fulfill the prophecies, and God's presence and protection for all of us during times of crisis.



Egyptian Museum of Antiquities

After Monday's last day of touring (museum, church, and lunch), we headed back to the hotel for a couple of hours of desert sun poolside. Then it was dinner and pack up for a 1 a.m. departure (Tuesday morning) for the airport. 4-hour flight to Frankfurt, a dash through the Frankfurt airport to our connection, and another 9+ hours to Miami. 24 hours later we are back in our home in the USA ready to resume our lives with a new appreciation for the history of the Bible and a strengthened personal relationship with God, Jesus, and our beloved new home church and friends—First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach. God is great! ●

FIRST DELRAY CONCERT SERIES

LISTEN! Can you hear it coming?

Imagine our Sanctuary full to the brim with people from our congregation and our local communities, surrounded by music that makes their spirits come alive...

You know what it's like on Sunday mornings, but this will be even more! A team with a musical vision for a new ministry of a yearly series of concerts at First Delray – touching all genres of music—has been hard at work making this vision a reality, and now we want to share it with you.

As a ministry of our church to members and the community, church leadership has approved the plan for the **First Delray Concert Series**, making us a new venue for exceptional music in our area. The Planning Team for this effort consists of Marsha Bird, Birgit Djupedal Fioravante, Penny Johnson, and Mary Martínéz, with invaluable support from our Business Administrator, Nancy Fine, and our wonderful Organist and Director of Music, Don Cannarozzi.

OVERVIEW OF THE CONCERT SERIES

The First Delray Concert Series debuts its first season in 2024. Four concerts are planned for the coming year, all in the beautiful Sanctuary at First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach. With excellent acoustics and a 400-seat capacity, it is a perfect venue for the varied genres of music that will be presented.

In **January**, concertgoers will be treated to the incredible vocal and instrumental talents of the Latin Divos (Fernando Gonzales, a featured vocalist at First Presbyterian, and tenors Ernesto Cabrera and Will Corujo), performing a mix of romantic serenades, Latin classics, and opera standards – interspersed with a dash of humor.

March will offer much-loved opera, classic Broadway, and American songbook favorites, sung by our own fabulous First Delray soloists – some of the best vocal talent in South Florida – and accompanied by Don Cannarozzi on piano.

April will feature “The Magic of Mozart,” an all-Mozart instrumental and vocal concert. Don Cannarozzi and Thomas Bachtell will be featured pianists performing Mozart’s Concerto No. 10 for Two Pianos and Orchestra. The magic continues with selected overtures by the 25-member orchestra and well-loved vocal selections by our concert vocalists.

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In November, we will celebrate the songs of America with a concert titled “This Land is Your Land.” Join us as we honor our veterans and celebrate our nation’s beauty and diversity. You’ll want to sing along as we are reminded of the many blessings of living in our democracy and the opportunities we have to ensure that all are as fortunate as we are.

YOU CAN HELP!

Support is vital to bring this new ministry to fruition. You can contribute in several ways. By becoming a FDACS sponsor, you will provide valuable financial assistance by choosing a sponsorship level. The Planning Team is grateful for any and all contributions, with names to be acknowledged in the concert programs. Donations can be made in memory of, or in honor of, someone you would like to recognize.

- Diamond Sponsor \$7,500+
- Emerald Sponsor \$5,000—\$7,499
- Ruby Sponsor \$2,500—\$4,999
- Platinum Sponsor \$1,000—\$2,499
- Gold Sponsor \$500—\$999
- Silver Sponsor \$250—\$499
- Friend Sponsor \$50—\$249

MISSION:

As a ministry of the First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach, the First Delray Concert Series seeks to provide an engaging, entertaining, and uplifting musical experience for our diverse congregation and local communities. The concerts, presented annually, will showcase the exceptional talent of performers associated with the church and our area. A variety of outstanding vocal and instrumental programs, from classical to popular music, are selected to appeal to a wide range of audiences.

VISION:

Our belief is that music has the infinite power to calm, uplift, delight, and unite audiences through the beauty of the human voice and the exquisite harmonies of instrumentalists playing together. The Concert Series strives to communicate God’s love through music and bring participants to our church family for worship, fellowship, spiritual wellness, and service to others.

You can give online by visiting our church website at <https://firstdelray.com/2024-concert-series> and indicating “First Delray Concert Series” in the notes section, or by making a check out to the First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach with a notation on the memo line of “First Delray Concert Series.”

You may also be able to assist in other ways – prayer, publicity, ushering, etc. – just let Nancy Fine know of your interest (561-276-6338 or nancyfine@firstdelray.com).

This is an extraordinary venture for First Delray! Please join us in establishing and growing this ministry – a ministry that will bring a diverse audience to our church, provide uplifting programs, and let them know that we are also here if they are seeking a spiritual home.

Tickets for the concerts will be available soon. You can reserve your tickets now by calling the church office (561-276-6338). ●

FIRST DELRAY CONCERT SERIES

2024 Schedule

January 14 – “The Latin Divos”

March 10 – “Broadway & Opera Classics

April 21 – “The Magic of Mozart”

November 10 – “This Land is Your Land”

games on the demo computers until our parents were done shopping.

I remember inviting Kenny and a couple guys from the team to hang out at Scandia for my birthday.

I remember we went to the buffet at Sizzler after a tournament in San Jose, and my dad showed Kenny how to sneak M&Ms into his pockets.

I remember reading in the paper that Kenny shot up a four-year-old's birthday party and killed three people. He's in jail now.

I remember going to a basketball tournament in Las Vegas and seeing a pair of plaid Nikes at Caesars Palace.

I remember returning to Vegas for a family member's Elvis-wedding. Back then, I was old enough to know I wasn't old enough to do anything fun. At least I bought those plaid Nikes.

I remember in-between sophomore and junior year taking a class trip to Harvard and Yale and other schools none of us could get into. I remember my parents gave me \$150 for the week, and I remember my grandmother pulling into the driveway just before we left and handing me an envelope with another hundred. I remember all my classmates buying snacks for

the bus rides and apparel from the different schools while I refused to spend anything. On the last day, we toured NYU and I went into Times Square and dropped \$200 on the latest Jordans.

I remember outgrowing them a week later.

I remember refusing to throw them away.

I remember in seminary buying insoles because I couldn't afford anything new.

I remember becoming a youth pastor. Some of the high-schoolers wanted to play basketball with me, but I didn't have basketball shoes anymore. So I called my mother and asked if we still had my fancy New York Jordan's in the green closet. The \$200 ones. We did. She shipped them to the other side of the country, and they were still too small, but they would do. I remember telling the high-schoolers these shoes were fifteen years old, and I remember them looking at me like *why is this guy wearing fifteen-year-old shoes? They're probably worth a ton.* And I remember thinking back at them (though they did not know it), *what good is a pair of shoes if you never wear them?*

I remember how the shoes broke during the second game with the kids I pastor, the same play I tore my calf in two.

I remember the body of Christ broken for you.

I remember having a Christ complex.

I remember the next day flying to California to say goodbye to my grandmother. My leg got all swollen on the plane and the doctor had to check me for DVT clots.

I remember googling DVT clots.

I remember the white compression socks covering grandma's feet as she lay still in the hospital bed.

I remember after we left grandma's house complimenting my dad's shoes and meaning it. They were Sketchers, and he got them from Costco. My parents bought me a pair.

I remember slipping them on and feeling just perfect.

Rev. Greg Rapier's article, originally published in 2022 by Sky Island Journal and reprinted in The Spire, has been nominated for a "Best of the Net" award. This small but prestigious literary award celebrates "voices that are imperative to good literature, responsible culture, and the understanding of today's social climate." ●

WALKS WITH THOUGHTS

How many of you escaped (or at least wanted to escape) the suffocating heat of Delray Beach in July, August, and September? This summer my husband and I fled Delray and took an extended vacation to enjoy the warm (rather than hot) days and cool nights of Michigan. Turns out, I not only ran away from the heat of South Florida, I also ran away from God. Hard to do in Holland, Michigan, which boasts over 170 churches plus Western Theological Seminary and is nicknamed “The City of Churches.” But, to my shame, I attended none of them. My beach walks along Lake Michigan were full of friends and family rather than conversations with God. This week as I walked through Winding Waters in preparation for this column, I realized how disconnected from God I had become. How much I missed my walks with God.

Let me explain Winding Waters Natural Area to you. Like Green Cay in Boynton Beach, this West Palm Beach urban wetland has been returned to its natural state after years of agricultural

use: the canals removed, the original marsh excavated, invasive non-native plants eradicated, and 1650 native trees replanted. Unlike Green Cay, this 548-acre site boasts a canoe/kayak trail, and in addition to its half-mile nature trail, it also sports a 4.9 mile hiking trail that circles the wetland.

Scores of Halloween Pennants, a type of dragonfly, circle and dive – reminding me of barn swallows along creeks up north. A large alligator swims directly below the first bridge we cross. His large snout and glassy eyes are fully exposed as he takes us in. A small grey squirrel scampers up the side of a skinny slash pine, dislodging several pieces of loose bark which fall on the path ahead. Ripe clumps of American Beautyberry lie to the left and right. This iridescent, bright-lavender fruit feeds the deer and many species of birds which live here.

The quiet path and gentle sound of unseen lapping water provide a constant backdrop to my walk. *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you*, James (4:8) says. And it’s true. I hear God calling me back, feel Jesus’s gentle embrace. Jesus may call us over the tumult as the familiar hymn says, but I find it easier to hear his voice here in the

quiet spaces. Easier to pour out my fears and anxieties, my thanks and praise.

Standing here in communion with God, I also realize that, while gone, I missed fellowshiping with you all in church, missed the easy camaraderie of Vacation Bible School. As I think about this, I wonder: why not combine the two – time outside with God, and time with you? Fellowship outdoors. If you like the idea of joining me in outdoor fellowship and quiet conversation with God, call Nancy Fine in the church office (561-276-6338) and let her know. I’ll be awaiting your call. ●





by Rev. Greg Rapier
Associate Pastor

IN THE WORLD ... CONNECTING CHURCH AND CULTURE

JUMPMAN

I remember wearing shoes with heels that lit up when I walked. I remember Velcro-straps and cartoon characters and my Star Wars slip-ons.

I remember spray-painting my Star Wars slip-ons gold so I could dress up as Mickey Mouse for Halloween.

I remember buying my first pair of big kid shoes. Patent leather, baby blue. My mom winced at the register but handed over her credit card anyway.

I remember my mom buying shoes a size too big that quickly became a size too small.

I remember Nelly's music video for Air Force One's.

I remember buying Air Force II's with a funky orange and blue colorway. I was the only kid in middle school who had a pair. On my first day wearing them, my gym teacher, Mr. Wong, stopped taking attendance to tell me my shoes looked like something he

would have worn when he was a kid. Thirty years ago. The other students laughed.

I remember throwing the shoes away.

I remember how in high school, everyone had iPods. This one kid named Devin didn't have one, but he wore the white headphones that came with them. They weren't connected to anything; they just dangled there by his waist like a severed umbilical cord.

I remember how the other students laughed at Devin. Okay, let's be real, I remember laughing too.

I remember Devin wore Sketchers.

I remember coming home from school one day and telling my mom I would not be shopping at Famous Footwear anymore, and that was that.

I remember the red Jordan XVIII's with the laces hidden behind the tongue.

I remember waddling through school hallways so I wouldn't get creases on my new shoes.

I remember wearing flip flops to AAU tournaments, sitting court-side, and unzipping my game shoes from my bag.

I remember buying a pair of Dub Zero's to impress a kid who didn't like me. He told me the shoes looked funny on people with big feet.

I remember demolishing him in a game of 1v1.

I remember seeing at Costco a pair of paste-white Sketchers with two-inch soles. They looked prescription. I remember calling them grandma shoes. Later, I remember seeing those shoes on my grandma!

I remember the time grandma bought a shakeweight.

I remember going to Costco with my mother and running into Kenny from basketball. We played

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The Community Church by the Sea

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This church magazine is available online at www.firstdelray.com.
If you are interested in receiving an electronic copy of this publication, please email Nancy Fine at nancyfine@firstdelray.com

Sunday Morning Worship Services

9 a.m. & 11 a.m.

Christmas Eve Worship Services

5 p.m. (Candles and Carols
with a Time for the Children)

7 p.m. (Traditional Candlelight
with a Time for the Children)

9:30 p.m. (Traditional
Candlelight)

*There will be only one worship service
at 11 a.m. on Sunday mornings,
December 24th and December 31st*

