

# THE SPIRE



*Your Church Magazine*

November / December 2024



# NURTURE FAITH

**by Dr. Doug Hood**

Co-Pastor

## STANDING UP TO LIFE

*“I can endure all these things through the power of the one who gives me strength.”*

Philippians 4:13 (Common English Bible)

**J**oan Burns, a friend for over eleven years, recently gave me one of the most honest compliments I have received—“What I enjoy best about our friendship is watching you try to be funny!” That comment demonstrates that Joan is the one—in our relationship—who is genuinely funny. More importantly, the comment demonstrates the strength of our friendship. She doesn’t fear damaging our friendship with her candor. That strength of friendship is what we all seek—and need. It is the strength that defines my relationship with my daughter. I will make a silly comment to Rachael, followed by the self-aggrandizement, “I’m so funny!” Rachael’s simple response is, “No, you’re not!” Naturally, that has become a clever riposte between my daughter and me. Yet, Joan’s quip, “What I enjoy best about our friendship is watching you try to be funny,” has theological depth: Joan acknowledges, in her humor, that I am actually “trying!”

**“I can,”** begins Paul’s remark to the church in Philippi. The emphasis is not on our dependence upon God. We do not expect God to do everything for us—or we shouldn’t! There are things that we can do and ought to do. There are things we can endure, though they may not be pleasant. A runner understands this. The first mile is unpleasant for every runner, regardless of physical condition. The first mile is a liar. The first mile will plead with us to stop, that this should be a rest day. Or the lie is that we are not strong enough or the weather isn’t ideal for running. Runners are familiar with the lies of the first mile. So, runners endure the lies and continue into the second mile, where the lies are eventually silenced. Our Christian faith calls forth the same endurance. Our faith does not release us from making the best effort within us. We can face difficulties and obstacles that find their way into our lives. It is simply a decision to stand up to life.

**B**ut there is more in Paul’s comment to the Philippian Church. The “I can” is matched by strength from God. First comes the resolve that we will stand up to life and make every effort within us to do so. Obstacles, setbacks, and losses will be met with our determination to move through them. That determination will then realize a surge of power that comes from without—the power of the one who gives uncommon strength, the risen Christ. Just as a runner endures the lies of the first mile, the second mile presents new strength for the road ahead.

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## CHURCH STAFF

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Co-Pastor

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Birgit Djupedal Fioravante, B.M., M.A.  
Associate Director of Music

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Director of Children and Family Ministry

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## THE SPIRE MAGAZINE

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

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

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God's strength always comes alongside our effort, the "I can." But our own effort comes first. The first mile must be endured. As we approach the end of that first figurative mile of difficulty, a new spiritual confidence emerges that touches every area of one's manner, disposition, and attitude toward life. The notion of "I can" is not a hope or wishful thinking. It is established upon God's promise of strength.

The stiffest challenge of life is not questioning God's presence when we need God. It isn't asking God to rescue us from difficulty or straighten things out for our family. The stiffest challenge of life is to stop viewing God as a blue genie available to grant our wishes or as a cosmic servant that makes the rough places smooth. God is available to pull us together when we fall into despair and to build upon our own determination to instill courage, strength, and guidance for where we place our next step. God's desire is that we stand up to life with the confidence that we don't stand alone. Every success, every accomplishment, every step into the second mile of our life will be through the power of the one who gives strength. Paul's words here, "I can endure all these things through the power of the one who gives me strength," renews courage when life becomes difficult. Repeated often, these words will become a vital part of surviving that first mile.

*O God, in those tumultuous days of life, when I am beaten down, grant me the courage to stand up to life while I wait for your power to move me forward. Amen. ●*

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**by Glenn Barton**

*The Welcome Team*

## THE WELCOMING MINISTRY AT FIRST DELRAY

*"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)*

The WELCOME TEAM began in May 2021. From Day 1, it has filled a special purpose—*greeting members and visitors at the Lobby doors*. Serving on the Welcome Team provides the unique opportunity to be the FIRST person to greet a member or visitor when they arrive; *the greeter's smile might be just what was needed for that individual*.

Schedules are offered one to two months in advance. Greeters usually serve once every four to six weeks, and we are always looking for new people to join the team. This is a wonderful and enjoyable way to serve with a small commitment.

In August 2024, we greeted 653 people over four services, and in September, 928 people over five services. Five new members made First Pres. their church during this time as well! Attendance continues to grow, as do the programming and ministries.

We are very happy to introduce some of our new team members, all of whom have deep roots with First Presbyterian of Delray Beach.

**Kay Cook** started worshiping at First Pres. in the late 1980s when Ted Bush was the Senior Pastor. She and her husband, Jim, then moved to North Carolina, but returned to Florida and First Pres. in 2020 to be closer to their growing family. Kay is looking forward to meeting more of the congregation as she welcomes them for Sunday service.

**Cindy and Kiv Kunkel** have been worshiping "seasonally" at First Pres. since 1981, but their roots go back to the 60s when Kiv's parents and grandmother were part of the congregation. Now the Kunkels are full-time Florida residents and full-time members of the church.

This is an invitation for you to contact Carolyn Kettle (recruiting/scheduling for the Welcome Team) to join 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. ●

## CHRISTMAS EVE OFFERING FOR MONTREAT

**O**ur Christmas Eve Offering this year is being dedicated to Montreat Conference Center which serves the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

**F**or over 100 years, nestled in the Black Mountains of North Carolina, Montreat has hosted groups of individuals seeking a closer relationship with God. These retreats have been a vital part of our youth ministry. Our records show that since at least 1990 (and it might even be before then), each summer, we send a group of our high school students to Montreat for a transformative spiritual experience. Many in our congregation, including parents, children, and grandchildren, have been participants at Montreat. Over 700 high school students attend each one-week session, participating in small and large group activities, attending worship services, and joining together in their belief in Jesus Christ.

**W**hen Hurricane Helene roared through the Southeast, no one could have anticipated the catastrophic damage brought to the mountains of North Carolina. Hurricanes ravage coastal areas, not mountains! Or so we all thought. Just 18 miles from Asheville, Montreat suffered damage to its campus, and damage assessments, as of mid-October, are still underway. Not only is Montreat a vital part of youth ministry, it is also a vital part of its community and has been able to serve as host for the Cajun Navy, distribution center for donations sent in for the surrounding communities and, immediately after the hurricane, was able to provide communications for the town of Montreat,

helping residents connect with each other.

**W**ith our help, and that of many others, Montreat will be able to continue its mission, to gather people to experience God's transforming power and inspire love for the world. Talk with any of our youth or adults who have attended Montreat and they will tell you it is a life-changing experience. Montreat is a place where the spiritual formation of many youth of our church has been solidified. Please help us ensure that the Conference Center continues to be a place for our youth to attend for many more years. ●





# OUR 2025 AND 2026 DISTINGUISHED PREACHERS

We have scheduled our 2025 and 2026 Distinguished Preachers, and you need to put these dates on your calendars now.

On Sunday, January 12, 2025, we welcome to our pulpit Rev. Dr. Jonathan Walton, an accomplished author, ethicist, religious scholar, and President of Princeton Theological Seminary. Born in Maryland, Walton attended Wofford College on a football scholarship and transferred to Morehouse College for his sophomore year, graduating with a degree in political science. He received his MDiv and PhD from Princeton Theological Seminary. He has taught at several universities, including Princeton University, the University of California, and Harvard. Before becoming President of Princeton Theological Seminary, he was the Dean of Wake Forest University School of Divinity.



Then, we welcome the return of Rev. Dr. Thomas Tewell on January 11, 2026. He graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary and served as a pastor for forty years, including at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in NYC during 9/11. Dr. Tewell has received numerous awards for his social justice ministry, particularly for his work with the homeless in NYC. He led his congregation to personally know the homeless individuals who slept on their steps. Dr. Tewell is the founder of Macedonian Ministry and enjoys serving as a pastor to other pastors, a guest preacher, a consultant to churches, and spending time with his family. ●



## DEACONS' CORNER

A special part of every Christmas season at First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach is our annual Deacons' Tree fundraiser for the Deacons' Christmas Tree fund. Thanks to the generosity of the congregation, the Deacons, in the past, have provided three hundred \$25 gift cards as presents for some of the neediest children in Delray Beach through five agencies:

**The Boys and Girls Clubs of Palm Beach County** works to help youth of all backgrounds develop the qualities needed to become responsible citizens and leaders. The Club offers daily access to a broad range of programs in the six core program areas, including character and leadership development; education and career development; health and life skills; the arts; sports and fitness; and technology.

**Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse (AVDA)** is dedicated to empowering and supporting survivors of domestic violence to live violence-free and self-sufficient lives.

**Adopt-A-Family** serves homeless and low-income families by strengthening families with children through access to all-encompassing services in order to achieve self-sufficiency and stability.

**Achievement Centers for Children & Families** provides programs for under-resourced children that support educational growth, skill building, and healthy lifestyles.

**Milagro Center** ensures the academic and social success of underserved children through cultural arts, living values, academic support, and mentoring.

This year, the Deacons seek to expand this event, providing an opportunity for all church attendees to assist in decorating the tree. On Sunday, November 17th, at noon, immediately following the 11 a.m. service, all are invited to linger in the Lobby for Christmas cookies, hot chocolate, and punch. Make your donations to the Deacons' Tree while crafting ornaments to hang on the tree. All funds collected go to purchase the \$25 gift cards for the previously mentioned local agencies. You can also contribute by mailing a check to the church office with "Deacons' Tree" on the memo line, or by going to the church website ([firstdelray.com/give](http://firstdelray.com/give)) and including "Deacons' Tree" in the notes.

Join the Deacons as we sing Christmas carols and get in the holiday spirit. This event is open to all ages. We hope to see you there. ●

**by Connie Timmons**

## HOLLY HOUSE HOLIDAY GIFT SHOPPE

That wonderful time of the year has arrived and we at Holly House have created a special place for you to find that extra special something for your holiday celebration.

We will be open on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10 a.m. until noon. After Thanksgiving, we will also be open on Saturdays from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m.

We have a large selection of handcrafted items, holiday décor, floral creations, shells, and jewelry to help you with your holiday preparations.

All proceeds from the sales go to the advancement of the ministry of First Presbyterian Church of Delray. ●

*Holly House is a ministry of First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach*



**by Dick Falk and Pat Breman**

## A MESSAGE FROM YOUR GENEROSITY TEAM

The fall-winter season is in full swing at First Presbyterian. Co-pastoring has begun, the Children's Ministry is growing, and Holly House and other groups are meeting. In addition, the Mission Outreach Ministry Team has planned several activities and the First Delray Concert Series has announced more exciting musical events, both of which carry the spirit of the church into the community.

Your continued generosity provides the fuel for this "ship to sail." For those who have graciously pledged, we urge you to fulfill your plan. And, for all others, we humbly ask for your continued support to help maintain our momentum.

We thank you for all you do.

Note:

If you are required to make withdrawals from your IRA, you are allowed to contribute directly to First Presbyterian from your account. This can provide additional tax advantages. Christine Davis, in the church office, can provide more information. ●



### SUSTAINING MINISTRY EXCELLENCE

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

## GIFTS TO OUR CHURCH

**Memorial Garden Fund** from Don and Karen Carter, in memory of Janet Loennecker and John Loennecker.

**Pennies from Heaven** from Hyacinth James, Matthew Linderman, Vince and Judy Pettinelli, and Marie Thies in memory of Deborah Salmore. ●



## SESSION REPORT

**D**uring August and September, the Session received five new members. They also approved the schedule for serving communion in 2025. The Session also approved that there will be only one worship service at 11 a.m. on Sunday, December 29, 2024. ●



### NEW MEMBERS

Laurie Alemany-Hlavaty

Susan Ambrecht

Kim Cascio

Sara Catherine Cook

Diane Franco

Lindsay Wille

Tyler Wille

# WELCOME



**by Grace Cameron Hood**

*Director of Children and Family Ministry*

## FIRST FAMILIES MINISTRIES

*A special thanks to Birgit Djupedal Fioravante for her leadership as the children sang a beautiful song on World Communion Sunday! ●*



*Bowling was a success!! More fun to follow!*



*Some of God's Amazing Kids!!*



*A special thanks to Birgit Djupedal Fioravante for her leadership as the children sang a beautiful song on World Communion Sunday!*

## “LIVING ABOVE”

A sermon preached on May 26, 2024, by Dr. Yvonne Martinez Thorne

2 Chronicles 20:1, 13-22

Colossians 3:1-4

*“Pay attention, all of Judah, every inhabitant of Jerusalem, and King Jehoshaphat, ’Jahaziel said. ‘This is what the Lord says to you: Don’t be afraid or discouraged by this great army because the battle isn’t yours. It belongs to God!...You don’t need to fight this battle. Just take your places, stand ready, and watch how the Lord, who is with you, will deliver you, Judah and Jerusalem. Don’t be afraid or discouraged! Go out tomorrow and face them. The Lord will be with you.’”*

2 Chronicles 20:15, 17 (Common English Bible)

*“Therefore, if you were raised with Christ, look for the things that are above where Christ is sitting at God’s right side. Think about the things above and not things on earth. You died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.”*

Colossians 3:1-4 (Common English Bible)

Several weeks ago, I flew from Palm Beach Airport to visit my 93-year-old mother who is living in upstate New York. She was showing signs of increasing frailty, physically, mentally and emotionally. I wanted to lay my clinical eyes on her to assist our family with understanding these ongoing changes and offer my loving support and prayers. Lucila is my mother’s name, and I endearingly call her Mamita. Like many mothers right here in this sanctuary, Mamita has an unwavering love for her family, for God, and for the Church. She has been an extraordinary mother who lived a fulfilling life raising four children. She served in various lay ministries within New York Presbyterian churches. In her working career, she was a bookkeeper, an executive assistant, and a court interpreter translating from Spanish into English for the Immigration Court in New York City. Following retirement, she found great fulfillment as a volunteer, translating from English into Spanish Individual Education Plans developed by the schools to help Spanish-speaking families better understand the

educational needs and plans for their special needs children. I pray that I have followed in her footsteps.

On this particular flight, my attention was drawn to the voice of the pilot. He was notifying us about the impending, strong turbulence. He was getting us ready for a very bumpy

ride ahead. Out of the windows of our plane, the passengers and crew could see a darkened sky filled with thick and ominous clouds. The rain had begun to fall. As we taxied down the runway and began our ascent into the low cloud cover, I silently said a prayer and reassured myself that I would be that much closer to God as we flew at high



altitudes above the clouds. I do not fear flying, but in some situations of life, I find comfort in prayer. I also reminded myself about my reasons for flying to Rochester, NY—I needed to see my mother, who also needed to see me. With a sense of reassurance, I was determined to trust God to get us safely to our destination. And what do you know? The flight was just as the pilot described for many air miles of our trip. The pilot, as he told us, flew high above the storm clouds in order to better manage the turbulence. For my part, I reflected on the palpable peace and confidence I felt despite our turbulent circumstances. This outbound journey, where the pilot flew us above the turbulence, reminded me of an invaluable life lesson: *when we find ourselves confronting stormy conditions in life, we can also discover a refuge and calm above the storms.*

In the OT reading by Dr. Hood this morning from 2 Chronicles 20:1, 13-22, we find King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah and Israel challenged by an unexpected life-threatening circumstance. They were about to confront an unprovoked military attack by an enemy who greatly outnumbered them. Under the leadership of their King, they assembled to seek help from God. They sought God's wisdom and

power for a battle they knew they could not win in their own military might. As Scripture reveals, God spoke to them through Jahaziel, a Levite. God's words to them were: *"Don't be afraid or discouraged by this great army because the battle isn't yours. It belongs to God!"* Just imagine what they must have felt hearing these prophetic words in the present reality of their doubts and fears. *How often have we found ourselves facing life's battles where we vacillate between our faith and our fears? Our human tendency is to feel overwhelmed with doubts and fears.* As a therapist, I too have moments in my own life when I have to take the counseling advice I give to clients, to calm my own fears through prayerful trust in God. A wise therapist years ago gave me one of the best pieces of advice that I took to heart. She said that the best therapists have their own therapists. Truth be told, sometimes life's threatening circumstances confront us all. Sometimes we find ourselves as Judah and Israel overwhelmed by life's slings and blows.

Our text tells us that when the people of Judah and Israel heard God's voice through Jahaziel, the Levite, they fell down and worshiped and praised God. God's words of reassurance to them were: *The battle isn't yours. It*

*belongs to God!* The people went to the battlefield the next day singing and praising God. And what does our text tell us? They won the victory! God was faithful to them! *What might God be asking of us this morning as we consider the life circumstances we are battling?* Brothers and sisters, we are being called to respond in faith certain in who God is, has always been, and will always be in our lives. We are to confront our life circumstances by taking our God-appointed places in our battles and wait expectantly for God to deliver us! *We can trust God for the outcome of our battle even though God's answers may be different from the outcome we expect.*

Some people may see this OT account as an allegory, a story revealing a hidden spiritual meaning. Perhaps there are others who might take this story literally. Wherever you stand in your belief, we can all agree that as people of faith, the inspired Word of God is always on the side of communicating something important to us. The people of Judah and Israel, under the leadership of King Jehoshaphat, trusted and believed God for a miracle in their battle. And God gave them one. Their enemy was defeated not by military might. The enemy turned on themselves and destroyed one another.





God not only delivered his people; he also blessed them with the spoils from the battle, which took them three days to carry away. They discovered that in this experience, the battle was never theirs to fight. It belonged to God! *How often do we fight battles where we continue to leave God out or on the periphery? God has a purpose for us in our battles that He desires to accomplish for us and through us. I believe that there are some personal battles we face in life that should be turned over to God. We ought to get out of the way and let God be God in those experiences.*

According to the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, there are more than 110 armed conflicts currently going on in our world. The top two most affected regions are the Middle East and North Africa. There are some 45 armed conflicts in the Middle East, and in Africa, there are some 35 non-international armed conflicts. Asia

takes third place with 19, followed by Europe with 7, and Latin America with 6. On this Memorial Day weekend, let us intentionally remember the many people who are currently serving in our military, our military retirees, and fallen soldiers who gave their lives in battle so that we can enjoy the freedoms we have. As we honor active soldiers and retired vets here this morning, I remember my own father who served in the Navy, and my brother who also served in two battles—the Vietnam War and Desert Storm—as a Marine and as an Army Reservist.

*And what about the tough personal battles with which we also live?* Some of us are living with medical conditions that take up much of our time and our resources. Our maturing years and longevity challenge our quality of life and independence. Some of us serve as loving caregivers for family members or friends who are struggling with addictions and the accompanying

powerlessness and helplessness to change their lives. Still there are others who may be in the physical and emotional battles of caring for a loved one, and this battle is leaving you depleted, and in anguish, even lonely, and bitter. There are others who are in a perpetual battle with themselves, imprisoned by their past, unable to stop the never-ending cognitive and emotional loops that replay the rejection, abandonment, and trauma in their lives. *Even so, can we dare to believe that our battles are not ours? They belong to God. And because they belong to God, can we dare ourselves to genuinely seek for God's outcomes?*

Several years ago when I was practicing in PA, I began working with a client who was grappling with a recent cancer diagnosis. He desired counseling to help him prepare for the health battle awaiting him. As his health issues progressed, he made the decision to step down from his professorship. This moment, coupled with his increasing sense of his own mortality, ushered in bouts of depression, anxiety, and grief about dying and leaving his family before he was able to properly provide for their needs. As he battled to live, while confronting the reality of his impending death, he opened himself to God and for God's purpose for him and his family. As his challenging journey progressed, God gave him peace, and he released his battle with cancer to God. He chose to *live above* the battle, and he found deep meaning and purpose in strengthening his relationships with his wife and children.

In the NT reading from Colossians 3:1-4, Apostle Paul reminds the Colossian Church that they are to set their hearts and minds on things above and not on earthly things. For Paul, their ability to do so came from Christ's sacrifice, accomplished for them on the cross. Hear the words of

Apostle Paul written to the Colossian Church in verses 1 and 2: “*Therefore, if you were raised with Christ, look for the things that are above where Christ is sitting at God’s right side. Think about the things above and not things on the earth.*” Paul encouraged our first-century sisters and brothers to live above their earthly circumstances. People of faith are encouraged to become *above-centered* or *above-focused* people. We are firmly planted on earth, yes, but the orientation of our lives should transcend and resist the pull of the earth, and this includes our daily battles. Paul was encouraging them to stay the course with God by *focusing on things above* as their focal point, by developing an orientation where they would authentically seek *living above* with God, and this includes our personal battles and struggles.

**I** want us to reflect on three points in closing. First, in the 17th chapter of 2 Chronicles, Jehoshaphat is described as a king who sought to follow the God of his father, King Asa. As his father did, Jehoshaphat followed God’s commandments. During Jehoshaphat’s reign, he regularly visited his people and encouraged them to return to God. He also developed a judicial system to judge civil matters across Judah, and he instructed the judges to dispense judgment not merely by human standards but also by God’s. He also appointed judges in Jerusalem among the Levites to administer God’s instructions and to settle religious disputes. Jehoshaphat practiced

spiritual disciplines of fasting and praying while encouraging his people to do likewise. *Is there any wonder why God miraculously intervened in Jehoshaphat’s battles?* I leave this for you to consider in your own life of seeking to live above by committing your battles to God.

**S**econd, *living a life above* our battles also requires us to be able to authentically *rest* in God. St. Augustine of Hippo, one of our Church Fathers, wrote in his book *Confessions* that *because God made us and draws us to Himself, our heart will continue to be restless until it rests in God.* St. Augustine understood that the restlessness we experience in life comes from our mortality and our daily living in a fallen world. Although we are created in God’s image and created to need and desire God, our life circumstances and battles tend to redirect us, at times, away from God and to live life lower than our high calling. We struggle between who we know God to be and the restlessness and anxiety that this world creates for us. The wise Bishop of Hippo identifies restlessness as one of our formidable battles. The cure for restlessness and its twin companion anxiety is rest or trust in God. *When we rest in God, we believe that although we may not know what tomorrow will bring, we know God has all our tomorrows. So rest in God, my friends. Take deep, restful daily breaths in God.*

**T**hird, as Paul reminds us in his letter to the Colossian church, our

confidence in fighting our battles comes in knowing what Jesus, our Lord, has accomplished for us. Christ’s death and resurrection gave us a spiritual life above with God. We have daily access to God’s love, power, protection, grace, mercy, and wisdom. *We are not alone.* We are very blessed here at First Presbyterian with excellent preaching by our pastors, Dr. Hood and Dr. Rapier. We are blessed with the sacred music directed by Don, and by our gifted choirs. As we join together in our weekly worship services in this holy space of First Presbyterian Church, we remind one another that we belong to a beautiful community of God’s people who are striving together with us to *live above* our battles. And above all, we have Christ’s promise that he will never leave us or forsake us. No, never!

**I**n closing, let us together embrace these words sung by the choir a few moments ago:

“**Y**ou raise me up, so I can stand on mountains;  
**Y**ou raise me up, to walk on stormy seas;  
**I** am strong when I am on your shoulders;  
**Y**ou raise me up to more than I can be.” ●

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<sup>1</sup>Humanitarian Law and Human Rights. “Today’s armed conflicts.” <https://geneva-academy.ch/galleries/today-s-armed-conflicts> (retrieved 5/28/2024)



## UPCOMING EVENT

You are invited to a fun afternoon on November 3rd from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. at PopStroke, the newest putt putt golf experience in Delray Beach. The afternoon includes lunch, games, equipment, and unlimited soft drinks. There is a charge of \$15 per person and a \$40 family cap. Lunch includes smashburgers, buffalo chicken dip with chips, chicken tenders, pretzels, and queso. Reservations are required and you may sign up at church or by contacting Grace Hood ([gracehood@firstdelray.com](mailto:gracehood@firstdelray.com)). ●



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## SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS

**DO NOT FORGET THE WONDERFUL PROGRAMMING FOR CHILDREN!**



**Nursery** for birth through 3 years  
**Bible Bunch** for 3 through Kindergarten  
**Primary Sunday School** for First Grade through Fourth Grade  
**God Squad** for Fifth grade on up



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**by Dolores McNaboe**

## WOMEN'S LUNCH BY THE SEA

All church women are invited to attend the Women's Lunch by the Sea, hosted by Dolores McNaboe and Kathy Wilsher. On the second Tuesday of every month at noon, you are invited to Boheme Bistro on Atlantic Avenue, adjacent to the church. Tables are reserved, and you are responsible for paying for your meal. This is a great opportunity to meet other women from our church. RSVP to Kathy Wilsher (561-252-0709). ●

# THE CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

Come one, come all!

On Sunday, December 8th, at 6 p.m., you are invited to celebrate 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 the characters from the first Christmas night, including the animals.



You are invited, even if you don't have children, to come and be part of this wonderful event and see our Chancel is transformed into a full-size manger where the Christ Child was born.

Following the pageant, you are invited to a reception in Fellowship Hall to congratulate the children and to enjoy a piece of birthday cake in honor of Jesus. ●

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## JOIN US AS WE CELEBRATE THE BIRTH OF THE CHRIST CHILD ON CHRISTMAS EVE

Join us on **Tuesday, December 24th**, as we celebrate the birth of the Christ Child.

Our evening begins with our 5 p.m. *Candles and Carols* service. This is a fun, song-filled service and includes a special time for the children.

At 7 p.m., we have our *Traditional Candlelight Service*, with a special time for the children.

And lastly, the evening concludes with our 9:30 p.m. *Traditional Candlelight Service*.

All services will be live-streamed. ●



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## MEET YOUR DEACON SUNDAY

The Deacons have been making great efforts to be more visible and to make meaningful connections with their flocks. Last Spring's **Meet Your Deacon Sunday** was well received, and many attendees asked that the Deacons hold two such gatherings a year. November 3rd will be your next chance to MEET YOUR DEACON and share some breakfast goodies. Come to Fellowship Hall on Sunday, November 3rd, at 10 a.m., between services, and share in Deacon-led fellowship. Stay after the 9 a.m. service, or come early before the 11 a.m. service. The Deacons will be ready to welcome you. ●

# 2025 ANNUAL DINNER

**W**e are pleased to announce that the 2025 Annual Dinner will feature our 2025 Distinguished Preacher, Dr. Jonathan Walton. Join us on Friday, January 10, 2025, at Benvenuto Restaurant (1730 N. Federal Highway, Boynton Beach).

**O**ur 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 \$45 per person. Both the church and Benvenuto Restaurant will be underwriting this evening. We provide confidential scholarships for parishioners who may not otherwise be able to participate. We would be grateful if you could help us offset them.

**W**e will begin taking reservations on November 17th. You can sign up at the Welcome Center in the Lobby, on our website, or by calling the church office.

**Y**ou do not need to be a member of the church to attend this event. ●

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## BEWARE OF GIFT CARD SCAMS



**I**t 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.

**H**ave 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.

**T**he 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.

**T**here 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. ●



# First Delray Concert Series

*Music by the Sea*

## CAN YOU HEAR IT? KEEP LISTENING!

Can you hear it? It's the strains of rousing and beautiful music played and sung by some of the best musicians in South Florida and beyond—and it's coming from the Sanctuary of First Delray!!

### A Spirited and Touching Final Concert of the Year

As you read this, our last concert of the first season of Music by the Sea, "This Land is Your Land," is, as they say, "waiting in the wings." As a tribute to our veterans and the ideals of the land we live in, this concert seeks to express the experiences and emotions of the diverse individuals who have contributed to our nation. Our goal is also to bring our community together through the uniting power of music as it speaks to our shared humanity. We hope you plan to attend this concert: whether the music recalls the natural beauty of our country, reminds us of the need to protect the freedoms of *all* Americans, or brings to mind the sacrifices of those who have fought in our wars—and those who waited for them at home—we promise it will go straight to your heart.

While our offerings in 2024 focused on the vocal music that we know this congregation and our community love, we "kicked it up a notch" at several concerts with, for our Mozart program, a 30-piece orchestra (yes, we fit them all in!), and for this last concert, a brass quintet with percussion, not to mention our own Birgit Djupedal Fioravante on guitar. Our concertgoers clearly approved of our approach, and the musical selections and talent we featured, since each concert was essentially a sold-out

event!

### To Those Who Made Our First Season Such a Success: Thank You!

Many, many people helped to make the vision of the Concert Team for this new ministry a reality. First and foremost, we thank our very generous sponsors. We are also incredibly grateful to all our exceptional performers, including our First Delray choir soloists (and friends) and our master of ceremonies, Shane Tanner. Applause to our wonderful Director of Music, Don Cannarozzi, pianist, piano soloist, and also conductor for the Mozart concert. So much important work for the success of the concerts goes on behind the scenes with our facilities staff, especially Aaron Strippel and our invaluable Business Administrator, Nancy Fine. Let's shine a spotlight on Penny Johnson, Front of House Manager, and the 15-18 volunteers whose efforts make each concert an enjoyable experience for our audiences. And shine a bright spotlight on our incredibly multi-talented Associate Director of Music, Birgit Djupedal Fioravante, our Back of the House Manager. (Few accomplished musicians and expert concert managers are also good at parking cars!) A huge thank you to Mary Martínéz, the person behind the words of our programs, brochures, and letters. Her exceptional wordsmithing eloquently describes all aspects of publicity for our concert series. Lastly, there are not enough words to thank Marsha Bird, our untiring team leader, the glue that holds the various elements of our concert series together. Her vision for a purposeful and

meaningful concert series is unending. Our gratitude is boundless for all those who prayed for our success and our humble thanks to God, who was with us at every step.

**T**hrough your contributions, as sponsors and ticket holders, our concerts have showcased musical excellence with some of South Florida’s finest singers and instrumentalists, as well as provided for related expenses for the concerts and music program. This ministry is putting First Delray on the map and attracting potential new members and supporters for this and other ministries.

### **Are You Ready for 2025?**

**B**ecause of your generosity and vital support, after only a few concerts, there was no doubt in our minds that this mission of First Delray should continue. With sold-out concerts and resounding accolades, it’s hard to think we could top 2024. We are ready! With your help, the 2025 Concert Series will bring another year of exciting music to First Delray.

**Brochures and tickets are available now for the 2025 concert season.** If you did not receive the brochure by mail, they are available at the Welcome Center in the church Lobby.

**Tickets are available for all four concerts.** They can be reserved online via our church website (click on “Concerts”), by calling or dropping by the church office, or they can be purchased at the Welcome Desk on Sunday

mornings. If you reserve but do not pay by check or cash in person or by mail (or card **if you purchase on Sunday morning**), you can pick up your tickets and pay at the “Will Call” table on the day of the concert. Credit cards are accepted, along with cash or check at that time.

### **Concerts for 2025—Save the dates now!**

#### **Here is our fantastic program lineup for 2025:**

- **January 26** – “An Afternoon with Gershwin,” including *Rhapsody in Blue* with a chamber orchestra and solos from *Porgy and Bess*.
- **March 23** – “Give My Regards to Broadway,” the best of Broadway—you loved it, and our wonderful soloists will treat you to more.
- **May 4** – “The Latin Divos Return!” Get your Latin dance moves ready—it will be hard to sit still . . .
- **October 26** – “The American Spirit,” with powerful spirituals and other thoroughly American songs expressing the spirit of our nation.

**S**o, keep your ears peeled for more beautiful music, and join us by sponsoring, attending, and praying for the mission of the First Delray Concert Series in 2025. With God’s grace and your support, we are confident we can continue to make a musical and spiritual contribution to First Delray and our larger community. ●

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## **WORSHIP SERVICE TIME CHANGE**

**I**t is that time of year when we transition to our “in-season” Sunday morning worship schedule. Beginning November 3rd and continuing through the end of April, we hold two worship 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.

**D**on’t forget to change your clocks and “fall back” on Sunday, November 3rd.

**M**ake note that on Sunday, December 29th, as done previously, there is only one worship service at 11 a.m.

# Thank You!

In A tremendous thank you is extended to the church for your generosity toward our 2024 One Great Hour of Sharing Offering to support the recovery efforts in Maui from the August 2023 wildfire. It burned more than 3,200 acres and destroyed an estimated 2,200 buildings, most of which were residential.

We purchased over \$4,300 gift cards to a local grocery store for residents trying to rebuild their lives. These cards were distributed by Dr. Kimberly Fong from Po'okela Church.

*Aloha,*

*Mahalo (used to express gratitude in Hawaii) to you and Pastor at Po'okela church for assisting my family as we continue to recover from the fires on August 8th on Maui. Your blessings are deeply appreciated.*

*Thank you so much for your generosity and kindness in supporting the devastating Maui wildfire victims. Although it has almost been a year, it is still very fresh, and we are still healing and struggling to cope with our lives. Your support from far away truly lifts us up and helps us keep moving forward. Thank you, and God bless. ●*



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## BACK TO BASICS ANGEL PROGRAM

Our congregation has supported the Back to Basics Angel Program for over 23 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 started in 1984 when its founder, Beverly Perham, realized that many children in our community didn'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 every year.

Our Mission Outreach Ministry Team commits to serving 70 students at Pine Grove Elementary School in Delray Beach. Each student receives a large holiday gift bag containing a pair of brand-new sneakers, five pairs of socks, five pairs of underwear, and a toy, individually wrapped and tagged for delivery. We are grateful that we have received a very generous donation of all the underwear and socks we need for this year's children.

We invite you to join us on Sunday, November 24th, to help us wrap and bag the gifts for this year's children. It is through you, our generous congregation, that we can provide these necessities to children in our community. Thank you. ●

**by Maryann Rana**

Prayer Ministry Team

## PRAISE AND WORSHIP



When praying for others we are always asking, asking, asking.

How often do we thank God for all he does?

“I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise will always be in my mouth.”  
Psalm 34:1 (Common English Bible)

“Enter his gates with thanks; enter his courtyards with praise! Thank him! Bless his name!”  
Psalm 100:4 (Common English Bible)

Glory and honor is due our God’s name. He is holy and deserves our worship and praise.

He alone is worthy. Why should we not give our praises to him?

How many of us even think about doing this? We usually have so much on our mind, praise is the last thing that enters our thoughts.

Maybe we should think about placing our praises first before anything else.

*Father, we pray your children feel your nearness, your very touch, and give you thanks and praise for your great and awesome love. Amen*

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. ●

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**by Maria Graham**

## MONDAY MORNING WOMEN’S BIBLE STUDY

In November, The Monday Morning Women’s Bible Study will listen to and discuss sermons by preachers Brian McLaren, Tim Keller, and Susan Sparks.

In December, we will do the video study *The Angels of Christmas: Hearing God’s Voice in Advent* by Susan Robb (retired Minister at Highland Park United Methodist Church in Dallas, Texas). The visits between Gabriel and Zechariah, Gabriel and Mary, Joseph and the Angel of the Lord, and the Angels and the Shepherds will be explored, as will the history of the angel Gabriel and other angels in the Bible. *The Angels of Christmas* aims to help us rediscover how God communicates hope and meaning in our lives today. ●



## WALKS WITH THOUGHTS

The signs of fall are all around us. Shorter days turn into longer nights. The smells of apple and pumpkin spice greet customers in local cafes and coffee houses. Large orange pumpkins and pots of chrysanthemums in blazing hues of yellow, purple, and burgundy frame the entrances of grocery and hardware stores. Car carriers with outstretched ramps block turn lanes. Television debates remind us that elections are fast approaching. Tempers flare, and even close friends' voices become heated as they defend their choices of candidates. An argument over the display of a Trump banner disturbs those of us in our condominium complex.

But here at James A. Rutherford Park, all is at peace. The newly renovated boardwalk is lined with brown and yellow leaves that crunch beneath my feet as they herald the last bits of summer and the beginning of fall. I have waited with impatience for nearly five years for this boardwalk trail to reopen. And the trail does not disappoint. Located off Federal Highway and 24th Street in Boca Raton, this gem lies along the Intracoastal Waterway directly across from Gumbo Limbo. The park contains over two miles of trails, which begin as mangrove-lined boardwalks and end in bark-lined raised paths. On this warm Thursday morning,

it is a cool place of beauty and tranquility, with only the occasional visitor. A peaceful place to walk and talk with God.

Last night's full moon gave rise to this morning's king tide, which laps softly only a foot or so beneath the boardwalk. After a short time, the shaded boardwalk opens into brilliant sun and an observation pier with benches. As I sit here and stare across Lake Wyman at the outlines of the small beach at Gumbo Limbo, I realize that Neil Diamond's song "Soolaimon" has been playing in my head for some time. Perhaps it is God's greeting. I have seen the word *Soolaimon* translated as *Peace be with you*. Even as I share some of my own anxieties and concerns for myself, family, friends, and the country, I feel a strange calmness. *The Lord is Near*. As Paul reminds us in Philippians 4:6 & 4:7, *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.*

Walking more slowly now as I commune with my God, I return to the boardwalk, where I come upon an inlet—or perhaps a canal. Here, an ibis in brown camouflage with a white belly pokes at the shallow, muddy water beneath us. A few more steps, and a small sandy beach appears to my left, while to my right mangroves filter the soft waves. Up ahead, the boardwalk connects with a bark-lined raised path, which I now find circles Lake Wyman Park.

I invite you to come enjoy this newly opened park. Walk the boardwalk and listen to the softly lapping waves beneath you. Open your heart to God's creation. Open your heart to peace.

*Soolaimon.* God's peace be with you. ●





**by Rev. Greg Rapier**  
Co-Pastor

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

There's a powerful story in Genesis about two brothers, Jacob and Esau, who, after years of estrangement, finally reunite. The more famous part of their story comes earlier in Genesis—when Jacob, the younger brother, tricks their father into giving him Esau's birthright and blessing. This cruel betrayal drives a wedge between them that lasts for decades. The biblical narrative then follows Jacob exclusively as he flees town, gets married, has children, and even wrestles an angel. But he could never fully escape all he'd done to Esau. So he decides to return home.

Jacob isn't sure what to expect. Revenge? Death? Anything was on the table. And when he discovers his brother Esau is bringing 400 men to the reunion, the tension only grows. Still, Jacob presses on.

Soon, he finds himself standing across from Esau and the 400 men. Jacob does what he can to humble himself, bowing to the ground as he approaches his brother. But Esau? Esau takes off in a dead sprint and races toward him—past the servants, past the 400 men, past everyone else, and throws his arms around his estranged brother. The brothers embrace, tears trickling down both their faces. No grudges, no accusations, just grace.

What a wonderful image for us to carry into this season. Christmas is about many things: Christ born into the world, families coming together, and a God who will not give up on us no matter what. But let me also suggest this: Christmas is about fresh beginnings. It's about wiping the slate clean and stepping toward each other with grace, just as Esau

did for Jacob.

What would it mean if you added one extra name to your Christmas card list this year? One extra stamp and photo. Maybe it's someone who used to be on your list long ago, or someone you haven't spoken to for quite some time. And if you don't send cards, maybe it's an email or a phone call. This simple act of reaching out—sharing life, sharing faces—can make a world of difference.

Like Esau, we can step into this season of giving with open arms, offering forgiveness and reconnection where it's needed most. Just one small gesture could bring renewal and healing, breathing new life into old relationships. Isn't that, after all, what Christmas is all about? Fresh beginnings. Hope rekindled. The birth of something new. ●

*The Community Church by the Sea*

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This church magazine is available online at [www.firstdelray.com](http://www.firstdelray.com). If you are interested in receiving an electronic copy of this publication, please email Nancy Fine at [nancyfine@firstdelray.com](mailto: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 morning,  
December 29th*

