

THE FIRST PRES



First Presbyterian Church
515 Court Street
Portsmouth, VA 23704-3605
Info@FPCPorts.org

Lane Pittman, Editor
Editor@FPCPorts.org
Phone: (757)397-3622
Fax: (757)393-6610

December 2008

Dear Friends,

I pray that everyone had a meaningful Thanksgiving and that you are now working hard on your treadmill, jogging or weight lifting to work off the added pounds from the celebration. In just a few weeks, we will again celebrate Christmas with all the joy and wonder that comes in praising God for the gift of our Master and Savior Jesus.

We are also approaching the end of our financial year in December. One of my goals as your Intentional Interim was to assist this congregation in insuring that income matched expenses during 2008. Yes, I have goals just like everyone else. This goal was not built into my covenant, but it is still one I am seeking to reach. However, I cannot reach this goal without your help. In fact, it will take the help of every member and friend of this church to reach this goal.

Christmas is about God's gift to us and our response to God's gift. May I humbly invite everyone to consider what will be their response to the needs of the Body of Christ as 2008 draws to an end. I know the economy is in trouble globally, but I also believe that God can empower us, with each person's sharing, to achieve this. I am always excited and enthusiastic about meeting what seems like a difficult and challenging test.

Enclosed at the bottom of this letter is information from Elder Diane Griffin about our needs to finish our budget needs for 2008. Please note that we are within \$9,646.00 to reach our needs and \$3,011.00 to reach our Sanctuary needs. Most of us cannot give huge amounts, even though we would like to because we love this church, her members and want to be faithful disciples; but everyone can give something toward the goal. I ask for your prayers and your generosity as we celebrate Advent—a time to celebrate the coming of Jesus to redeem us and look forward to his coming one day to claim his kingdom forever with love, inclusiveness and healing.

Peace,
George

Financial Notes

As we approach year's end,...etc from Diane.

Consecration Sunday was held on October 26, 2008. The projections from the pledges received that day have proven to be somewhat optimistic. We have received a total of 44 pledges for 2009 amounting to \$139,807.00. There are more than 15 "giving units" who pledged last year that have not yet pledged this year, so this is a reminder to everyone to please get your pledges into the church office as soon as possible. Call Diane Griffin (397-1776 or 484-4965) or the church office if you need a pledge card. A complete report will be presented to the Session at the December meeting, along with the 2009 recommended budget. Thank you for your prayers and continued support.

ADVENT/CHRISTMAS MUSIC

- Sunday, December 14th, the SUNDAY SCHOOL CHRISTMAS PAGEANT will be presented during the 11:00 Worship Service. The congregation will be singing the Carols for the pageant, with some solos added by members of the choir.
- Wednesday, December 17th, following the Church Family Christmas Meal, the Adult choir and Children's Ensemble will present a *CANDLELIGHT CHRISTMAS CONCERT*, beginning at 6:45. The concert will end with a Carol Sing-along.
- Wednesday, December 24th, Christmas Eve, at 6:45 a string quartet made up of members of the Virginia Symphony will start our service with a 15 minute prelude. The Worship Service will follow at 7:00.

CHURCH FAMILY NEWS



PRAYER LIST: We will list here only names that have been added to the Prayer List in the bulletins. We will list only the names and nothing about the reason for a name being on the

list.

Pat Rayburn, Mike and Dale Pendergraft, Pauline Council, Trey Rhodes (in Iraq), Elizabeth and Sylvia Stephenson, Dot Wyman, Mary Rice, Minnie Doleman, Rick Falls (friend of Duff Porter), Phil Winkler (son-in-law of Bob and Judy Powell), Liz and Frank James.

ENDOWMENT GIFTS

As the Advent and Christmas seasons approach, members are reminded that gifts can be given to the church endowment fund in honor or in memory of someone. For specific information on how to go about making such gifts to the Endowment, see Nan Jennings or Mike Broadhurst.

FINANCIAL COMMITTEE REPORT

We are not in the “black” as yet. Contributions in October were about \$4000 below budgeted needs. The General Fund lost \$3,486 and the Sanctuary Fund lost \$185. We hope and pray that November will be better. Year-to-date deficits run \$9646 for General Fund and \$3011 for Sanctuary, a total of \$12,657 for both.

The Finance Task Force has altered insurance coverage and recommended other cost-saving measures, but there are not many options available for reducing the budget or expenditures. Therefore, that Task Force is essentially unable to function.

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH COOKBOOK



ORDERS for the cookbook are being taken. The total cost of each book will be \$12.00.

Please indicate how many books you want and put the correct amount in the offering plate on Sundays or mail to the church office. Checks should be made out to the church and marked for “Cookbook Purchase.” The Cookbooks will be available before Christmas for gift-giving and holiday cooking or for keepsakes.

FOOD AND DRINK, CELL PHONES

Members are reminded that food and drink items should not be carried into the Sanctuary at any time. Cell phones, watches, and other noise-making devices should be turned off or silenced during worship services. Recently, we have become lax about following these precautions, and so special attention needs to be given. Thanks.

GIFTS FROM THE BUMBU CHURCH

Our Sister Church, the Bumbu Church near Kinshasa in Congo, has sent us two colorful paintings done in the style of local art. These paintings will be temporarily displayed in our sanctuary and elsewhere before going to their permanent home in our choir room.

Accompanying the paintings there will be museum-style plaques interpreting the paintings, based on the words in a letter from the folks in Bumbu. One painting shows a figure playing a horn (or cornet) “to announce the Good News and Justice of the Kingdom.” The other depicts “the instruments of music used to glorify the Lord in his churches” and in their joyous fellowship together.

Thanks to our friends in the Bumbu church for this gift and to God for their example of celebration and joyful worship in the face of hardship.

HOMELESS SHELTER

This year we will host the shelter February 8-14. Please volunteer to help out as you are able. This service normally involves sleeping at our church over one night with the homeless folks. Food is usually provided and prepared by volunteers from another church and then served in our social hall.

More details will be coming about the shelter. Volunteers should contact the Service Committee through the church office.

MEALS ON WHEELS



Help is always needed and welcome for this important ministry. Volunteers spend a few hours with us on the third Thursday morning of each month. If you can volunteer, please contact the church office to offer your services. May God continue to bless all the folks who volunteer.

MUSING: KIDNAPPING JESUS

Every Advent Season we Christians can be heard deploring the fact that the “real meaning” of Christmas has been lost.

Amid the store decorations that seem to go up earlier each year, the endless loops of “holiday music” that seem to contain few, if any, Christmas carols, and the general “hustle and bustle” and crazy running around we all do at this time of year, the baby in the manger could go missing – indeed, some would say he HAS gone missing – and few of us would even notice.

Of course, this also can be true every day throughout the year. With all the economic and family pressures of our too-busy lives, Jesus is frequently a fleeting thought at best. With little time for anything else except a hurried prayer in the middle of a harried day, we rush through the week and stop only long enough to show up at church on Sunday. Even those of us who work on committees and projects or hold offices in the church often struggle to find time for our church-

related responsibilities. Sometimes, those church duties are just another part of our hectic lives. God is never too busy for us! He knows and loves each of us – we must not forget that, because he never does.

However, the secular, commercial world and our busy lives aren't the only things that threaten to kidnap Jesus. There are many different groups who want to claim Jesus as their own. Each group in its own way threatens to kidnap him.

Take Politics. The so-called “religious right” thinks Jesus belongs to them. They say that Jesus agrees with them and they try to use certain issues to gain political power. On the other hand, the folks on “left” end of politics claim that they have it right and they understand what the Bible **really** means. They are both wrong. Some issues are – or should be – moral issues and not political. When we politicize certain issues those issues become weapons with which to hurt those who disagree with us. That's not how Christians should act! Even worse, both parties in the political battle tend to lose sight of the fact that there are real people attached to these issues.

There are people with real needs, people with pain, people with shattered lives; people whom – as Christians – we're supposed to love and take care of. Instead of fighting each other, we should be seeking God's help in coming up with reasonable solutions for people's lives. Even if we believe that a certain issue leaves no room for compromise, we are to love the ones affected and offer them comfort. “Blessed are the peacemakers.” Nowhere are we taught that we are to hate them and abuse them with our attitudes, our words, or our actions. We need to be mindful that we, too, are only sinners saved by grace.

There's also what I think of as the “sweetness and light” crowd, who teach

that Jesus is a laid-back, easy-going, loving chap who preaches tolerance and accepts everybody as they are, as if he's the original hippie. Their Jesus would never tell anyone how to live. This idea comes from folks who are trying to make Jesus over as they want him to be. Scripture will not support it. It's true that Jesus loves everyone, but anyone who thinks he is easy-going and makes no demands on our lives is thinking of somebody other than Jesus.

Then there's us. We, too, are guilty of attempting to kidnap Jesus whenever we choose to overlook or tolerate misrepresentations of Christ and his church. We threaten him when we turn our backs on poverty and suffering, and when we fail to give comfort to those who need it. We are guilty of making this threat when we say we are followers of Christ but don't observe all his teachings, or when we choose to “live and let live” rather than “get involved”. Jesus didn't teach tolerance; he taught love. He was not known for “leaving well enough alone”. He got involved. He acted out of love to correct and discipline, and we must follow his example. Love is not mere emotion; it is action. Lack of action is indifference, which is lack of love.

What God did for the world – which we celebrate as Christmas – he did out of love. The appropriate response to that love is for us to love each other – and not just the ones we agree with or like, or even other Christians, but the whole world. That's the real meaning of Christmas, and as long as we keep it in mind every day of our lives, we don't have to worry about Jesus going missing.



Lane Pittman

NEWS FROM CONGO

The social and medical welfare of the people are further endangered as the situation in this politically unstable Democratic Republic of Congo continues to deteriorate. A resurgence of the near-universal state of war, added to poor harvests, pervasive poverty are part of daily life, and they seek our prayers and our moral and material assistance. It is easy to dwell on our own lives and misfortunes; but in our relative blessing and peace, these folks must be included in our daily prayers.

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.

Mailing address: Lane Pittman
614 Chandler Harper Drive
Portsmouth, VA 23701
Telephone: (757) 405-3554
E-mail: Editor@FPCPorts.org

Everyone's cooperation on this will be greatly appreciated.

SERVICE AT OASIS



Every third Monday of each month throughout the year a group from our church serves breakfast at Oasis. A good, nutritious breakfast is served to the homeless and others who are in need.

Please consider volunteering—we always need people to make breakfast casseroles (baked at your home and can be frozen), shop for milk and juice, or actually show up at 6 am to serve. Those who can help should contact KAREN DIGGS or the church office.

CHANGES TO PRAYER LIST

If you have submitted names for the Prayer List that's printed in the bulletin every Sunday, please help keep the list current by checking your submissions for accuracy and timeliness. If your items on the prayer request list need to be corrected, updated, or deleted for any reason, please make those changes with the church secretary, Mary Myers.

PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN

The annual **Christmas Gathering** will be held on Saturday, December 13 at 11:00 AM. Ms. Martha Giles will provide music on the hammered dulcimer. Anyone who would like to attend is invited to join the women in the sanctuary for this short concert.

Following the program, the PW will partake of a "pot 'o soup" lunch. The offering for this gathering will be the collection of filled Christmas stockings which have been provided by The Salvation Army.

In October, Circle No. 1 completed twelve hygiene kits which were distributed to local migrant workers.

Both circles participated in Operation Santa Claus by purchasing Christmas gifts for foster children.

The Presbyterian Women will coordinate the purchase and distribution of poinsettias during the Christmas season.

CWS Blanket Offering - \$224 was collected so far.

REPAIRS/REFURBISHMENT TO ENTRANCES

The entrances to the church are being repaired and refurbished with money raised from our Octoberblest church bazaar. This includes both entrances to the sanctuary, as well as the Court Street and the King Street entrances to the Educational Building. During this work, your patience and extra attention to safety are requested.

An estimate of nearly \$6000 raised from the bazaar has been made. A final, official figure will be reported when one is ready.

A note from Property:

The front steps (Court Street) have now been “cradled” with a steel understructure to support our footsteps. Those steps were in an almost dangerous state of disrepair. Repair and paint should be seen soon on the entranceway and doors.

SESSION ACTIONS

On Monday, November 17th, 2008, the Session of FPC held a regular stated meeting with Interim Minister Dr. George Oehler as moderator and Diaconate Chair Jennifer

Patgorski representing the Diaconate. The Session took the following actions:

- Referred several letters and other communications to committees for action/recommendation.
- Approved the Clerk of the Session to provide certain information requested by former pastor Don Belanus to facilitate his returning to the Christian Reformed Church. (This involved a form asking for information from the Session that had already been gathered regarding Dr. Belanus’s tenure as our pastor and which was in the Clerk’s possession.)
- Approved the Minutes of the stated Session meeting of October 20th.
- Approved a joint Session-Diaconate meeting on Monday, December 15th.
- Approved the recommendation of the Endowment Committee for a request from Witness for the Bumbu Church.
- Approved the recommendation of the Endowment Committee for a request from the Director of Music Ministries to provide for professional musicians for Christmas.
- Approved an additional donation from the Endowment to go to the Bumbu Church.

STEWARDSHIP REPORT

Consecration Sunday was successful, with a 2.9% increase in pledges over the previous year. A complete report and the recommended budget for 2009 will be presented to the Session in December. Thanks to all who worked to make it so.

FINANCIAL NOTES

As we approach year's end, the Finance Committee reports that the General Fund has a year-to-date deficit of \$9,646.00 and the Sanctuary Fund has a year-to-date deficit of \$3,011.00. This budget deficit of \$12,657.00 could be erased if outstanding pledges and some additional gifts are paid by December 31, 2008. Please check your records or contact our bookkeeper, Linda Hackworth, for pledge status information. Our ministries for salvation and service are sustained by solvency – let us keep our covenants!

The Finance Task Force has not met in several months. After altering our insurance coverage to achieve cost savings, and encouraging Committee Chairs (and the congregation) to conserve, there do not appear to be many options for leveraging or reducing the budget. We are hopeful that even in this tough economic climate that the congregation has the will and the capacity for continued grace and generosity.

LETTER FOR TAX CREDIT

Have you ever personally paid for something needed by a church committee or other church-sponsored entity? If so, your help is appreciated, and your contribution is valued. However, you might not realize that you can get a letter documenting the dollar value of your contribution to the church for tax purposes. If you wish to have such a letter written for you, please contact the church Treasurer or the Stewardship and Finance Committee for the details.



BIRTHDAYS

December

2	Kathy Goolsby Kaitlin Hackworth
3	Frances Spiers
6	Rose Council
9	Rebecca Porter
12	Margaret Glynn Jay James Viki Goolsby
18	Chuck Powell Michael Broadhurst
20	Ed Powell
21	Pat Sparks Dylan Wilson Shannon Brown
22	Earl Griffin
27	Sean Taylo
28	Elizabeth Pond Riley Winkler Stephen Deller
29	Duff Green Porter IV

January

1	Kendall Rhodes Jerry Askew
7	David Turner, Jr.
8	Megan Newsom
10	Robert Bailey
12	Kenny Hackworth
14	Caroline Newsom
15	Anne Porter