

THE SPIRE

*Your
Church
Magazine*



November / December 2021



NURTURE FAITH

by Dr. Doug Hood

Senior Pastor

THANKSGIVING DAY IN BONAIRE

“After giving thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this to remember me.’”

1 Corinthians 11:24 (Common English Bible)

This year my wife, Grace, and I will celebrate Thanksgiving Day on the Caribbean Island of Bonaire. Our thirty-fourth Thanksgiving together, this one will be different. Most of our celebrations of this holiday have been with family – our children, our parents, or our siblings. Some years ago, our children and Grace’s mother celebrated Thanksgiving with us in New York City, kicking the day off with the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade. During our twelve years in Bucks County, a number of celebrations were shared with another family in that church, each year alternating homes for the meal. Since moving to Florida, several celebrations were with a family of this congregation, breaking from meal preparation in the home to celebrate over a sumptuous buffet provided by the former Marriott of Delray Beach. Guests around the table may have varied through the years. However, there were always guests.

This year, neither of our children are able to make the trip to Florida. Our daughter, Rachael, has now made her home in Seattle, Washington and our son, Nathanael, will be preparing final papers for the fall semester at Princeton Theological Seminary. My brother, Wayne, and his wife, Nancy, have now retired from their ministry in Florida and have moved to Tennessee, and Grace’s siblings will be out of the country. The church family we shared several meals with at the Marriott have moved on, and Grace and I have buried both of our parents. This year Grace and I will be alone for Thanksgiving Day. It is a familiar story. Each year brings change to every one of us – and our families. Since the beginning of this pandemic, it seems the speed of change has only accelerated. Disorientation is the result, often accompanied with some level of grief.

This year’s celebration will be a significant departure from our first thirty-three together – a holiday that always included either family or friends at the table. Therefore, Grace and I will celebrate Thanksgiving Day in Bonaire. It is a decision to embrace what is inevitable in all of our lives – change; and to make an imaginative use of that change. Most of us have little control over our future. Change is a reliable companion that shares life with all of us. What we do have is the ability to take charge of that change, to make creative use of it in a manner that

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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.**

OUR 2021 DISTINGUISHED PREACHER



The purpose of our Distinguished Preacher Series, begun in 2014, is to elevate the power of the pulpit for transforming lives in Jesus Christ. As Rob Tanner, an Elder in our church, stated, *“Our Distinguished Preacher Series programming over the years has brought to our congregation some of the finest Christian ministers of our time. Each of them bring a new voice from our pulpit; a new confidence spoken about our faith that allows us to hear God’s word filtered by their incredible knowledge and experience that challenges us to be better disciples of Christ. Each time we welcome them is always a joyful experience creating the wonderful opportunity for new spiritual growth and development.”*

This year, on November 14th, Dr. Michael Brown returns to our pulpit for the third time. He is the pastor of Blowing Rock Methodist Church in Blowing Rock, North Carolina. Prior to his ministry there, he was the Senior Minister at Marble Collegiate Church in New York City, the oldest Protestant church in North America. He is an accomplished author, preacher, and teacher. We look forward to Dr. Brown’s reappearance to our pulpit as our 2021 Distinguished Preacher. ●

OUR 2022 ANNUAL DINNER AND DISTINGUISHED PREACHER



Our Annual Dinner and Distinguished Preacher program is back. On Friday, January 21st, we are holding our Annual Dinner at Benvenuto Restaurant (1730 N. Federal Hwy, Boynton Beach). After taking a year off due to Covid, we are excited to have Rev. Susan Sparks speak at this beloved event. The cost of the dinner, which includes a social hour, sit-down dinner, thought-provoking speaker, and live music coordinated by Don Cannarozzi, is just \$35 per person. This event is underwritten by both the church and Benvenuto. We do provide scholarships for deserving parishioners who may not otherwise be able to attend. If you would like to help us offset those costs, we would be grateful. We will begin taking reservations in early January.

“The Annual Dinner allows me to meet and mingle with others in the congregation whom I might not know. In addition to great fellowship, excellent music, and a terrific meal, I am always amazed at how the speakers help me with my walk with Christ.” (a church member)

Then on January 23rd, Rev. Susan Sparks will be our Distinguished Preacher at our Sunday worship services. An ex-trial lawyer, turned standup comedian and Baptist minister, she is America’s only female comedian with a pulpit. A North Carolina native, Susan’s work with humor, healing, and spirituality has been featured in O Magazine, the New York Times, and on 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.

Make sure to put both these events on your calendars now and watch for additional details in the January/February edition of *The Spire: Your Church Magazine*. ●

by Grace Cameron Hood

*Director of Children and
Family Ministry*



FIRST FAMILY NEWS!

We are excited to share some good news with you! The leaders of the Children's Ministry of First Presbyterian Church have been in prayer throughout the pandemic about how to continue best serving our families and engaging our children in meaningful Christ-centered activities. While we were excited to come together this fall through the Thursdays@First program, we have discovered it would serve our families best to change directions and design a more diversified and personalized fellowship plan for our children. So, while we are cancelling our Thursdays@First program this fall, it is our prayer that we can provide a touch point for your children to make friendships, learn about their best life as a Christian, and give opportunities for them to participate in the life of the Church!

So, in short, we are going rogue for 2021-22! We will be reaching out to children and families in a more individualized, more randomized way which we believe will better build fellowship in the midst of this pandemic. We will continue to offer Sunday School with opportunities to learn about God. We always try to include the core values of how God wants us to treat each other. We also want to provide regular opportunities for fun, fellowship, and service on an ever-changing schedule to accommodate as many families as possible. Kelye Cauldwell will reach out to families individually to ask if we can assist their children in meaningfully contributing to the worship service. Some of those opportunities include praying, lighting the candle, and performing spoken, musical, or dance pieces during the service. Kelye would then coordinate with the child, family, Nancy, Grace, and Don.

We want to strengthen the bond of the 5th graders. Kelye will occasionally steal them away during the fall Sunday School classes to explore the possibility of a chimes performance in church. We have a good group of 5th graders who will be heading into Middle School. There is and will be a Middle School Sunday School Class. Strengthening their love of church and each other will make them a stronger group.

We would like to offer some events for fun and fellowship:

Sunday, November 28th – **Celebrate Advent**. 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. Come and prepare your hearts for Advent! We will have some fun family activities and we will hear from the children as they tell the story of Christmas.

Thursday, December 9th – **Holiday Craft Event!** 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Let us take care of your children as they make something special.

Friday, December 24th – **Christmas Eve Services** at the church. 5 p.m. (Carols and Candles); 7 p.m. (Traditional Candlelight with a special time for the children); and 9:30 p.m. (Traditional Candlelight).

Monday, January 17th – **Morning Time Together on the Beach**. We'll enjoy bagels, Bible Study, and have a Sandcastle Contest!

We are so pleased to have this opportunity to grow together as a Community and Family of God! ●

FIRST FAMILIES FUN FACTS

The Pothast Family

Grant and Kim moved to Delray Beach this past summer from NYC and are blessed to have four wonderful children. Morgan (25) is in Medical School at Georgetown University, Jake (24) works in asset management in NYC, and Taylor (22) recently graduated from Vanderbilt University and works for Microsoft in Seattle. Our youngest is Charlie (3) and he attends PK at The Gulfstream School.

Kim works in luxury real estate marketing for Discovery Land Co. She is currently head of marketing for their Silo Ridge project in the Hudson Valley, and will be assuming the same role with new Discovery Land projects in Hobe Sound and Naples, FL.

Grant worked for 25 years on Wall Street in leveraged finance and managed an in-house hedge fund at Credit Suisse before spinning out and building his own hedge fund. He sold the hedge fund in 2016 to a large US based insurance company. Presently, he is a Venture Capitalist and has ownership stakes in 25+ companies. He is a registered representative with Pickwick Capital and assists many of the companies he invests in with raising capital and with corporate strategy. He sits on the board of directors for White Energy.

Grant also owns and operates a large family farm in Iowa that raises 7,000 acres of corn and soybeans.

We are very excited to be part of the Delray Beach community and to have found our new religious home at “The Church by the Sea”.

— Grant and Kim Pothast ●



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THANKSGIVING DAY IN BONAIRE

creates blessings. Without purposely choosing how we will adapt to change, the consequence that results may produce sadness and grief that is difficult to navigate. Inevitable change in the seasons of life may produce a deeper, richer experience than we ever thought possible, or it can diminish life. The choice belongs to every one of us.

Therefore, this year, Grace and I are going to Bonaire. Moreover, I have purchased a fruitcake. Not just any fruitcake. Like many people, I usually do not care for fruitcake. However, for decades I have delighted in the fruitcake from Collin Street Bakery in Corsicana, Texas. It has become a Thanksgiving Day tradition and it is hard to imagine Thanksgiving without it. I will take this fruitcake to Bonaire and, only there, remove it from its packaging and enjoy it. This year, Thanksgiving Day will be a significant departure from previous celebrations. That is why this fruitcake is so important. In the midst of inevitable change, I need to remember – to remember the journey that now takes me to Bonaire. This fruitcake will connect me meaningfully to the richness of the past as I experience the present moment and anticipate the Thanksgivings that lie in the future. “After giving thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this to remember me.’” ●

DEACONS' CORNER

DEACONS' CHRISTMAS TREE

Forget Frosty, Rudolph, and the Grinch. Christians know the real focus of Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Jesus. Perhaps the tradition of giving presents started with the three kings bearing gifts.

As in the past, the Deacons' Christmas Tree Project will support five agencies which will distribute \$25 Target and Walmart gift cards to underserved families in the Delray Beach area. These agencies are:

- **Achievement Centers for Children & Families** provides programs for under-resourced children that support educational growth, skill building and healthy lifestyles.
- **Adopt-a-Family of the Palm Beaches** serves homeless and low-income families by strengthening families with children through access to all-encompassing services in order to achieve stability and self-sufficiency.
- **AVDA (Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse)** is dedicated to empowering and supporting survivors of domestic violence to live violent-free and self-sufficient lives.
- **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.
- **Milagro Center** ensures academic and social success of underserved children through Cultural Arts, Living Values, Academic Support and Mentoring.

Last year your generous donations exceeded \$7,500; wouldn't it be wonderful if we at First Presbyterian could once again match that donation amount, or perhaps even surpass it? Please prayerfully consider what you can give in 2021. There are three ways to participate:

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

The deadline for all gifts to be received is Sunday, December 12th ●

SESSION REPORT

During the months of August and September, the Session received new members and approved a baptism. ●

GIFTS TO OUR CHURCH

Church Improvement Fund from Daniel Mallett and Marie Claire Ged, in loving memory of Mary Ged.

Deacons' Fund from Debbie Holderness, in honor of Jean Irwin.

Flower Fund from Joan Wennerholt.

Memorial Garden Fund in fond and loving remembrance of Janet Loennecker, from daughter and son-in-law, Karen and Donald Carter.

Minister's Discretionary Fund from Fred and Dolores McNaboe.

Music Fund from Jean Irwin, in loving memory of Mary Bush; from Jean Irwin, in loving memory of Janet Howard; and from two anonymous donors.

Operating Fund from Jack Marshall, in loving memory of Gerald and Mary Marshall.

Remembrance Fund from Robert Anderson, Bruce Anderson, and Barbara Robinson, in loving memory of their mother, Betty Anderson; from Jason Blunt, in memory of loving husband, father, and grandfather, Frank C. Blunt, Jr., "We miss you and love you immensely"; from Fred and Betty Devitt, in loving memory of Robert and Janet Howard; from Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Kalbach, Sr., in loving memory of Bob and Janet Howard; from Jason Blunt and Diane Keane, in loving memory of Lynne Weedling; and from Jimmy Emmerich and Holly Volle.

Robert H. Teninga Scholarship Fund from Gayle Stevens.

To Support Mission Outreach from David Lewis, and from Cliff Roberson. ●

*Giving
Our
Gifts*

NEW MEMBERS

Marie Gurick

Richard Gurick

Dolores McNaboe

Fred McNaboe

Madeleine Narvilas

Mariella Narvilas

Connie Timmons



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:

Patricia Cowles

– September 2, 2021 –

William (Bill) Hager

– October 13, 2021 –

by Grace Cameron Hood

*Director of Children and
Family Ministry*



MORE FAMILY NEWS

NURSERY AND BIBLE BUNCH

Nursery and Bible Bunch are up and running!! Iva Branscombe and Alice Barrett are back in full steam! They are using the wonderful book Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible.

Liz Landes is making our nursery dreams come true. We are presently looking for a second person to help out. If you would like to volunteer occasionally, or if you would like to be a permanent part of the nursery life of our church, please contact Grace Hood (gracehood@firstdelray.com).

SUNDAY SCHOOL

Our Sunday School program continues to grow in person. We are striving to make the classroom a safe place for everyone. We are following CDC policies to ensure the safety and comfort of our children and volunteers. All leaders are vaccinated, everyone must wear masks, social distancing is practiced as possible, and we have stringent cleaning protocols. If your child does not feel well, we ask you to keep them home and instead watch the church service livestream on our website. This guideline also applies to all adults involved.

In November we are using a curriculum based on Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible. In September we learned about people that Jesus met. In October we looked at brave men and women of the Bible. November will be about what Jesus taught. December will focus on the birth of Jesus. If you do not have a copy of this Story Bible, please contact Grace Hood (gracehood@firstdelray.com).

Something new we are adding is chimes for 5th graders. Kelye Cauldwell will be taking the 5th graders during Sunday School occasionally to learn to play the chimes. As they learn new songs, they will be invited to play them during the church service.

SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY

Liz Landes has been part of our church family for many years. Among other things, she has been part of the youth group, volunteered in the nursery and Sunday School, helped with VBS, and presently works in our nursery on Sunday mornings. She also works in the Palm Beach County school system as a teacher's aide for children with special needs. She has noticed that the students love technology, which has been shown to have many benefits in helping them to flourish.

She is looking for several iPads or tablets for the children to use with special programs. If you are interested in helping out with a gently used device, you may contact Grace Hood (gracehood@firstdelray.com).

FUN OUTING!

The Youth and First Family outing to Boomers was a fun success. Twenty-six people showed up. Mini Golf, Go Karts, Lazer Tag, pizza and salad, Bumper Cars, and Bumper Boats were only a part of the fun! ●



by Maryann Rana

PRAYER MINISTRY TEAM

FROM EARTH TO GLORY

We are looking at the season of joy coming ever so quickly: the baby in the manger, poinsettias, brightly colored gifts under the Christmas Tree, and the famous motto “Eat, drink, and be merry!” All done in remembrance of a baby...or maybe not.

Is it just another reason to celebrate? Is it just because everyone else is celebrating? Does it matter who, what, or why? You might want to take some time to really, truly think about the reason for the season. Maybe it even is as simple as celebrating the birth of Jesus.

However, our celebration does not need to start or end at just one reason. There are even more gifts that come from our Father, God’s gifts of loving and caring for his people at all times. You don’t need to wait until Christmas; allow the thoughts and conversations to start now. Read the Christmas story to your children. Teach them about the gift of Heaven, of eternal life with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the wonder and glory of it all.

What good does it do if we wear our cross without the spirituality of Christ? This does not reflect the love of our Savior. “If you are not willing to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of me.” Think about that at Christmas and at all times. Wear your cross in pride and remembrance, and let us pray for one another in God’s true love, joy, and glory.

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. ***May God bless you all!*** ●

HOLLY HOUSE

HOLIDAY GIFT SHOPPE AT HOLLY HOUSE

The Holiday Gift Shoppe at Holly House is now open with a large variety of Thanksgiving and Christmas items. We hope you will stop by and see what the Holly House ladies have been busy creating for our annual holiday bazaar. In our floral area we have lovely uniquely decorated wreaths and trees. The sewing area has been “sew” busy working on an array of items including table runners & toppers, placemats, tree skirts, aprons, and more. Our coastal area has created one-of-a-kind items using sea shells and sea glass. And the jewelry area has been designing beautiful necklaces, bracelets and earrings, and has a large selection of costume jewelry. Also on display are new and vintage ornaments and a variety of novelty items.

We hope you will visit us at Holly House located at the northeast corner of the church campus. We welcome your feedback as your input is important to us.

Holly House hours are Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. and will be closed on Thanksgiving Thursday, November 25th. We will also be open on Saturdays and Sundays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. beginning Saturday, November 27th. Our last day of the sale will be Sunday, December 19th.

For further information, contact Linda Prior (561-702-0245 or Linda_Prior@hotmail.com). ●

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





by Dr. Doug Hood

Senior Pastor

“THE POWER OF PURPOSE”

**A sermon preached on July 19, 2020 by Dr. Hood
Nehemiah 6:1-3**

“I’m doing important work, so I can’t come down.”
Nehemiah 6:3 (Common English Bible)

The absence of success isn’t the great malady of our time; it is the absence of purpose. Millions of men and women push through each day eking out a living with no large meaning or compelling purpose in life to inspire them. Each day they are going and going but are not moving toward anything. Without direction or motivation these people find their lives flattened, living lives that are meaningless and without a center that strengthens, both physically and emotionally. Life is little more than some sort of dreary treadmill; the result being that powers are depleted and personal existence seemingly pointless. These are people who will say that, more than comfort or security, what they crave most of all is meaning in their lives.

John Claypool recalls a story told by Alfred Adler – an intriguing encounter that took place in the main train station of inner Austria,



back in the early 1930s. A well-dressed businessman got off the train and was walking through the lobby, when an alcoholic beggar stopped him and asked for just enough money for one more meal. The businessman said he did not usually respond to such requests, but he would on one condition. He said, “Tell me, how has an intelligent-looking person, as you appear to be, allowed yourself to get into these straits?” With that,

the beggar turned red in the face with anger and responded, “Listen, if you had experienced what I have had to live through, you wouldn’t be asking that question. You would be exactly where I am...I was one of several children.”

The beggar proceeds to tell his story to the businessman. “My mother died when I was young. My father was abusive and a very cruel man. The state finally took

my brothers and sisters and me away from him and put us in an orphanage. During World War I, a battle raged around the orphanage, the building caught fire, and I had to flee into the night. I have never seen any of my family since. I don't know whether they are alive or dead. It's been that way all my life. Every time I try to get on my feet, something knocks me down. If you had experienced what I had to live through, you would be standing in these very shoes."

The businessman said, "It's interesting that you should say that, because as you tell your story, it does, in fact, parallel my own." Shocked that their stories were so related, they began to talk more fully. As you probably anticipated,

they discovered that they were in fact brothers, separated years before and now, mysteriously, their lives had again intersected.

Dr. Adler used this story to raise the perplexing question, "Why is it that we humans respond so differently to the same circumstances?" Here were two individuals who have the same genetic background, who had much the same things happen to them, and yet, while one had allowed those events to crush him to the ground, the other, like a sail tacking into the wind, has somehow used things that might go against him as energy to move forward. Why did these two brothers respond so differently to the same set of circumstances? The answer, simply, is how we look at life or, as Victor Frankl once observed,

choosing to use our freedom of choice in how we will respond to any circumstance. Once we have uncovered a strong sense of purpose, we reach up to the highest and best our intellect and energies will provide.

Nehemiah found the answer to aimlessness, "I'm doing important work, so I can't come down." Nehemiah put his hand out to a task that God wanted done and no distraction or discouragement would pull him away from that work. Naturally, Nehemiah's first task was to properly discern what it was that God wanted from him. The exercise of discovering God's purpose for us is commonly called, spiritual formation. It need not be a complicated process, but it does require a determination of the heart and a regular time commitment. At the minimum, what is necessary is





the regular reading of the Bible and the prayer, “What would you have me hear from these words and what would you have me to do?”

Dallas Willard says the reason we find the Christian life so difficult is we seek God’s blessing while we live our own will. Amazing power comes when we surrender. How does that work? In the Second World War the Italian forces were driven out of North Africa. Wishing to make the harbor unusable to the Allies, they took huge barges, filled them with concrete, and sank them across the mouth of the harbor. When the Allies arrived there was no way in or out. That harbor was totally unusable unless somehow they got those massive sunken barges out of there. They came up with an ingenious plan. They took huge gas tanks – the size

that hold hundreds of thousands of gallons at oil refineries, sealed the tanks so they would float, and floated them out on the water directly above the barges. They waited until the tide was out and then sent in frogmen who chained the tanks to the barges. When the tide came in, those tanks rose on the tide, lifting those heavy barges up out of the sucking sand at the bottom of the bay. From there it was simple to just float the barges away and the harbor was usable again.

Think of that enormous power! The barges were chained to the tanks. The tanks were moved by the tides. The tides were pulled by the gravitational attraction of the moon, and the moon was moving within the solar system, which was set in motion by the hand of God. Align your life with the will of

God and you will be unstoppable. To stand against God’s will is futile. It does not matter how insignificant you may think you are. When you attach yourself to the power that moves the stars, when your life is attached to God’s will, our lives have incredible power.

This is a large message of the New Testament; that salvation is, in part, being delivered from aimlessness and finding our lives organized around the creative purposes of God. Attention to God’s voice in the Bible gathers the scattered forces of our being and links them to the one divine force at work in the world. Anyone who has spent considerable time with God in this matter discovers that his or her loyalties are shaped and a grand purpose in life emerges. Day then follows day with a deep sense of meaning running through each of them because these people finally discover that they are moving steadily toward something worth getting to.

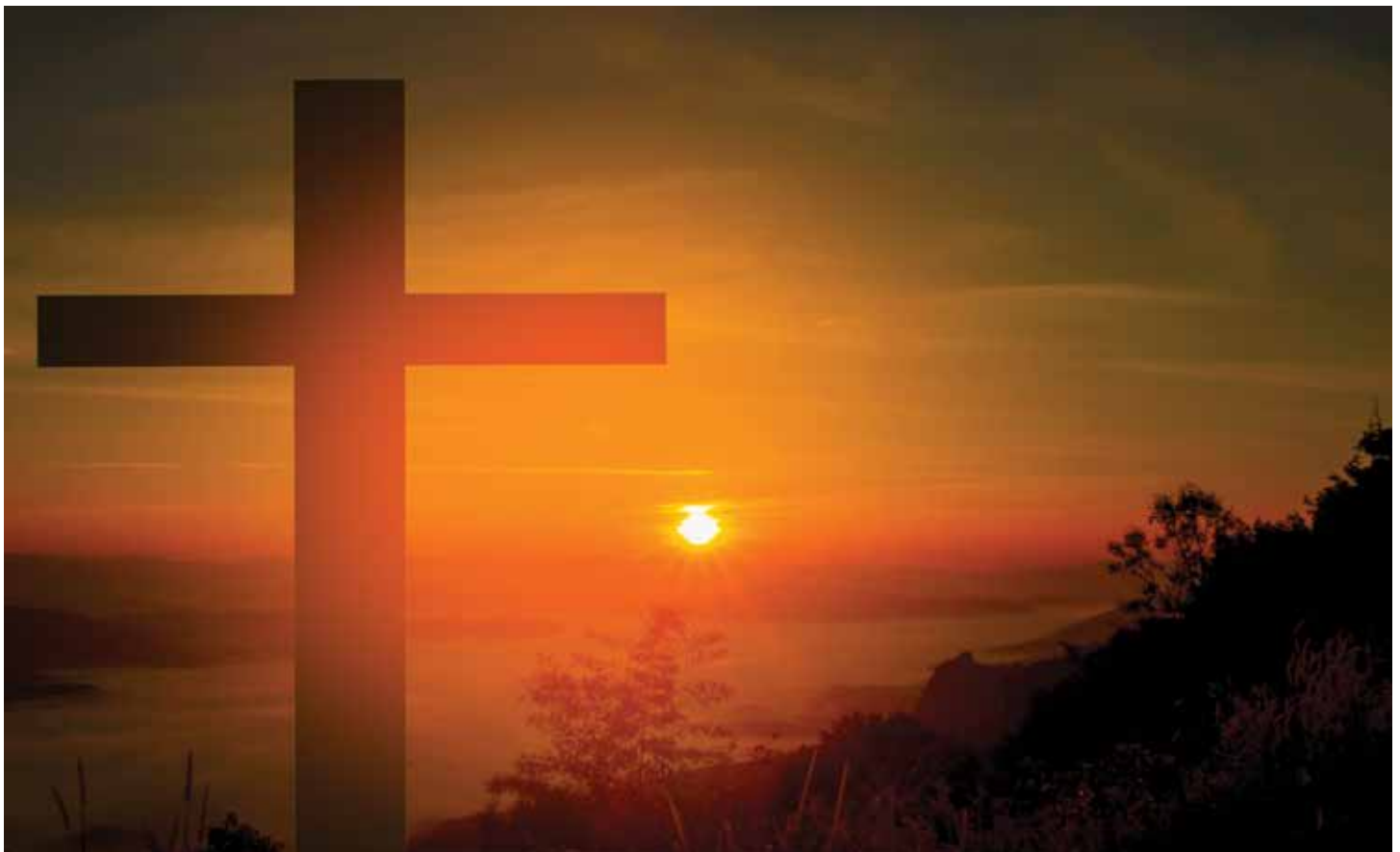
At the end of his book, *Leading Without Power*, Max Dupree illustrates this vision in the leadership of Leningrad in WWII. In 1941, as the Nazi armies were marching on the city, the staff of the Hermitage Museum boxed up all the paintings and sculptures and shipped them east before the

advancing army arrived. However, they left the frames on the wall and the pedestals on the floors as a symbol of their belief in a time when the war would be over. The siege of the city went on for two years, but during that time the staff of the museum didn't just long for better days and they didn't just complain. Instead they continued to give tours for the people even though there was no art in the building. We have photographs from this period that depict people standing in front of empty picture frames while the curators describe in detail the Renoirs and Rembrandts that

should be there. They filled in the blanks, and helped others see what was not now visible. Attention to God, in reading the Bible and prayer, makes visible God's purposes for our lives.

When people say that they are going to pieces, often they are speaking the literal truth. Life has a tendency to crumble into pieces when a centering purpose is absent. What is deeply needed is some master passion, some supreme devotion that will hold our scattered selves together. That is the enormous contribution that Christ makes in the world.

Christ puts divine meaning into our daily human tasks and saves us from scattered, aimless living. Called to a great cause, a great enterprise worthy of our complete devotion, fractured lives are once again pulled together, physical energies restored, and we discover that we are caught-up in an important work. It is a work that recovers purpose and makes us whole. *Amen.* ●



HOW MANY BRICKS DID IT TAKE TO BUILD THIS CHURCH?

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” (Acts 2:42)

I have no idea from whence these thoughts arise, but I looked at our Church the other day and wondered, “How many bricks did it take to build this church?” I became so curious that I started counting, but I quickly lost track of where I was on the wall and had to start again. That attempt also failed.

Next, I obtained a yard stick and made a measurement to determine how many bricks were in a square yard. I thought I was onto something here, except that I would have to measure every wall of the building and subtract the allowance for windows and doors to get the square yards, a task which would be daunting given that there are several areas that are inaccessible to my yardstick. I decided I was on a fool’s errand.

Before quitting, I drew some conclusions from my labors based on what I had observed. First, there are a lot of bricks that go into making a church. Some are obvious and we see them every time we attend a service, like the bricks at the front door. Some are almost

completely hidden, like the ones behind the bushes on the north wall. But, all of the bricks are necessary to make a complete, solid church. If you start removing bricks from any location, you weaken the entire structure. You may not notice the absence of one brick, but how many can you remove before a wall starts to crumble and, ultimately, the whole building is destroyed?

All the bricks in our church are connected. The mortar binds our bricks together. In addition to holding the building together, the mortar fills the gaps and irregular spaces and hardens to make the structure solid by spreading the weight of the bricks evenly. You can also add decorative colors and patterns if you choose to do so.

Finally, the number of bricks you have determines the size of your church. As you add more bricks, your church grows larger. And, if you subtract bricks, it gets smaller. No need to belabor that point.

I am sure everyone saw this

analogy coming. People are like the bricks of a church. However, unlike the bricks, they are living beings. They are the living part of the church. Without them, the structure is just a building, an empty space that could be used for anything.

Carrying the analogy one step further, the people are all connected by the “mortar”, by Jesus and the tenets, values and principles of the Presbyterian Church. But, there needs to be another ingredient in the mortar to make this analogy work. I could be standing next to a church member in an elevator, and if I did not know that person, there would be no connection. The spark of community would be missing. But if I know that person, if we recognize each other as fellow church members, the connection is made. We exchange greetings. We magnify the bond between us. We strengthen our relationship with one another and with our church by our meeting. That other ingredient in the “mortar” is fellowship. ●

MONDAY MORNING WOMEN'S ADVENT BIBLE STUDY

Through November 15th, the Monday Morning Women's Bible Study will continue discussing Rev. Susan Sparks' newest book *Love, a Tiara, and a Cupcake: Three Secrets to Finding Happy*. How do you hold onto hope in the midst of despair? With humor and grace, Rev. Sparks guides us to the answer: by finding our joy, donning our radiance, and opening our arms in compassion.

On November 22nd, we begin the series *Arts and Faith: Advent* by Loyola Press. We will take a look at this season of hope and preparation through the lens of sacred art. Each week we'll view a video commentary about a work of art inspired by the Sunday scriptures.

We meet at 10 a.m. each Monday via Zoom to grow our faith and share our joys and concerns. We would love to have you join us. Please contact Maria Graham at mmg2352@gmail.com to request a Zoom invitation. ●



CELEBRATE ADVENT SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 28TH FROM 6 P.M. TO 7 P.M.

Celebrate Advent will focus on the story of Jesus' birth and all the events that led up to his birth. The children of the church will lend a hand in presenting the Christmas Story. Everyone is invited to help create a Nativity Set to be used as a visual reminder of the Season. If the weather permits, this will be held outside and in the breezeway to Fellowship Hall. *All are welcome!* ●

by Nathanael Hood



THE LOST LEONARDO

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

It's a simple painting, quiet and inauspicious. The figure at its center stares ahead from a void of darkness, his pale skin shining from the shadows like a beacon as his brown hair falls in delicate curls upon his blue dress. His face is calm yet inscrutable, staring calmly at the viewer as his right hand makes the sign of the cross. In his left sits a transparent crystal orb within which, it is understood, all the cosmos are contained. Those in the know label this painting a "Salvator Mundi," a frequent motif in Renaissance-era art wherein Jesus Christ—inevitably whitened and enriched beyond his historical station as an itinerant Palestinian rabbi—is depicted as holding the Earth, and all of creation itself, in his hand. There are countless "Salvator Mundi" paintings, many by esteemed masters. But this one is different. This, it is said, is not just a "Salvator Mundi" by a master, but *the* "Salvator Mundi"

by *the* master. For this is the painting believed to be painted by none other than Leonardo da Vinci himself.

That is, of course, if the painting is authentic. Assumed to have been lost a century after its creation, it was spotted by an eagle-eyed art dealer in a New Orleans auction house where it was assumed to be the work of one of da Vinci's students. But during the restoration process it was declared to be from the hand of the master himself, sparking one of the most controversial sagas in modern art history as its price ballooned from a few thousand dollars in 2005 to nearly half a billion when it was sold at auction in 2017. In the interim, this simple, quiet, and inauspicious painting would become a cause célèbre among art collectors and a cause maudit among art critics and historians. It would change hands from shady Swiss dealers to shadier Russian

billionaires to mercurial and murderous Saudi princes. This stunning history has been captured and condensed for all to see in Andreas Koefoed's brilliant and disturbing documentary *The Lost Leonardo*.

Over my career as a critic, I have reviewed more documentaries about the art world and those who navigate it than I care to count or remember. But this is perhaps the only one that properly captures the sense of dread, corruption, and duplicity that lurks at its heart. The film isn't just about the painting itself; Koefoed instead uses its story as a springboard to examine how corrupt businessmen and criminals use the art world to launder money, dodge tax laws, and rob the public of cultural masterpieces. After all, an ex-Soviet oligarch may not be able to transfer illicit funds out of Russia without raising the eyebrows of international investigators. But if

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that same oligarch spent hundreds of millions of dollars on paintings by Picasso or Gauguin, moved them to another country, and then resold them at wildly inflated prices with the aid of complicit auction houses happy for an eight-figure commission fee, there's little any police force could do.

Which is exactly what happened to this alleged da Vinci. Notice the word "alleged," for to this day there is still doubt among experts as to whether or not the painting is authentic. Not that it matters, as Koefoed explains. The film details how esteemed art museums, galleries, and auction houses seemed happy to ignore credible naysayers so long as they could sell exhibition tickets to the public or raise asking prices for sellers. After all, what's more important: that something is authentic or that people *think* something is authentic? And who cares either way so long as it doesn't hurt the bottom line?

Through it all, two figures seem to float above the madness. The first is Dianne Modestini, the woman hired for the painting's initial restoration and who first suspected it might be an original da Vinci. Of all the people in the film, she seems to be the only one

who acknowledges the painting as a work of art and appreciates it as such. She seems to care nothing for how much it's worth or whether or not it's truly authentic: it exists, it is beautiful, and therefore it is worthy of admiration and love.

The second is the figure of Christ himself staring out from the painting. If the film has one flaw, it's that it misses the central irony lurking at the heart of this story: all this duplicity, all this subterfuge, all this controversy, backstabbing, and greed revolves around a painting of a man who raged against the wealthy and lionized the poor. This was a painting made to inspire religious devotion towards a savior who drove moneylenders from the temple and said the meek shall inherit the earth. Fortunes were made and lost over this image of a man who told the wealthy to sell all that they owned, give the money to the poor, and follow him. Did anyone at any point in the making of this film wonder to themselves that if Jesus could feed 500 people with five loaves and two fishes, how many more could he feed with nearly half a billion dollars? Suddenly Jesus' face in the painting doesn't seem so blank. Is that exasperation or resignation we read? If it isn't, maybe it should be. ●



WORSHIP SERVICE TIMES CHANGE

It is that time of year when we transition to our “in season” Sunday morning worship schedule. Beginning November 7th, and continuing through the end of April, we will be holding two services at 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. They will be the same with the exception of the addition of the “Time with the Children” at our 11 a.m. service. Nursery care will be available at both services. However, children and Middle School Sunday School will be held only during the 11 a.m. service.

Don’t forget to change your clocks and “fall back” on Sunday, November 7th.

In addition, on Sunday, December 26th, as per our regular practice, there will be only one worship service at 11 a.m. ●

CHRISTMAS EVE

Celebrate the birth of the Christ Child with us on Friday, December 24th. We will be offering three worship opportunities that night.

This joyous evening will begin with our 5 p.m. service “Carols and Candles”. Rev. Greg Rapier will lead this service and a time for the children will be offered.

Our 7 p.m., traditional, candlelight service will have a message from Dr. Doug Hood and feature a time for the children.

Our last service of the evening, at 9:30 p.m., will be a traditional, candlelight service, with a message from Dr. Doug Hood.

All services will be live-streamed on the church website for those to choose to join us in worship at home. ●



MEET MARIO ARÉVALO

The following is adapted from an NBC News article published on October 13, 2020



As a child in El Salvador, Mario Arévalo dreamed of being a doctor. But in the United States, destiny took him in a different direction: He's a rising star in the opera world, or, as some of his fans describe him, a "healer of souls."

Mario grew up in extreme poverty in his native city of San Vicente, moving from one house to another with his mother as she struggled to pay the rent as a domestic worker. When Mario was 8 years old, his mother emigrated to the U.S., and he went to live with his grandmother; the reunion with his mother would take six years. As Mario explains, "She came to the U.S. without papers, then obtained residency when she got married and brought me. At first, as a child, I didn't understand anything, but now I tell her that I understand her sacrifices, she and my stepfather are my No. 1 fans, they don't miss any shows...My mother is my heroine, although when I was little I had resentments about the separation, she is everything."

In addition to the support of his mother in overcoming adversity, Mario also credits his English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher who encouraged him to pursue an artistic career. He says, "My ESL teacher was the one who discovered that I was talented and introduced me to my choir teacher and music classes, then I met singing teachers, and my love for music grew."

Throughout his career, Mario has performed on numerous stages and opera houses in the United States, and has brought his talent as a tenor to countries such as Austria, Canada, Italy, Peru and throughout Central America. He considers himself a lucky person, because it is not a very easy world for young artists, and he had to make many sacrifices, including missing Christmases, family parties, and many other special occasions. However, he faced additional challenges as a young Latino artist trying to participate in a largely homogeneous space. In auditions where there were already 500 or 600 people competing for one or two spots in a production, he felt he had to work extra hard just to have an opportunity to audition.

In 2019, Arévalo participated in the XXII International Lyrical Singing Competition and Festival, in Peru, where he represented El Salvador for the first time. He has since been named a Goodwill Ambassador for Culture and Fine Arts by the United Nations Association of El Salvador, and also dedicates time to teaching singing classes and training new talents.

Due to myths and stereotypes, the world of opera can be an intimidating and alien experience, especially for young Latinos who may only know popular ballads, bachatas, or reggaeton. Some of the myths, according to Mario, are that operas only exist in Italian or German; that they are only for wealthy people; that you have to dress in tuxedos or long dresses for a function, or that the singer is always fat and wears a Viking helmet. But Mario insists that opera is for everyone. He says, "Opera is a drama performed and sung...you can see it, feel it, hear it. Opera takes you to exciting, incredible places, even if you don't understand the language."

With the commitment to bring opera closer to future generations, Arévalo traveled to San Vicente in 2019, where he offered a free performance in a rural town that had never seen an opera. The show, which featured national artists and one from Germany, drew nearly a thousand people to the theater, and another 16,000 who saw it live on Facebook. He said it was the best thing in his life, but what touched his heart the most was a fruit seller who approached him after the show to express her gratitude to him for bringing opera not just to the town, but to her own ears; she had never heard it before.

Mario has helped raise funds for the construction of a cultural center for poor families in San Vicente, the first of its kind in the area and expected to open in 2021. This project, a product of the citizen initiative “Yo quiero mi teatro” (I want my theater), will include a library and classes in art, music, and ballet in the old building of the Jiboa Theater, and has had the support of both the previous leftist government of Salvador Sánchez Cerén as well as that of the current president, Nayib Bukele.

Mario also founded the organization “Una Voz, Un Mundo,” (One Voice, One World) an artistic initiative to promote the teaching of the arts and music to low-income children inside and outside the U.S., as well as promoting the musical talent of women and minorities. He started this initiative as a way to give young Latinos a platform to present their music, from Latin America and Latin American composers, including Latin American opera. In January 2019, the organization distributed gifts and instruments to children in El Salvador during Three Kings Day, which also served as a way to promote access to art programs, since many schools in El Salvador had lost funding for arts and music programs.

Mario, a tenor who prefers operas with dramatic endings, says he’s grateful for the opportunities he has had in the U.S., because there are many “arias” ahead of him in his life. He says he “never dreamed that all these things would happen in my life, because I come from a very humble place. The opportunities that life gives you are impressive, and you have to take advantage of them.”

Included is a personal note from Mario:

I am truly grateful to First Presbyterian Church for opening the doors and allowing me to share the gift of the voice. A gift I don't take for granted. Thank you to Don, Nancy, Grace, Greg, and Doug for believing in me and giving me the extra strength every Sunday after each solo I've sung, and to reassure myself not to give up and to continue singing. A few years ago I almost quit singing and I lost my faith because I didn't believe I was good enough. But the love and strength I have received by God has allowed me not to only use my voice to glorify him, praise him, and exalt him, but to also be a voice of power, a messenger, and ally to our ministry. I know that my path in music is wide enough not to only sing opera but to sing anything that God allows me to sing. One of my favorite lines from a song is “Blessed is the man who loves the Lord, blessed is the man who praises him. I will lift up my voice to hills from whence comes my help.” I know that God has a path and plans for me, therefore I will wait in glory of him. ●



WALKS WITH THOUGHTS

A few minutes ago, I sat down at my computer to write up the minutes of a committee meeting. Instead, I caught myself staring out the window—entranced by the landscape just beyond my reach. Blue sky. White puffy clouds blown by ocean breezes. Sunbeams dancing on the rippling water in the harbor. A row of palm trees, their dark green fronds swaying, beckoning me to come join in their fun. God's creation was calling. How could I resist? I closed my computer and headed for the door.

I walked next door to Delray Beach's Mangrove Park. At a glance, this park appears to be nothing more than a large, paved parking lot for boaters putting in at the intracoastal. However, taking the time to explore, I have found this mangrove preservation area to be filled with nature's wonders. Red, white, and black mangroves lie to my left. A row of shade trees to my right makes this walk a pleasure no matter what the time of day. Seagrapes line the southeastern edge of the park. Green and purple clusters of their ripening fruit hang just beyond my reach. In the grassy area to my left, two ibis peck the ground searching

for breakfast. Beyond the dock, the intracoastal stretches for miles to the north and south. Later in the year, this docking area will be home to a family or two of manatees.

For the beauty of the earth... the words of the old hymn of thanksgiving spring to mind. They remind me to offer up a "thank you" to the God who fills our world with beauty. Finishing my half-mile circuit of the park, I am torn. I know I should return home to my computer and committee minutes, but I am restless, not yet ready to face my daily chores. The ocean, only a few blocks away, is calling. I surrender.

Walking two blocks south to Linton Boulevard, I turn east toward the imposing drawbridge spanning the intracoastal. At the base of the bridge, the sidewalk stands eye-to-eye with the tangle of mangrove roots wriggling out of the muddy banks of the intracoastal to my left. The sidewalk then ascends into the mangrove canopy before descending to A1A and Atlantic Dunes Park. As I enter the park, seagrape trees usher me along the boardwalk, past the pavilion,

and across the dunes to an expanse of rolling waves and breaking surf. The sun plays off the water, which extends before me seemingly forever. A truly breathtaking respite for the soul. I resume my hymn of praise: *Lord of all to thee we raise...*

To the south along the coastline, the tops of the high-rise apartment buildings of Highland Beach touch a shelf of low-lying clouds. The scene resembles nothing so much as a modern-day version of Jacob's ladder, joining earth and sky. "*Surely God is in this place.*" Jacob's words from Genesis 28 echo in my mind.

Is there somewhere that calls to you? A special place where heaven and earth meet? A place of respite from daily cares and duties? A place where you feel an integral part of the entirety of creation? Where God's presence is palpable? Where, when you sing your own hymn of grateful praise, you feel God smiling? Today, that is my prayer for you—that you revel in such a place. A place where you, like Jacob, can say, "*Surely God is in this place.*" ●



by Rev. Greg Rapier

Associate Pastor



IN THE WORLD ... CONNECTING CHURCH AND CULTURE ON CREATIVITY (PART 1)

People sometimes ask me why I, a pastor, chose a creative writing program for my doctorate. Church leadership? Sure. Homiletics? Absolutely. But creative writing???? What in the world does that have to do with God or with leading a church?

I'd love to give each of you a more nuanced description of how creativity and faith are woven together. I could easily write an entire book on the topic (and I've thought about doing so!), but for now, I'd like to share with you one example of the beauty of creativity.

My son recently started drawing. He'll take a crayon, and after a few minutes of trying to insert it into his mouth, he'll press it against the paper and look with wide-eyed wonder at the mark he leaves on the page. Then he'll giggle.

In the end, we're left with abstract chicken-scratch that, before I was a father, I would have suggested belonged in the trash. Now, I can't bear to throw it away. Something about it is beautiful. Holy, even.

The book of Genesis tells us God creates each of us in God's image and breathes life into us. We all hold within us an element of the divine. And in those first passages of Genesis, God reveals that part of God's divine nature is to create. God creates something out of nothing. God creates the sky and the stars and the sun and the land and the plants and everything else in the universe.

When we create, we are tapping into that element of God within us. We are participating in a shared moment with God, expressing that most sacred part of us, and maybe, just maybe, crafting something holy.

If done well and shared well, your creative projects, your expression of God within, can help others access God too. There's a reason so many people cite our music ministry as the most impactful of our church. There's a reason a good movie can stir or convict you in the same way as a powerful sermon. There's a reason so many people donate generously to art galleries; something about great art taps into what it means



to be human and, therefore, what it means to house the divine.

That's what I see when I look at my son's scribbles. That's what I hear when I listen to a good song. And that's what I hope to create when I sit down to write. ●

On Creativity (Part 2) will appear in the next edition of The Spire.

The Community Church by the Sea

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

**Sunday Morning
Worship Services**

9 a.m. & 11 a.m.

**Christmas Eve
Worship Services**

5 p.m. (Carols & Candles)

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 26th.*

