

THE SPIRE



Your
Church
Magazine

September / October 2023



NURTURE FAITH

by **Dr. Doug Hood**

Senior Pastor

OUR GREATEST GIFT TO ANOTHER

“I made myself holy on their behalf so that they also would be made holy in the truth.”

John 17:19 (Common English Bible)

Jim Rohn writes, “The greatest gift you can give to somebody is your own personal development. I used to say, ‘If you will take care of me, I will take care of you.’ Now I say, ‘I will take care of me for you if you will take care of you for me.’”¹ Rohn seems to have captured wisdom from Jesus’ playbook. In a tribute to his nature and character, Jesus makes the statement, “I made myself holy on their behalf so that they also would be made holy.” Here is Jesus’ secret for maintaining intimacy with twelve irritating men who were his companions. Each disciple pledged their life to the purposes of Jesus. Yet, in one measure or another, they disrupted their fellowship with angry contention as to who came first or who was the most loved. Petty prejudices were evident in their ministry, and they fiercely attacked men who had caught the spirit of Jesus but who did not belong to their select circle.

Abandonment of such a divisive, arrogant, and argumentative bunch of men seems the most reasonable course for Jesus to take. Yes, Jesus loved them. But they also drove him crazy. Certainly, there were stronger candidates that Jesus could trust to care for his divine purposes. But right here, with this statement captured in John’s Gospel, Jesus purposed to lift them, “I made myself holy on their behalf so that they also would be made holy in the truth.” Jesus’ technique is to lift himself closer to God, on the disciples’ behalf, so that as he is changed by God’s presence, he might change the disciples. These foolish, deficient colleagues that Jesus loves are made useful by Jesus’ decision to draw closer to God. As Jesus is changed, the disciples are changed by their proximity to Jesus. There is something intensely practical here for us. Every individual is affected by a relationship they establish with another personality.

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THE SPIRE MAGAZINE

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SPECIAL THANKS:
Printers Choice

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.

Instinctively, we become like those persons we keep company with. This becomes evident in the fashions that dress us, the amusements that entertain us, and the values we embrace. Parents know this. That is why the company their children keep becomes such an important consideration. We spend an hour with a friend, and we come away different. If the experience is less than satisfying, we are conscious of a weakening within our psyche. We question why we entertained unsavory gossip or indulged in humor that inflicts pain upon another. Then we spend an hour with another friend, and we come away with indescribable joy. The world takes on a different complexion than before, and we feel good about ourselves. The world is a beautiful place, more welcoming, more gracious, more inclusive of differences. The dynamic is the same in both cases. We are under a spell of influence.

If we do not have a satisfactory relationship with those who are closest to us, Jesus shows us what we can do about it. We can take care of ourselves—we can lift our own life closer to God until we experience a change in our own character. That change is inevitable. Moses experienced it on the mountain with God. The apostle Paul experienced it on the Road to Damascus. One life rubbing up against another results in change for both. But a life that draws near to God—and remains there for a considerable period—experiences transformation by the divine. If those who are nearest to us seem to disappoint, and seem to have lives marked by the trivial and shallow, we cannot wave aside the blame for such conditions. As Jim Rohn might say, that is the life we inspire by who we are. Take responsibility for spiritual growth and watch the change in those who are closest to you. That will be our greatest gift to another.

1 Jim Rohn, *The Treasury of Quotes* (Dallas, Texas: SUCCESS Enterprises, LLC, 1994-2021), 88.

WHAT WILL YOUR LEGACY BE?

Dear friends,

We are remembered for what we give, not for what we hold onto. I was powerfully reminded of this during a memorial service for someone who died. During the service and following, I heard story after story of how the deceased had given generously to this organization and another. Each church and non-profit receiving gifts were stronger today because giving characterized this person's life. Their life was being celebrated by what they gave, not for what they held onto.

Recently, the church sold a small condominium left to the church by a member, Susanne Emery. During one of my pastoral visits with Susanne, about a year before she died, she shared how much the ministry of this church had blessed her life. She informed me that she wanted to multiply that blessing to others in perpetuity. That is when she told me she had planned with an attorney to leave her home to the church. After her death, her home was sold, the remaining mortgage was paid, and the church received over \$45,000. Our church has a stronger financial position for the future because of Susanne! Her generosity will be remembered and celebrated for many generations.

I invite you to consider how you will be remembered. Your membership and annual support of our church have resulted in a stronger ministry. Our impact in the community is greater because of you. Yet, once you have died, your part in that impact stops unless you make plans to make a Legacy Gift. Even small gifts such as \$500 or \$1,000 are important. As someone once said, raindrops can fill a bucket.

Naturally, not one of us is guaranteed tomorrow. I invite you to make plans with an attorney to make a Legacy Gift to First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach. Or, you may contact the Presbyterian Foundation (800-858-6127) and speak with a Ministry Relations Officer. In any amount, a gift will be

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invested with others in our Remembrance Fund to create an annual gift to the church. That way, year after year, just like Susanne Emery, you will be supporting life-changing ministry through our congregation as a Legacy Partner. Indeed, we are remembered for what we give, not for what we hold onto.

With gratitude for you,

Dr. W. Douglas Hood, Jr.
Senior Pastor

*Become a
Legacy
Partner*



MEET THE CHILDREN'S LEADERS

IVA BRANSCOMBE

I am the middle child of a family of five children raised on a dairy farm in Ontario.

I officially joined this church as the beautiful music and the Bible readings were refreshing my soul.

When the announcement was made that the Sunday School Bible Bunch needed a helper to assist in teaching with Alice Barrett, I knew this was how I wanted to give back to the church. To tell each child all the stories that my parents had taught me from the Old and New Testaments and how each child has their own special marking found on each little finger and toe print, design markings in their beautiful eyes, and their own unique personality that God loves so much.

Mrs. Grace completes the Sunday School circle by teaching the children to feel “at home” in God’s house, and to look out and see all the members that care for them.

No child can make it to church on their own, it takes effort and love from parents/grandparents, to carry out this task. Know for certain, nothing can ever be more valuable to your child than to start them on the sure pathway of knowing God’s love. ●

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



SESSION REPORT

During the months of June and July, the Session received four new members. ●

GIFTS TO OUR CHURCH

Memorial Garden Fund in loving memory of Janet M. Loennecker, by daughter Karen and son-in-law Don Carter; and in loving memory of her parents, John Coltman and Jane Sowers Coltman, from Joyce Coltman Sterrett.

Remembrance Fund from Maria Graham, in loving memory of Jean Hilton; and from the estate of William Talen. ●

Giving
Our Gifts

NEW MEMBERS

Marsha Bird
Sally Harwood
James Painter
Ed Rule



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:

– Dan Parkinson –
June 29, 2023

– Jean Hilton –
July 11, 2023

by *Connie Timmons*

CELEBRATE THE OPENING OF HOLLY HOUSE HOLIDAY BAZAAR

SAVE THE DATE

Holly House Holiday Bazaar Open House
Sunday, October 22nd, 11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Delicious brunch treats and beverages will be served.
Admission is free.



Mark your calendars! Make your list! Check it twice! **The Holly House Holiday Bazaar** is just around the corner.

Sunday, October 22nd, we will be opening our doors after church to unveil the 2023 offerings. Refreshments will be provided. Jewelry, hand-sewn items specifically crafted for the holidays, floral arrangements, special seasonal offerings, shell creations, and those unique treasures that are often found as you shop will be available for purchase as you begin your holiday preparations.

After October 22nd, shopping 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). We look forward to seeing you at our opening.

Holly House is a ministry of First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach. ●

by Nathanael Hood



ARE YOU THERE GOD? IT'S ME, MARGARET.

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

Looking back, there's a certain grim irony to the frenzied controversy that surrounded Judy Blume's seminal 1970 young adult novel *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*. Telling the story of 11-year-old Margaret Simon as she navigates the uncertain waters of growing up after her family moves to the New Jersey burbs, the book's frank discussions of puberty, menstruation, and—shall we say—“bra envy” sparked the admiration of teenage readers and the ire of many of their parents. The result? In the 50+ years since its publication it has been listed by the American Library Association (ALA) as one of the most frequently challenged and censored books in America's schools. The grim irony of it all is twofold. First, if parents in the 1970s thought this book was too explicit—and having read it I can confirm that there's nothing more “graphic” in it than what kids might see and learn in any middle school health class—one can only imagine what they'd make of the sex in the *Twilight* series or the violence in *The Hunger Games*. And second, if all the parents who decried the book's examination of budding teenage sexuality as sinful would

look beyond the trees for the forest they'd realize that Blume's book is a marvelously moving and surprisingly pious depiction of faith. Born to a Christian mother and a Jewish father, Margaret spends as much—if not more—time praying to God and wondering what religion might be right for her as she does boys or bras. In our modern secular society, the idea of a novel that treats personal faith as being as important to young people as puberty becoming a hit among teenagers seems unthinkable.

Now, decades later, Blume's book has been adapted into a major motion picture. Written and directed by Kelly Fremon Craig whose previous film *The Edge of Seventeen* (2016) proved her deftness at handling the sensitive topics surrounding adolescence, *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* isn't just a faithful adaptation of Blume's book—although it is that. If anything, it's the rare film version of a book that surpasses its source material. Fleshing out many of the adult characters while keeping its gaze firmly locked on Abby Ryder Fortson's wonderful performance as Margaret, the film

perfectly balances the humor and drama of Blume's novel without being twee or preachy. Though set in 1970, the film maintains the universality of Margaret's experiences which helped make the book so timeless—you may never have been a teenage girl praying for her first period, but almost everyone can relate to feeling like a freak over feelings that their body isn't “developing” fast enough compared to everyone else. (The few exceptions will be glad to see that Craig maintained Blume's subplot about one of Margaret's classmates who got bullied and accused of being “easy” just because she developed breasts in the fourth grade.) Likewise, everyone can relate to the awkwardness of a first crush, body envy, and realizing that the friends you have might not always be the friends you'll need down the road.

Still, it's the film's treatment of religion and faith that makes *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* so refreshing. As in the book, Margaret works through a crisis of faith as she tries to decide whether she wants to be Jewish or Christian when she gets older. She attends synagogue with her

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firecracker Jewish grandmother Sylvia (Kathy Bates), goes to a worship service at a black Baptist church with her school friend, and even visits a confessional at a Catholic Church during a personal crisis. But above all Margaret prays, prays, prays. She prays with an intensity that would make the Apostle Paul blush, going to God with all of her fears and hopes. She prays in times of joy and sorrow. She even prays in times of doubt when surrounded by people who make her question the very goodness and existence

of God—people like her devout Christian maternal grandparents who cut contact with her mother eleven years ago when they learned she was marrying a Jewish man. Like the book, the film offers no easy answers to these difficult questions—it doesn't try to solve the problem of faith in a God who can sometimes seem remote or absent in our lives. Instead, it's the portrait of a relationship between Created and Creator, one where both knock on the doors of each others' hearts.

Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret. *is recommended for parents and young teenagers to watch together and is currently available to rent and stream on DirecTV, Google Play, Vudu, Amazon, and other streaming services. It contains frank discussions of puberty, menstruation, and teenage anatomy, but it features nothing more graphic than a diagram of a penis in a medical textbook which is briefly shown for a few seconds.* ●

by Carolyn Kettle

WELCOME TEAM

*“And serve each other according to the gift each person has received,
as good managers of God’s diverse gifts.”*

1 Peter 4:10 (Common English Bible)

In the two years since this ministry began, it continues to serve those on the Team as well as the congregation.

Their purpose is, in essence, to greet visitors at the Lobby doors. Might we interest you?

We often hear, “The best testimony is our own.” A Team member offered this:

“Being a Greeter has afforded me far more than I expected!

Getting to know and meet more members and new friends of the congregation is

SUCH A BLESSING!

In addition, connecting with the children as they arrive is a JOY!”

This is an invitation for you to contact Carolyn Kettle (recruiting/scheduling for the Welcome Team) to indicate that you would like to be a part of this ministry—to welcome people warmly and sincerely into this place of worship. Please reach out to Carolyn (561-504-9550 or carolynskettle@gmail.com) as soon as possible. She is eager to give you more details. ●

We hope you will join us!

by *Maryann Rana*

Prayer Ministry Team

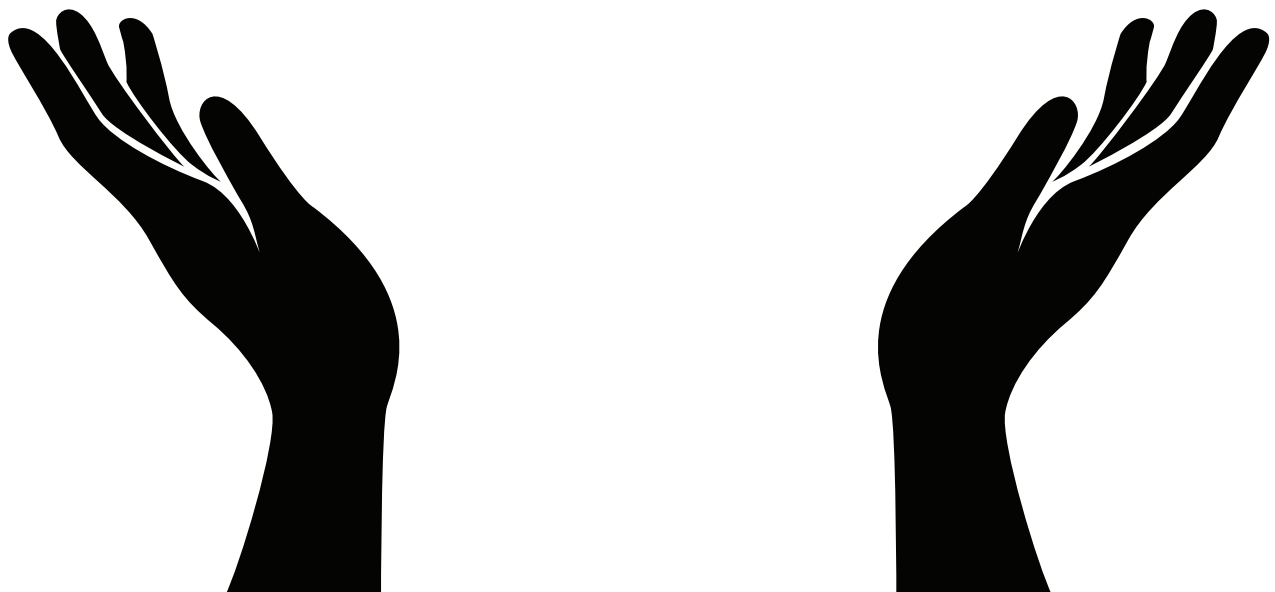
WHY SHOULD WE PRAY FOR OTHERS?

The Prayer Ministry Team is still alive and well and as always we partner with God at this uneasy and crucial time in our lives and the life of our nation, deepening our love for him, our faith in him, our worship of him, and our surrender to him. He waits for us to come to him and knows our needs before we speak our prayers, and he welcomes our concerns for others in Jesus Christ and pours out his power in response to those prayers.

In Luke 18:1 Jesus tells his disciples “a parable about their need to pray continuously and not to be discouraged.” Ephesians 6:18 says to “Offer prayers and petitions in the Spirit all the time. Stay alert by hanging in there and praying for all believers.”

As a reminder our team continues to pray on a daily basis as a commitment to our church and its members. Please join us in this vital ministry on behalf of those struggling and in need.

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 contact Nancy Fine in the church office (561-276-6338 or nancyfine@firstdelray.com) for more information or if you are interested in joining. ●



YOUR GENEROSITY TEAM IS HARD AT WORK

Despite the slower pace of summer, the ministry of First Delray Beach to its church family and the broader community goes on unabated. Meanwhile, the Generosity Team has been meeting to plan for the coming year and recently participated in an excellent meeting with our Ministry Relations Officer from the Presbyterian Foundation regarding our programs designed to sustain the mission of the church.

We are truly grateful for your continued support of everything that First Delray Beach does every day. ●



SUSTAINING MINISTRY EXCELLENCE

- Nurturing Our Faith
- Enhancing Our Congregational Care
- Strengthening Our Pillars of Support



by Rev. Greg Rapier
Associate 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.*

WHEN YOU FEEL ALONE

Romans 12:10-15

Listen for God's Word:

"Love each other like the members of your family. Be the best at showing honor to each other."

Romans 12:10 (Common English Bible)

When Lissette and I visit Sacramento, we normally try to squeeze in as much time together with people as possible. We're intentional about keeping contact with old friends. Between old friends, family, neighbors, and people from our old church, each visit to Sacramento has a long itinerary of people to see. We're pretty social.

About a year ago, an old friend of mine from high school, Alex, had a birthday celebration that just so happened to align with our travel dates. The city recently allowed beer trolley tours, and if you haven't seen them, these tours allow guests to sit on what is essentially a mobile bar. Each mobile bar is staffed by two people, a driver/tour guide and a bartender. The guests sit there in rows on the back of the trolley, facing each other, pedaling.

The party was an interesting high school reunion of sorts because there were about ten of us there. Out of those ten, there were about six people I hadn't seen or spoken to since I graduated back in 2009. It was cool to see how everyone's evolved. One of my classmates was now a chef. Another worked as a financial planner. Another was a bartender. And, another was finishing school to become a medical assistant.

Out of everyone there, I definitely received the most questions about my vocation. It's not every day you find out your friend is a pastor. And, it's not every day you see a pastor on the back of a beer trolley. You can drink? Yes, but I won't be drinking too much. You're married now? Yes, in fact many denominations allow their clergy to marry. What's a denomination? And, so it went.

While most people were interested in my work, there was one person I was most interested in, a man I've known since my freshman year of high school. I wouldn't say I was great friends with him, but we played football together, and I knew him. In fact, everyone in the school knew him. We'll call him Will.

Back when I was in high school, iPods were all the rage. At any given time walking the hallways, about half the school would have their headphones in. Some students had the bulky, original iPod that held thousands of songs, and others had the tiny Shuffle, but most students had either the discreet iPod Nano or

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the mid-size iPod Video.

Not me. I had the Zune, Microsoft's short-lived, self-proclaimed iPod killer. The Zune is the butt of a lot of jokes now, but to this day, I swear to you it was a better product. I loved my Zune, until one day during PE, my gym locker was broken into and my Zune was stolen from me. There was someone I thought stole my Zune, but I wasn't going to make any accusations. I talked to a friend of mine who was connected with the person I suspected. I asked him to help me out, and he did. Sure enough, my suspicion was confirmed.

It was Will who took my Zune. As I said, everyone in the school knew Will. Everyone in the school knew Will because, as the rumor went, Will was a Crip. As in a gang member. Even I knew it might not be wise to tell on a Crip. From then on, my Zune was no longer mine. It belonged to Will.

Here we are, ten years later, seated directly across from one another, he a well-known gang member, me a pastor in the Presbyterian Church. The night went on and finally I got the courage to ask him, "You know Will, back in high school everyone always said oh, don't mess with Will, Will's a Crip, be careful around Will." I hesitated for a moment and I said, "Just out of curiosity, what's up with that? Why'd you join?"

He took a sip of his beer, and he looked at me sideways; like he was assessing me, like a long time had passed since someone had the nerve, or the stupidity, to ask him that. For a moment, I was scared.

He took another sip, and finally he said, "You know Greg, the thing about the Crips people don't understand is they're like a family. Sometimes you just need someone who has your back."

While our pressures may be different from those of Will, my guess is many of us need that. Family. Someone to have our backs. After all, don't you ever feel alone in your brokenness? Like you can really use someone in your corner? Don't you sometimes feel like your situation is utterly helpless? Like your heart is chained to the floor? Don't you sometimes feel confined, condemned, to repeat the same mistakes, or to feel the same sadness? Don't you ever feel stuck in the mud of life with no way out? Don't you ever feel alone, and what you need is someone to have your back?

What struck me was that Will, who wasn't really a Christian, found family and protection and meaning in life not from the Church, but from a gang. Will, like many of us, felt a deep brokenness and helplessness; he felt confined, condemned, held captive in the mud of life. He needed someone who had his back. Only instead of joining a church, he joined a gang.

Now why is that? Maybe because that gang was more of a Church for Will than church ever was. The gang offered him meaning and family and protection, and it was present for him in a way the Church simply was not. That got me thinking about why people join gangs, about that need for family, for someone who simply has your back. That got me thinking that we, the Church, on good days, we're like a gang in that respect, aren't we? We're like a family.

Of course, that's a limited metaphor; we're not exactly like a gang. Whereas gangs spread violence, the Church spreads love. While gangs often tear communities apart, the Church seeks to bridge us together. While a gang would kill for you, the Church celebrates a Christ who died for you. There are major differences.

In one primary aspect, the Church is absolutely like a gang, and that is because we are indeed a family. We are, as a Church, a group of people who, first and foremost, worship God. Also, we're a family who has one another's backs. It's what we are called to do.

It's a hallmark of the Church. We are to care for one another just as God cares for us. We are to love our God with all our heart and all our soul and all our mind, and we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. Or, like today's passage from Romans says: We are to love each other like family. We're to be happy with those who are happy, and cry with those who are crying.

This is both a comfort and a call. It's a comfort because as we face difficult times, we can remember that we are not alone. As we feel lonely and isolated, helpless, held captive by our circumstances, stuck in the mud of life, we can remember that God comes into our lives to release us from those circumstances that weigh us down and pull us apart.

Friends, in the fourth chapter of Luke's Gospel, Jesus proclaims that he came to liberate the captives and set free the oppressed. Sometimes that's us. God came to free us. To liberate us. It's a comfort because it reminds us we have a God. And, therefore a Church who has our back, who will fight for us, advocate for us, liberate us, and that never in life do we travel alone.

It's a comfort, but it's also a call. It's a call for each one of us to be the body of Christ. It's a call for us to be family for one another. So the question we all have to ask ourselves is this: As a member of God's family, am I pulling my weight around the house? Am I treating others as family? Am I caring for my brothers and sisters? Or, am I simply locked in my bedroom all alone with the TV on? In other words: Do I really love my neighbor as myself? Or, is all that just lip service?

The body of Christ has one another's backs in a way that a gang never could. I see it every day. Good work done by good people. I go on a hospital visit and discover other members of the church already there. I hear laughter amongst friends at youth group. I see the various ministries supported by this church and others. I see the imprint of these ministries throughout the world. I've seen the way you serve together in the community. I've seen brothers and sisters in Christ come alongside people experiencing great loss. I've been part of a great many Christian celebrations. The body of Christ really is like a family.

The Fast and Furious movies are by no means Christian, but one of the things they do get right, so much that it's become a bit of a joke, is the sense of family. One of the theses of this series is that your family is the

people you choose. In *Fast Five*, which, for those of you keeping track at home, is the fifth movie of the series, Vin Diesel's character Dominic Toretto gathers everyone from the four previous movies together in a warehouse. They come from all over the world: the computer expert from Miami who debuted in *2 Fast 2 Furious*, the former LAPD officer we first met in the first movie, the precision driver from Japan, the female Israeli soldier from the fourth movie. And, an eclectic group of six or seven others gather in the room too. This is Dom's family.

They're there in the warehouse to do a job, make some money. You know how it goes in the movies. Before getting to business, Dom gives a speech where he tells his crew, "The money will come and go. We all know that. The most important thing in life will always be the people in this room. Right here. Right now." Then he raises a glass and offers a toast, "to family."

Dom's family is big, and growing, and inclusive. It includes people who don't always look like him and don't always think like him. The people in that room. That's his family.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, I hope you know that you are amongst family. That though you feel sometimes helpless and captive in your sins; that although you at times feel alienated, isolated, and lonely, know that wherever you walk, you do not walk alone. Brothers and sisters in Christ, I hope you know that you are surrounded by people who love you, care for you, who pray for you, and who fundamentally have your back. The people in this room. Right here. Right now.

Dominic Toretto in that speech gets one thing wrong, though. The Crips do too. Sometimes we as a Church forget it also. Family is not just the people in this room. If we look only at the people who look like us or think like us, we're missing the point. God's family is so much larger than that. God's family cannot be defined by any walls or geographic boundaries. It can't be defined by blood or skin or what colors you wear or your political affiliation or economic status or common interests. Because, you know this, we are all God's children.

The same Christ who tore the temple curtain in two and exploded out into the world; the Christ who met the Samaritan woman at the well and who sent us forth to make disciples of all nations; the Christ who came to proclaim good news to the poor and release to the prisoners and who demands that we love our neighbors as ourselves; the God who took on human bone and flesh, who promises that one day every tongue will gather together in praise of God's name; the God who invites us all to the great banquet of communion and who holds the whole world in those hands, that God calls us to be part of a large and vibrant and extended family. To be happy with those who are happy, and to cry with those who are crying. To put love first. To share with the poor. To fight for justice. To promote equality.

Can you imagine what the world would look like if we all took that call seriously? Can you imagine what your life would look like if you took that call seriously? How the world would transform into a better place. How your life may transform into a better place. And, how people like my friend, Will, would grow up knowing for certain that a whole army of God's people have his back. Let it be so for Will, and for you, and also for me. Amen. ●

WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY

OCTOBER 1, 2023

World Communion Day is October 1, 2023. Millions of Christians worldwide come to the Lord's Table on this day. God's people gather to remember from before the sun rises to well past the sunset. We remember that God so loved the world that we can come to the Table without fear, as One Body and One People.

God's People meet under tin roofs with wide open windows, cathedrals, country churches, magnificent edifices, hidden rooms, adobe brick buildings, temporary auditoriums or schools, and mud brick churches with thatch roofs. The Invitation to the Table is given in hundreds of different languages. Different types of bread are used that reflect each country. There are many differences in faces, languages, cultures, and clothes. What brings us together is that we come to the Table of Christ, the elements are blessed, and we consume together. We are the Body of Jesus Christ. On this World Communion Sunday, we will celebrate what brings us together as One Body of Christ. ●

by Nancy Fine

Business Administrator

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

On Sunday, January 7th, we will welcome to our pulpit Rev. Susan Sparks as our Distinguished Preacher. Rev. Sparks, an ex-trial lawyer turned standup comedian and Baptist minister, is America's only female comedian with a pulpit. A North Carolina native, Susan's humor, healing, and spirituality work has been featured in O Magazine, the New York Times, and several television networks. She is an accomplished author and recipient of the Intersections International Award for her interfaith work to promote justice and reconciliation among diverse communities.



Our ongoing Distinguished Preacher series brings a distinct, diverse voice to our pulpit. Make sure to put this date on your calendar and invite your family and friends as we welcome Rev. Susan Sparks to our Pulpit on January 7th as our 2024 Distinguished Preacher. ●

SUMMER SALAD POTLUCK A HUGE SUCCESS



Sounds of laughter filled Fellowship Hall at our Summer Salad Social Potluck on Sunday, August 6th. This annual event was an excellent opportunity to greet old friends and make new ones. Over 55% of those in attendance at worship stayed for the luncheon.

A huge thank you to members of the Fellowship Team

who decorated Fellowship Hall, received food dishes before the service, arranged the beautiful serving tables, and stayed to clean up. ●



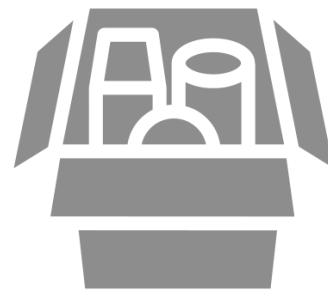
CELEBRATE WORLD COMMUNION BY PROVIDING FOOD FOR A FAMILY IN NEED

On October 1st, we and churches worldwide celebrate the Lord's Supper on World Communion Sunday. Rejoicing in this, we ask that you bring a bag of food so that we can provide supper to those members of our community who are experiencing food insecurity.

Partnering with Christians Reaching Out to Society (CROS) Ministries, the food collected will be distributed to people in our local community awaiting food stamps, families facing unplanned hardships, single mothers with children, and low-income families struggling financially. Your donations will help people like "Walter." He works two part-time jobs but is not getting enough hours or benefits, and he is struggling to find a full-time job. Your donations allow him to have the food he needs for his family as he works towards finding stable, long-term employment.

Unopened, unexpired, non-perishable items are needed and include:

- Peanut Butter
- Canned Meat—Tuna, Chicken, Ham
- Boxed Pasta
- Boxed or Bagged Rice
- Dry or Canned Beans
- Canned Vegetables
- Canned Fruit
- Canned Soup
- Canned Spaghetti Sauce
- Canned Tomato Sauce



Throughout October, we will be collecting bags of food on Sunday morning in the church lobby. If you prefer not to shop, please consider making a monetary donation in the form of a check payable to "CROS Ministries" and place it in the offering plate or mail it to the church office. You may also leave your donations on the cart outside of the church doors in the circle, Mondays through Fridays during the workday.

Your generosity and compassion can positively impact families and individuals in our local community. ●

WON'T YOU JOIN US?

We are blessed with a warm and welcoming congregation, the outstanding preaching of Dr. Doug Hood and Rev. Greg Rapier, a growing educational program for children, and one of the finest church music programs in South Florida. In addition, our worship services impact the ever-growing number of Sunday morning in-person attendees and the national and international reach of our live-streaming and social media presence. Yet, we continue to hear from people who are unsure how to formalize their relationship with our church community.

We just need to know that you want to become a member of First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach. Becoming a member of this flagship faith community is quite simple. If attending in person, you can complete the “Connect” card in the pews and hand it to a pastor or put it in one of the red or black boxes in the church lobby as you exit the building. If you are attending our services virtually, you can complete the “I Want to Connect” form on our website. After indicating your interest in joining, one of our pastoral staff will contact you to answer any questions you may have and arrange for you to become a member.

There are four ways that you can join:

Letter of Transfer: If you are currently a member of another church, you may join by letter of transfer. We will ask for the name and address of the church where you are considered an active member, and we will contact them and inform them of your desire to unite with us.

Reaffirmation of Faith: If you have professed your faith to Christ before, but it has been a while, or there is no active church membership to transfer, you may join by reaffirmation of faith in Jesus Christ.

Profession of Faith: If you have never professed your faith in Jesus Christ and never joined a church, you may join by profession of faith. If you have not been baptized, we will join you in celebrating your baptism into the family of God.

Affiliate: If you are a resident in the area only for part of the year and wish to maintain your membership in your other church community, you may join as an affiliate member. You are entitled to all the rights and privileges of active members except for the right to vote and hold office.

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This congregation significantly impacts the ministry and mission of individuals locally, nationally, and internationally. We change lives by committing over \$100k of our annual budget to support nonprofits that provide ministry to the homeless, the hungry, victims of domestic abuse, and medical care for those without access to such care. We invite you to join us in our mission to positively impact our community and share our vision of *Building Disciples, Transforming Lives*. ●

SAVE THE DATE:

CROS MINISTRIES HUSTLE TO END HUNGER 5K

October 7, 2023 | 7:30 a.m. | John Prince Park, Lake Worth

Be part of our First Presbyterian Church Delray Beach Team, in person or virtually, and help support Christians Reaching Out to Society Ministries' various food programs. All proceeds go directly to purchase food for those in our community who need a helping hand.

EVENTS

- 5K Timed Run – In-person event on October 7, 2023, in John Prince Park (start 7:30 a.m.)
- 5K Walk (untimed) – In-person event on October 7, 2023, in John Prince Park (start 7:32 a.m.)
- 5K Virtual Event – Run/Walk a 5K at your own pace between September 29 and October 10, 2023

Each event has an approximate \$45 registration fee, and all pledge monies collected go toward CROS Ministries' hunger programs.

Check our website for more information or contact

Jeanne Heavilin (561-901-8714 or jcheavilin@gmail.com)



tells on me. Practically yells. She tells on me so loud the whole class hears.

I want to hide.

+++

Gregory the Hero Issue #54: Evil supervillain *Mr. Stick* replaces the water in the Sacramento River with super glue. *Gregory the Hero's* attending a local birthday party when one of the girls falls into the river and gets stuck. So he slips on his mask and saves the girl. They hold hands. The girl asks for his secret identity, but he can't reveal it; it's not safe.

+++

The summer before second grade, my parents and I pick out a new dog, an eight-week-old Sharpei named Buddy. He nibbles on my finger the first time I hold him. I hope never to let go.

+++

Sixth grade. We return home from our yearly vacation to Santa Cruz. A handwritten note hangs on our front door: *Call me*. My mom rings the number and hears the voice of our neighbor next door. He asks her to sit down then tells her while we were gone Buddy chewed a hole in the fence and escaped, then he attacked some woman and killed her dog. The pound got a hold of Buddy, and he's in heaven now.

+++

Gregory the Hero Issue #13: the 100-foot-tall *Dog-Man* is on a rampage, tearing through Sacramento, Godzilla-style. He sinks his claws and teeth into the tallest building and works his way to the top. He wants to dismember the roof and

eat everyone inside. Now, our titular hero must fight to save the city from his arch-nemesis.

+++

Gregory the Hero Issue #71: Gregory the Hero flies so high he tears a hole through the sky and releases all the souls held captive in heaven. *Maybe they don't want to be in heaven*, he says. *Let them choose*. Souls of the deceased drift back to earth like specks of dust. Then they choose heaven—all of them—and Gregory the Hero learns sometimes he's not a hero at all. Sometimes, he's just Gregory.

+++

High School, junior year. It's Greg now. I'm with a few church friends in the courtyard by the memorial garden. We're hanging out in a circle, waiting for our parents to finish talking. A girl I like asks why I've never had a girlfriend. I deflect; I'm good at deflecting.

Then she says to another of our friends—and he agrees—that I'll probably be one of those people who end up marrying their first girlfriend. If I can ever get one.

+++

I get my first girlfriend at eighteen around the time I stop writing for pleasure. All those years living inside my own head have extracted a toll.

Lissette turns 21 two months into our relationship. I google: *The perfect gift for someone who's been your girlfriend only two months but who is also celebrating a milestone birthday*. Four million results; none perfectly fit.

We're driving home from a movie date when Lissette mentions she wants a pet—a baby tortoise so small she can hold it in the palm of her hands. She has small hands.

A week later, I go to the pet store and buy a terrarium and a heating lamp and a calcium stone and everything else google tells me I need, then I pick out the store's smallest tortoise. The owner warns me the tortoise will probably outlive me. He raised this tortoise from a baby, and he needs to know I'll commit to it for life. I tell him not to worry—the pet's not for me. Then I hand him my credit card.

I present the tortoise—without asking—at a birthday party at the house where Lissette lives with her parents. She loves the tortoise, but I don't think her parents love me.

The tortoise fits into her palm with room to spare. She names it Libra.

+++

Gregory the Hero, issue #68: Gregory the hero trusts someone enough to take off his mask. His secret identity is revealed. Or something like that. This whole superhero thing is pretty stupid. I'm over it.

+++

I ask Lissette's parents for permission to marry her. They say yes.

+++

Lissette and I get married. We move from California to New Jersey then Florida. Libra stays behind. I start writing again. We

switch apartments each time the landlord raises the rent. We adopt a dog. Lissette gets pregnant; we buy a house.

On September 28th, 2020, Pierre Isaac Rapier is born in Boca Raton, Florida. We choose this name for its literary quality. Pierre Rapier. He sounds like the type of sophisticate Ralph Fiennes would play in a movie.

+++

Lissette sets down her book, pulls the covers snug against her chin, then leans against my shoulder. *My mom called today, she says. It's been eight years, and she's tired of watching Libra. Mom says Libra either flies out to Florida or we get rid of her.*

Lissette's eyes tell me she wants Libra here. I don't. We have a one-year-old, and the CDC says tortoises carry bacteria that can kill children under five. Their site strongly recommends no tortoises in homes with young children. So I tell her

that. I say no.

She's mad at me, and I'm mad at me too.

+++

Lissette cries.

+++

Lissette asks again about Libra. I waver, but I don't break. I think she needs me to be the bad guy here. But I'm not sure.

It's the right thing, I tell myself. You're doing the right thing.

+++

I normally write at my desk, but today I'm at my favorite recliner in the living room with the family. I open a word document, but I can't concentrate. The movie *Cars* blasts through the TV for the third time this week. Lissette's listening to music through Alexa, and she keeps raising the volume on both Alexa and the TV, searching for the golden ratio where she can hear both at once. Pierre runs around in his diaper, screaming, laughing, pushing his toy firetruck

along the tile, trying to ram it into our English bulldog-mix, Ernest.

Pierre plops down onto the cold floor. Leans against the corner of the house. Ernest looks over his shoulder—no more *yips*, no more chases—so he turns around, trots to Pierre's side, nudges the firetruck with his nose, sits. Pierre rests his tiny palm against Ernest's chest, and together they look out the window.

+++

Gregory the Hero #99: *Final issue*. Our aged hero is tired of fighting Dog-Man, and he's not sure he's much of a hero either. He sets down his cape and mask. And he hopes one day, maybe, a new story will emerge where Dog-Man isn't an arch-enemy, a story with no villains and no heroes. Just people. Gregory the Hero sits down in his recliner and writes a new story, signing his name just Greg. *The Adventures of Pierre*. Issue #1. ●

It's easy to encase oneself in the beauty of the inlet and forget the murky water of the busy Intracoastal Waterway only a few feet away. Easy to close our eyes to the less fortunate.

Today, here, in this lovely, peaceful place, my prayer is that God will use peaceful places such as this to renew my strength—and yours—not only to face the pain and suffering in this world but to help relieve it. ●



**Content in italics from He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother by the Hollies (1969). Lyrics by Bob Russell and Bobby Scott.*

WALKS WITH THOUGHTS

Today, I return to Palm Beach to walk the Lake Trail. My drive from Delray Beach takes me through West Palm Beach, where waiting at a stoplight, I spot several people I identify as homeless. Their soiled clothes are worn, and shopping carts or bicycles hold overflowing sacks of their life's meager possessions. I spare them hardly a glance or thought.

Continuing across the Intracoastal, I arrive at Palm Beach. Although parking in Palm Beach is at a premium, three open spaces line Whitehall Way, a side street off Cocoanut Row just north of the Henry Flagler Museum. Here, signs point to the Lake Trail, which runs along Cocoanut Row before turning west along Royal Poinciana Way. I park and join the wide multi-use trail. At the bridge, the trail dips under the street and heads north, hugging the Intracoastal Waterway. Lake Worth Lagoon lies to my left, Bradley Park to my right. The park is quickly replaced by the tall pink grandeur of the Biltmore Hotel with its matching concrete walls. Just beyond the hotel grounds, mansions line the rise to the right of the trail. A few sport beautiful sweeping lawns graced with ornate patios and small gardens ablaze with the reds, oranges, and yellows of summer flowers. Most barricade themselves behind stone walls or high hedges, some homes almost invisible from the trail. Nannies push buggies and fashionably dressed women chatter to each other as they walk French bulldogs or Pekingese. No homeless here.

The coolness of the early morning passes, and the sun beats down with a fierce intensity until I reach a gnarly old tree sprawled above the trail, its leaves a welcome umbrella of shade. For the next quarter of a mile, branches of shade trees cover the path and cool breezes from the Intracoastal to my left provide a respite from the heat. Ahead, a bench along the water beckons and I stop to rest. Here, nothing blocks my view of the lagoon beneath a clear blue sky. I sit and talk with my God.

Surprising myself, the first thing I share is my morning's sighting of the homeless. Then I listen as *He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother* plays in my head. I first heard that song years ago in a college church service. Sitting there then, I thought, as I do now, about Jesus, his parables, and his attention to the poor and the outcast. I sat there thinking Jesus was not only telling us to have faith, but also to act on that faith. To love thy neighbor as thyself. To act on that love. I—and you—are charged to see those homeless individuals. Are charged with treating them with dignity and respect. Charged with helping provide them with clothing and food and shelter. Charged with not letting our fears of the vulnerable among us build walls to block our views.

And the load doesn't weigh me down at all. He ain't heavy, he's my brother. The lyrics play in my head as I resume my walk. The path continues for another four miles, only to end at the Palm Beach Inlet, where a small park and dock await. Here lies beautiful, clear, blue ocean water. Several blue angel fish catch my eye as I gaze into the transparent water directly below the dock.

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by Rev. Greg Rapier
Associate Pastor

IN THE WORLD ... CONNECTING CHURCH AND CULTURE

HEROICS

This piece of memoir was originally published by Dream Pop Press and is reprinted here with permission.

I write my own stories. Gregory the Hero. While the other kids are outside playing wall ball or four square, I sit alone on a bench in the far corner of the playground by the drinking fountain, a pencil in my left hand—because with pens the ink smears—and an open binder sprawled against my lap.

To the adults on yard duty, I probably look lonely or sad. But I'm not sad. I'm not even there. I'm out having adventures—flying above cities, lifting derailed trains, sifting through crumbled buildings. Fighting supervillains, befriending the entire city.

I write my books out of order. Gregory the Hero #43, Gregory the Hero #72, Gregory the Hero #19. And so on. One day, I'll have the whole collection. One day, the pieces will make sense.

+++

My parents have a junk room. The room is so dusty nobody enters without reason. Inside, we keep our

exercise equipment and the blankets we inherited and some baby clothes my parents refused to donate.

One rainy Saturday, I'm playing *Space*—which is entirely different than Gregory the Hero because saving the galaxy is not at all like saving earth—and my intergalactic adventures bring me to the junk room. Those pesky aliens have me pinned against the wall. I manage to turn around but the aliens press my face hard against the window. I look outside. Our fence—it's missing—must have blown down in last night's storm. And our dogs. They're missing too.

+++

Gregory the Hero Issue #1: *Origin story*—Six-year-old Gregory Rapier discovers his dogs are lost. Nobody can find them, not even his parents. While searching for his dogs in the rain, Gregory gets struck by lightning. Equipped with superpowers—super-speed, super-sight, super-hearing—the newly-minted *Gregory the Hero* does what no one else can: he finds his dogs.

+++

I'm in kindergarten, fantasizing, as I often do, about gluing myself to my desk chair. I have a glue stick

inside my pencil box; it'll be easy. Just roll the glue all over my seat and sit down—then, when it's time to leave for the weekend, I won't be able to stand. They'll call the fire marshal, the principal, maybe my parents will move to the school for the weekend, and my classmates won't be able to stop talking about me. I'll be the cool kid who stayed in school after everyone else left.

I'm also fantasizing—again, as I often do—and there's really no way to say this other than to say this—about rolling my purple glue stick all over my hand and gluing myself to one of the girls, because when you like someone, you hold hands, and if you hold hands enough, you fall in love.

We've just finished show-and-tell at the beanbags in the corner of the classroom, and Mrs. Broff asks us to return to our desks. I race toward mine, hoping the transition between activities will give me enough time to enact my plan. I fling open my pencil box, rub the glue stick all over my seat and sit down.

And the girl I like—whose hand I fantasize about—catches me. She

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33 Gleason Street, Delray Beach, Florida 33483
(561) 276-6338

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 Service

10 a.m.

