

THE FIRST PRES

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June 6, 2008

From the Desk of our Pastor

Dear Friends,

On Sunday evening, (June 8th) the Aloha Mission Study Team held their first formal meeting. Members are Pat Sparks, Paul Butler, Debbie Hice, Todd Taylor, Hunter Webb, Laura McRary, and Dan Swanson. I would like to encourage each member of the congregation to **regularly pray** for this Team which will be meeting regularly to work through the Developmental Five Step Process. As we work together, we will regularly be seeking God's will and the Holy Spirit's guidance to prepare this portion of the Body of Christ for the future. These Team members have made a commitment to work together diligently to complete their work. They will need your daily prayers.

In the coming months, there will be various gatherings for every member of the congregation to attend. Let me urge **you to participate** each time the Team seeks to gather information, ideas, input, and wisdom. We will eat together to celebrate our church's rich history. We will meet in small groups to have a chance to share together our life as Christians in First Presbyterian. To use a New Testament sentence: We will gather to "speak the truth in love."

I have made several visits to listen to your stories about your life in this community of faith. If you would like to share with me, please call Mary at the church, and I will establish a visit.

You have been a wonderful warm and welcoming people of God. I am excited that I will play a part in your life, as you prepare for the future God has in store. Also, please continue active worship during the summer. A part of our Developmental process is praying together in worship for the Aloha Mission Team. **See you Sunday!**

Peace,
George

Church Family News



God Bless Our Graduates!

Tara Taylor has graduated from Norfolk Collegiate and will leave in mid-August for the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, where she will be on the crew team. Good luck, Tara; we're proud of you!

Mallory James graduates from Western Branch High School. She will attend Randolph-Macon, and play on the volleyball team. Mallory, we're proud of you! Best wishes!

In Remembrance



We mourn the loss of **Betty Wallace**, a gracious lady, whose care for her husband, Jack, was loving and attentive. We enjoyed Betty's dry humor and quiet strength. In recent years we didn't see Betty very often, but she remained in our thoughts and we shall continue to miss her.

Give/Get A Ride

This program is for members who need a ride or who are available to give one. The program is still going strong and rides are available.

If you need a ride – whether it's to church, to a medical appointment or to the grocery store – please call Mary at the church office or call Agnes McFadden at 399-3190 or Jennifer Patgorski at 718-3610. They will need 2 days' advance notice to make arrangements.

If you can give a ride, please call Mary, Agnes or Jennifer to let them know of your willingness and availability.

They ask that everyone please keep this program and its participants in your daily thoughts and prayers

Gleaning Opportunities for all Groups

The practice of gleaning dates back at least as far as the Old Testament. According to ancient law, farmers were to leave some grain and other crops in their fields after harvest, so poor people and strangers could gather, or GLEAN, the leftovers so they could eat [Leviticus 19: 9-10]. Ruth, King David's great-grandmother and an ancestor of Jesus, was gleaning in a field belonging to Boaz she met him. [See Ruth 2 and 4; and also Matthew

1: 5-6.] The practice of gleaning has a lot of history, and its place in ancient Hebrew law is recognized at First Presbyterian by a Sunday School class called the Gleaners.

In June 2008, youth groups, women's groups, and men's groups will have an opportunity to glean at a farm in Suffolk. Based on the



weather, the farmer will allow a five day window for groups to participate in this ancient practice.

The first crop will be corn, then squash, turnips, beets and carrots. Then in late summer comes more corn, cantaloupes, watermelon, pumpkins and greens, collards and kale. If you or your group are interested, you should contact Alice Taylor at PEVA (397-7063, ext. 309, or alice@pcusa-peva.org). Alice can place you on the gleaning list and tell you what dates are available.

Letter of Thanks



The Clerk of the Session reports that a letter of thanks has been received from Portsmouth

Volunteers for the Homeless for providing shelter for the homeless in February, 2008.

Thanks to Green Acres Church for cooking and serving meals and to the members of the FPC family who stayed overnight.

Meals on Wheels



This important ministry still is in need of volunteers. Please contact the church office to offer your services. The work requires that you spend just a few hours with us on the third Thursday morning of each month. Thanks and God bless all the volunteers.

Musing-Questions

IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS AND MONTHS, our congregation faces a time of self-examination as we prepare to call a new pastor. Readers should note that, although we've been through this before, unlike past searches this time around we have a more formal process – an INTENTIONAL process – to guide us. Dr. George Oehler, our Intentional Interim Minister, and Elder David Collins of Greenbrier Presbyterian, our church's liaison to the presbytery's Committee on Ministry, are here to help bring us through to a successful – and spiritually satisfying - conclusion.

Before we search for a pastor, we will need to search our hearts and minds. There are questions to be considered, with help from our Lord and from George and David. We must respond to some of these questions as individuals and to some as a congregation. So, what are these questions? I have a feeling George Oehler will be asking them before very long; but as preparation for his questions, let me suggest some for we need to think about and pray about.

- What are we about as a congregation? What is our purpose?
- What is our mission? Do we have one? Do we have more than one?
- How am I, as a member of this congregation, contributing to its purpose and mission?
- What are our hopes, our visions, and our goals as a church?
- What are my personal hopes for this church? What am I doing to realize them?
- What values and principles do we reflect as a church?

- What are my own values and principles? Where did they come from?
- What is our place in the community? Where do we fit in?
- What are we doing as a church to further God's kingdom? What would God have us do? Would He be happy with what we are doing?
- How am I, as a Christian, representing Christ and His church to the world?
- Am I active in the life of this church, or just busy?
- Which programs of this church are most important to me? How am I supporting them?
- Is my work in this church furthering God's kingdom?

It's not like I have the answers to these questions; I also am pondering them in my own mind. These are questions all of us should ask, all the time. We shouldn't address them with a sense of satisfaction – of knowing how they should be answered – but with a sense of self-examination and humility.

As we search for answers to these and other questions – both as a congregation and as individual believers – we must seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit.



Lane Pittman

News from Stamps for Missions



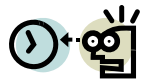
Peggy Reinhold writes that she has received a Thank You note from the Presbyterian Church in Tshikaji, Congo for a gift that helped that church install audio equipment. They needed this

equipment because they had overflow crowds attending worship and THOSE STANDING OUTSIDE THE WINDOWS had difficulty hearing the church services. (When was the last time our sanctuary was even full?) Mrs. Reinhold further reports that the new printing press has enabled the printing of 3000 hymn books.

She also reports that she has recruited seven volunteers at Sunnyside to help her process stamps. She is grateful for their help, especially since she recently received seven “tall grocery bags” full of foreign and U. S. stamps contributed by churches in the Presbytery of the James, as well as “three big boxes of stamps” from churches in Minnesota, South Carolina, and California. She says that the stamps temporarily took over a couple of rooms in her apartment.

Since January, the Stamps for Missions project has raised close to \$1500 for Congo churches. Mrs. Reinhold thanks all involved for their support, and asks for continued prayers, which are exceedingly important to the success of the program. Thanks to Norma and Lanier Halterman for this update.

Deadline for Submitting Newsletter Articles



The deadline for submitting information or articles for the newsletter each month will be the 21st of the month prior to the month you want the article to appear.

Information for the newsletter should be submitted directly to the newsletter editor whenever possible. Submissions may be made by U.S. Mail, telephone, or e-mail.

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Telephone: (757) 405-3554
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Everyone's cooperation on this will be greatly appreciated.

Help Serve at Oasis

Our church serves breakfast at Oasis on the third Monday of every month. A good, nutritious breakfast is served to the homeless and others in need. Various groups from our congregation take turns preparing and serving, including the Presbyterian Men, the Diaconate, the Choir, the Youth, the Session, Open Ends, the Service Committee, and the Mary Rice Class.

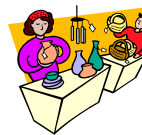
Karen Diggs coordinates the scheduling of these groups for service at Oasis throughout the year and is always looking for new people to help. Those who can help should contact Karen through the church office. Please consider volunteering—we always need people to make breakfast casseroles, shop for milk and juice, or actually show up at 6 am to serve.

Thanks and God bless all those who make this important ministry possible.

Thanks to all who helped with Oasis, Monday, may 19th. Servers: Duff Porter, Rudy Simpson, Mike Pendergraft, Mike Broadhurst, John Hackworth, Made Egg Casseroles: Edna Broadhurst, Todd Taylor, Mike & Don Taylor, Burma Smith, Gwen Brown, Anne Porter, David Stuart. Also, thanks to Pat Sparks for helping with the shopping.

In Christian Love,
Karen Diggs

Octoberblest Bazaar



This year's bazaar is Saturday, October 18th. The money raised will be used to repaint and do other things to spruce up all of the entrances to the church. This is to include the entrance on King Street as well as those on Court Street to the

Sanctuary and to the Educational Building at the courtyard. Any funds remaining may go toward putting windows in the Pastor's office and the church secretary's office.

Donors are asked to please bring bazaar items to the church, in boxes if possible, and to please place items in the Library Room. (The same room where items were collected for the last bazaar.) There is still no one to pick them up at your home.

Please begin now to look through your attic, closets and garage for items to be contributed. It may seem like a long time until October, but now's not too soon to start looking. Of course, help, donations, and prayers also will be needed to make this bazaar successful.

Again this year, **Clara Spanos** is chairing this event. She still really needs people to help her move and arrange items dropped off at the church. Also, she still needs four or five people to help with the tables of items to be sold, as well as someone to take money for breakfast and lunch. In addition, Clara would like to have a "silent auction" and needs a volunteer to watch over that.

A bazaar is a project that needs a lot of volunteers. We all know the saying that "The Lord will provide," but often, we are what He provides! Please volunteer. We all need to do what we can, and what we can do often is more than we think it is.

Stewardship and Finance



The Session has received a report from the Stewardship and Finance Committee that, while giving has increased some, and we are so far making budget, our church is not "out of the woods yet." Some payments are being delayed when possible and giving isn't as good as it needs to be.

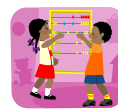
The Session has approved a task force to review the overall finances of the church.

Task Force members are Diane Griffin, Anne Porter, John Hackworth, Jim Plaatsman, and Michael Broadhurst. After gathering information, including input and suggestions from our bookkeeper and other members of the congregation, the Task Force will make recommendations to the Session. If you have suggestions for them, please contact one of the Task Force members.

Please pray for the work of the Task Force and for the finances of our church.

[Editor's note: The life of this church depends on prayer, attendance at worship and other activities, and volunteering to help. These are all important; but accomplishing anything also takes money. Distasteful as it may be to discuss money, the reality is that finances are part of operating any church. The Session discusses it every month, all year, like it or not. For the past few months, they have been more and more concerned.]

Vacation Bible School



Vacation Bible School again this year will be held in conjunction with St. John's Episcopal Church from June 23-27. Please plan to enroll your children. We had a wonderful group last year and Clara is hoping those wonderful ladies and gentlemen from our church will help again. Gentlemen are needed again to watch over the kids and man the doorways.

Please contact Clara Spanos if you would be willing to help in the kitchen at St. John's.

Courtyard Concerts 2008



We are pleased to announce that our third annual Courtyard Concert series will begin this summer on

Wednesday, June 18th, at 7:00 in our beautiful courtyard. We will open our series with the *Tidewater Pipes and Drums*, who are always a favorite of our church family and friends. The concert will follow our Wednesday night dinner which begins at 6:00. Please sign up for dinner by Monday, June 16th. The concert is free and open to the public. The fee for the dinner is \$4.00. Please invite your friends and bring your lawn chair as we kick off this year's series. Let's fill the air of downtown Portsmouth with music, excitement and fun.

Courtyard Concerts 2008

June 18 *Tidewater Pipes and Drums*
 July 2 *Betsy Fitzgerald and Sherie Aguirre* (Harp and Oboe)
 July 16 *The Clark Project* (Jazz)
 August 13 *Duncan and Danielle* (Guitar and Flute)
 August 27 *Eddie Smith Blue Grass* (Duff's Group)

For more information, please call the church office at 397-3622.



June

3 Elizabeth Stephenson
 6 Irene Hunt
 June Culpepper
 9 Doris Leitner
 10 Matthew McRary
 12 Margaret Westbrook
 Pete Brown
 14 Trudy Webb
 16 Bobby Lawrence
 17 Gabrielle Furman
 18 Frances Hardy
 20 Diane Fletcher
 25 Mason Winkler
 26 Mackenzie Taylor
 28 Barbara Livingston
 29 Nan Jennings
 Liz James

July

1 Don Taylor
 Peggy Norfleet
 4 Carol Chou Adams
 5 Mary Johnson
 6 Megan Diggs
 7 John Hardy
 Billy Taylor
 8 Dale Pendergraft
 9 Mackenzie Morgan
 12 Keith Hackworth
 14 Christie Wilson
 15 Ann Hagerty
 21 Ryan Baggett
 22 Russell Hackworth
 25 Mary Rice
 26 Robert Norfleet
 28 Corey Powell
 31 Robin Sherrill
 Beverley Byrd

Who Am I? And Who Are We?

Two weeks ago, I began a series of sermons on the five developmental steps this congregation will go through in the coming months to discern God's call for you and for a new Pastor. The first sermon was centered on the first developmental step of "Coming to grips with your history". The sermon was entitled **A Peculiar People**. Together we looked at the amazing changes this congregation has faced in its 186 years of ministry. This morning, we look at the second step in the developmental process. We will look at "Discovering a new identity" as you move into the future God is calling you toward.

This past week, I made a visit to members of this congregation. The two questions, which compose my sermon title of **Who Am I? And Who Are We?** Came together. As I have discovered often in my life, truth is always more wonderful than fiction.

While visiting with Liz and Frank James, I was told a wonderful story of Sunday School at First Presbyterian Church when their son Jeff was a young boy. So the story goes, Jeff was having a "rough day" in Sunday School as most of us have at some point in our lives. Finally, the teacher had to sit Jeff down and have a talk. "Jeff, if you don't behave I'm going to have to tell your mother!" "Oh, please don't do that," he begged. "Why not?" asked the teacher. "Oh! My mom's mean and she'll punish me!" "Now, Jeff, you know your mother isn't mean," she responded. "Your mother is a Christian." With great dignity and forcefulness, Jeff quickly replied, "Oh, no she isn't a Christian, she is a Presbyterian."

My first question this morning is "Who Are You?" In English grammar, this pronoun "You" can be singular or plural. During World War II, the pronoun "You" served both purposes in the life of a Lutheran Pastor named Dietrich Bonhoffer. He was arrested and put in prison for his involvement in a plot to assassinate Adolph Hitler. While in prison and awaiting certain death, he wrote a poem entitled "*Who Am I*".

Who am I? They often tell me I stepped from my cell's confinement
Calmly, cheerfully, firmly, like a squire from his country-house.
Who Am I? They often tell me I used to speak to my wardens
Freely and friendly and clearly, as though it were mine to command.
Who am I? They also tell me I bore the days of misfortune equally,
smilingly, proudly like one accustomed to win.
Am I then really all that which others tell me of? Or am I only what I myself
Know of myself? Restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,
Struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my throat,
Yearning for colors, for flowers, for the voices of birds,
Thirsty for words of kindness, for neighborliness,
Tossing in expectation of great events,
Powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance.
Weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,
Faint, and ready to say farewell to it all?

Who am I? This or the other?
Am I one person today and tomorrow another?

Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,
And before myself a contemptibly woebegone weakling
Or is something with me still like a beaten army,
Fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?
Who am I? They mock me, those lonely questions of mine.
Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am Thine!

All Christians asked, "Who Am I?" Our answer is the same as Dietrich Bonhoffer: "O God, I am Thine!" No matter the ups and downs of our lives as individuals, our profession of faith is always, "O God, I Am Thine!" Yet as Christians, (who according to Jeff) are also Presbyterians, we are more than individuals, we are a community of faith. As the Brief Confession of faith says, "In life and in death, we belong to God".

In the coming months, we will be seeking to discover what new identity God has for this covenant community who belong to God.

The Christians, to whom Hebrews was written, were struggling with many of the same issues this congregation faces. The future seemed unsure. They were uncertain about how they should move forward into God's future.

The author of Hebrews reminded those new Christians that they were surrounded by a "great cloud of witnesses". In other words, there was a large cheering squad, praying for them daily. This church, with its long history, also has a cheering squad, who have built a strong foundation for us to stand upon as we enter anew the race of faith. The author urged his hearers to: "run with perseverance the race that is set before (you)..."

This summer the world will join to celebrate the Olympics as young men and women from all over the world compete for bronze, silver and gold metals. Two things we know about each of those competitors is that they need both discipline and training. For years, they have been preparing for this once-in-a-life-time event.

Eugene Peterson translates Hebrews this way: "Strip down, start running---and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins." A part of Discipline is turning loose of what encumbers our race as Christians as we look for a new identity and a new future. Discipline for a runner means giving up what limits their running ability. It may be diet. It may be a form. It may be a life-style. For any congregation seeking to be faithful, it means turning loose of what is comfortable, familiar or our favorite things. It means turning loose of what limits us from the past and building on what from our past calls us into the future. You have already made one of those steps by beginning your First Fellowship Service. In the future, there may be other changes that God has in store. It will take the discipline of turning loose. It will take perseverance. As I wrote to someone recently, "The only place where there is no change is in a cemetery."

Yes, we are in a race, and that sounds demanding. However, a race also has a goal to which we strive to reach. Our daughter, Emily, a few years ago was convinced by a friend to run in the Marine marathon in Washington, D.C. I watched with amazement as month after month she trained daily. Up at dawn, running miles before work, eating the right food and learning to pace herself. Even when she came to visit us, she got up and ran before church. She had a goal. There was a finish line. There was a medal awaiting her when she completed 26 miles. We all stood near the finish line waiting to cheer her at the end.

The author of Hebrews reminds us that we too as Christian Presbyterians have a goal. Eugene Peterson translated it this way. "Keep your eyes on *JESUS*, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed---that exhilarating finish in and with God...God is doing what is best for us, training us to live God's holy best...Help each other out. And run for it!"

Our goal is not to do what is always comfortable, what we like best or seems safe. Our goal in this journey to discover and live a new identity, is to keep our hearts minds and souls fixed on Jesus Christ. He provides the model, the way, and the energy for us to complete our race to "live God's holy best" both as individuals and as a congregation.

It will not be easy, but that is our challenge and call. As we look to the future, we will often be asked "**Who Are You? And Who are We?**" I pray that like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, O God we will be able to express in our words and actions that "O God, I am/we are Thine!" I pray that yes, we will be Presbyterians, but even more that we will be Christians looking to Jesus "the pioneer and perfecter of our faith." This morning in the words of Hebrews, I offer you the challenge: "Strip down, start running---and never quit! And in that race of faith, you will discern and discover, the new identity God has in store for you.