

THE FIRST PRES

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Dear Friends,

This Sunday we entered the season in the church we call Lent. This is a season of the church in which we pause and reflect on our relationship with our Lord Jesus and our willingness to hear and follow the will of God. It has traditionally been a time of discipline, study of scripture, reflection in prayer and worship. For some it has been a time of giving up something as a spiritual discipline as we look toward the Passion of Christ and his resurrection, which we joyfully celebrate on Easter.

As we walk through Lent, I would like to invite you to give up some of your valuable time to pray each day at noon for the Pastor Nominating Committee. We had a Called Session Meeting on Saturday. The Session approved the Church Information Form, which will be forwarded to the Presbytery of Eastern Virginia Committee on Ministry. Once the Committee on Ministry has approved the Church Information Form, then the Pastor Nominating Committee can get on with the work of seeking a new Called Pastor for the congregation.

I believe the church will be bound closer together as we wait and pray for the calling of a Pastor. I believe the Pastor Nominating Committee will be strengthened knowing that the members of the church are praying for them regularly every day.

Our discipline for this Lent, will be the discipline of regular prayer. Maybe each day before lunch, we can each bow wherever we are, and ask for God's guidance for the committee and God's preparation for the new Pastor. Our prayers will give the Pastor Nominating Committee encouragement and the congregation patience and excitement about the future of First Presbyterian Church.

Peace,
George

Bake Sales

Our youth plan to have Bake Sale tables set up at Wednesday night dinners once a month for the next few months to raise money for youth to attend Makemie Woods and Montreat. Indulge your sweet tooth and help send a kid to camp!

Church Statistical Report

At the February 16th Session Meeting, the church's Annual Statistical Report was received. A synopsis of that report is given here:

- Active members on 1/1/08 – 209
- Active members on 12/31/09 – 196
- Gains – 1
- Losses – 14 – 7 by Transfer of Membership; 7 by Death

Those by transfer of membership:

Theresa Askew, Margaret Belanus, Christian Hearn, Kimberly Hearn, Earle Mobley, Melissa Nash, Robin Sherrill

Those by death: Allan Covert, Fred Culpepper, John Hardy, Caroline Matthews, Evalyn Rule, Betty Wallace, Margaret Westbrook

- Average Attendance (both services combined): 93
- Baptisms: 1

The full report is posted on the bulletin board outside the minister's office.

Church Family News

We remember with affection **Mike Pendergraft**, a man many of us at First Presbyterian came to know and love over the past several years. Beneath the gruff exterior that he presented when you first met him, Mike had a heart for people, caring and compassionate. He and his wife, Dale, have been in our prayers often and we continue to offer up prayers for Dale now that Mike is gone.

Sympathies to **Frank Jennings** and his family on the death of Harry Jennings, Frank's brother, who died in February 2009.

Congratulations to **Grant Briggs**, grandson of **Agnes McFadden**. Briggs, a junior at Essex High School with a 4.12 grade point average, attended the five-day Presidential Youth Inaugural Conference in Washington, D.C. Nominated by his teachers and principal, Briggs was selected by a national committee to attend the conference among high school students from across the U.S. recognized for their scholastic merit and leadership ability. Held every four years, the conference included seminars, workshops, and speakers such as Colin Powell and Al Gore, and culminated with attendance at the inauguration itself and a black-tie inaugural ball. Briggs, who has the highest gpa on the Essex field and track team, appreciated the ground-breaking and historic nature of the Obama Inauguration and was excited to be there. He is in the process of selecting a college, but says he might study law. Grant is the son of Dr. Robert and Peggy Briggs of Tappahannock. For further details, see the copy of newspaper article on the bulletin board in the Fellowship Hall.

Prayer List– Please add to your daily prayers or continue to pray for the folks named below:

Cathran Harrell, Pauline Council, Dale Pendergraft, Elizabeth and Sylvia Stephenson, Dot Wyman, Mary Rice, Minnie Doleman, Rick Falls, Ashley Outland, Phil Winkler, Christian Schmidt, Frank and Liz James, Fred Culpepper, Jr., and Cathy Jordan.

Dan and Carol Chou Adams Plan Retirement

According to correspondence from Dan and Carol Adams, they will retire from Korea on December 31, 2009. After that, they will have a three-month mission interpretation assignment from January through March and will finally retire on March 31, 2010. Then they will stay temporarily at Mission Haven in Decatur, Georgia. Their plans following that are unresolved right now, but they're already getting "post-retirement" job offers. They have taught at Hanil University in Jeonju and the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Seoul for more than 20 years. Dan and Carol have been our missionaries and have visited us here at FPC several times over the years. We wish them luck in retirement and pray for their continued good health and God's blessings in the future.

"I Am"

I was regretting the past and fearing the future.

Suddenly God was speaking. "My name is 'I am.'"

I waited.

God continued,

"When you live in the past, with its mistakes and regrets, it is hard.

I am not there. My name is not 'I was.'

"When you live in the future, with its problems and fears, it is hard.

I am not there. My name is not 'I will be.'

"When you live in this moment, it is not hard.

I am here. My name is 'I am.'"

Helen Mellicost
From 100 Graces and
Mealtime Blessings.

Meals on Wheels



If you can volunteer, please contact the church office to offer your services. Help is always welcome for this important ministry of our church. It involves a few hours on the third Thursday morning of each month.

May God continue to bless all the volunteers.

Missions Dinner

On Wednesday, March 18, the annual Missions Dinner will be observed. There will be a speaker, music, and tables decorated to represent different countries.

Please mark your calendars and plan to be there.

Musing: Choosing Life

Being “Pro-life” involves more than one issue. It seems inconsistent for someone to say that abortion is wrong, and yet support capital punishment. Nor does it make sense to say capital punishment is wrong while supporting “assisted suicide.” Life is a gift that only God can give. If this gift is precious, then it is precious in all situations, and “pro-life” should be “pro-life” regardless of the circumstances. To illustrate this here, we will look at three issues. First is the volatile subject of abortion.

When does human life begin? How each of us answers this question may determine our differing views on abortion. If life doesn’t begin until birth, then what happens to the fetus before birth doesn’t matter, and abortion is acceptable at any time prior to birth. On the other hand, if one believes that life begins at the moment of conception, then what happens before birth is vitally important and abortion at any time is wrong. On a less technical (and more political) level, some see abortion as a choice that the mother has a right to make; others see it as the unjustifiable taking of a life.

Is abortion a choice? Should it be? Granted, some say it is a choice; but what person – whether the mother or a doctor or a nurse or clinician – has the right to “choose” to take life away? We can no more do that than we can “choose” to give life. Only God has that authority. Is abortion going to happen anyway? I’m afraid it will. Is the procedure dangerous? Yes, it is. Is the decision fraught with emotion? Certainly it is. Do all involved have to live with what they’ve done? Sadly, yes. It is as it is.

Next, consider euthanasia, or “mercy killing” or “assisted suicide” or whatever name is appropriate. Who knows when it’s time to end someone’s life? not a doctor or nurse, no matter how scientifically they

approach it. A loving and sympathetic family member or friend may sense that the end is near – even the suffering person may have “a feeling” – but no one knows for sure. The best anyone can do is to make a guess. It may be an educated or informed guess, it may be close or even accurate, but it’s still just a guess.

A decision to remove life support machines and other devices or procedures that are designed to sustain life artificially – heart-rending as it would be – does not usurp God’s authority to determine whether and when life should end. Thus that decision isn’t against life, as I see it. But no human has the authority to determine when a life should end – no matter the condition of the body that contains that life. Suffering and pain, lost awareness of one’s surroundings, even the person’s own expressed desire to die, don’t confer that authority.

Is it hard to see someone suffer? Yes it is. Do we wish to end that suffering? Of course we do. Do we have authority to interfere with the natural – sometimes terribly painful – process of dying? No we don’t. And we must remember – painful death is not “God’s will,” but is a result of evil being brought into this world and of the sinful natures we have inherited.

Then there’s capital punishment. The nature of the crime and issues of race or mental capacity or social standing can complicate this issue. So can the expense of housing a convicted criminal, or whether the method of execution inflicts undue pain, or the possibility of executing someone who’s innocent.

The family and friends of the victim might seek “closure” from the death of the one convicted, but “closure” can be just another word for revenge. It is assumed that there is satisfaction to be had in the death of the one found guilty; yet any such satisfaction would

be hollow, at best. Should we feel sympathy for the victims of a capital crime? Of course we should. Should the convicted criminal be punished? Yes, without a doubt. Will the criminal's death bring peace to survivors of the victims? No.

I may not know how to resolve these issues, but I do know that there is no "right" to life, any more than there is a "right" to salvation. Life is a gift from God. Circumstances or disease or criminal acts – however sad or tragic – do not confer on anyone the authority to decide when and how life begins and ends.

This season of Lent and Easter may seem to be a strange time to discuss these issues. However, Jesus Christ came into the world, died, and was resurrected so that we might have eternal life. How we respond to that gift from God is an issue for discussion every day, every season.



Lane Pittman

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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Everyone's cooperation on this will be greatly appreciated.

Oasis Breakfast Schedule

January 19	Mary Rice Class
February 16	Youth Group
March 16	Diaconate
April 20	Session
May 18	Open Ends Class
June 15	Mary Rice Class
July 20	Youth Group
August 17	Karen Diggs et al
September 21	Choir
October 19	Open Ends Class
November 16	Diaconate
December 21	Service Committee

Oasis Youth Servers

Kudos to the Youth who served at Oasis on Monday, February 16, 2009. This was their day off of school, so they had no other reason to get up so early. Some of them had never served before and found that it was a much needed and worthwhile ministry.

Youth who served were:

Grady Fitzwater
Tanner Furman
Gabrielle Furman
Mallory Collier (a friend of Tanner and Gabrielle)
Jay James
Erin McRary
Collin Taylor

Other servers:

Elizabeth Fitzwater
Jennifer Patgorski
Duff Porter
Todd Taylor
Karen Diggs

Those who prepared casseroles were:

Elizabeth Fitzwater
Paula Fuss
Laura McRary
Jennifer Patgorski
Anne Porter
Don and Mike Taylor
Todd Taylor

Thanks to you ALL!!

Operation Attack Update

Time for an update - and a request - from your workers in the Operation Attack ministry!

There has been a flurry of activity over the past few months and as the nation's economic conditions continue to fluctuate, we're bracing ourselves for more.

Currently, PARC (our city's consortium of helping agencies) is referring families to our food closet through Portsmouth Social Services. Most of our food comes from the Food Bank (it's not free, but it's cheaper than buying at a grocery store). We also shop (tax-free) at Food Lion and Walmart for staple groceries that we keep on the shelves and in the freezer. We purchase fresh fruit and vegetables each week based on the family's needs.

In general, we supply these families with enough groceries to last them the week, for up to four weeks, until their food stamps kick in. Why does it take so long to get food stamps? If someone works (but just doesn't make enough to buy food, too), it takes a month from the time they apply for food stamps until they actually begin receiving them. That's when Social Services calls on us. The families referred to us are working families who come to us on Thursdays to pick up a week's worth of groceries (including

fresh fruit and vegetables). Generally, they are with us for one month.

Now, here comes the request. We are in real need of volunteers willing to help pack and/or shop for our families. We are asking you to agree to volunteer for just one week to do one (or all) of the following:

- Pack groceries from the closet. You can pack the groceries any time before Thursday. If you are unable or would rather not come to church to give them out to the families Mary is more than willing to give out the groceries you've packed.
- Shop for fresh foods (generally fruits and vegetables) for the families we are expecting for the week. Beverley Byrd, our Operation Attack coordinator, can let you know what to purchase. There is money to reimburse you for your purchases. If you'd rather not do the fresh food shopping, please don't let that stop you from volunteering! We have others willing to do that shopping if you can't, and there are other jobs that volunteers can do. Continue to make donations of money and food! Our biggest food need is meat. If you could occasionally buy a little extra with your regular grocery shopping and put it in the Operation Attack freezer, that would be great!
- Continue to pray for our ministry and for those who are hungry and in need in our city and in the world.

Pastor Nominating Committee

The Pastor Nominating Committee is busy preparing for the work ahead of them. The committee will report to the congregation on a regular basis through the newsletter or the pulpit.

They ask for your support and especially your prayers as we move into a new and exciting period for our Church.

Members of the committee are: Paul Butler, Chair, Elizabeth Fitzwater, Diane Griffin, John Hackworth, Jay James, Jennifer Patgorski, Alice Simpson.

Congregational Meetings and Session Actions

* On January 11, 2009, during the 11:00 worship, Interim Pastor Dr. George Oehler ordained and installed officers for the class of 2011. Karen Diggs and Kendall Rhodes were ordained and installed as Elders; John Hackworth and Kay Kidd were installed as Elders; and Beverly Byrd, Susan Fay, Charles Hudgins, and Duff Porter were installed as Deacons.

* On January 12 the Session met in a stated meeting with Dr. George Oehler as Moderator. The following actions were taken:

- Approved for 2009 – Election of Anne Porter as Clerk of Session, John Hackworth as Treasurer, and committee chairs as listed: Christian Education – Elizabeth Fitzwater, Property – Michael Broadhurst, Grounds – David Stuart, Stewardship & Finance – John Hackworth, Witness – Alice Butler, Worship – Alice Simpson, Youth – Karen Diggs, Endowment – Michael Broadhurst, and Personnel – Kay Kidd.
- Approved – Recommendation that our church continue combining with St. John's Episcopal for Vacation Bible School.
- Approved – Resumption of regular payments to support work of Presbytery.

* On January 26 the Annual Congregational Meeting was convened for the purpose of presenting the 2009 Budget and receiving the committees' annual reports. There being no permanently installed pastor, the Pastor's Terms of Call were not presented for vote. The 2009 Budget, having been approved by the Session, and written annual reports of activity during 2008 were distributed to those present. The Moderator asked committee chairs if they had information to add to their written reports. Property added that proceeds from the Octoberblest bazaar had been used to repair and refurbish all the church entrances and that two handrails had been added to the King Street entrance to the Educational Building. Service reported a goal to provide a year-round homeless shelter in Portsmouth.

* February 1, 2009, a Congregational Meeting was convened for the purpose of electing a Pastor Nominating Committee and two persons to fill vacancies on the Diaconate. Paul Butler, Elizabeth Fitzwater, Diane Griffin, John Hackworth, Jay James, Jennifer Patgorski, and Alice Simpson were elected as the Pastor Nominating Committee. Michele Graupmann was elected for a one-year term (Class of 2009) and Rudy Simpson for a two-year term (Class of 2010) as Deacon.

* On Monday, February 16, 2009, the Session met in a regularly-scheduled stated meeting with Dr. George Oehler as Moderator. The following reports were given and actions were taken as shown:

- Received as Information – A letter from Virginia Arts Festival advising that our church has been selected to be profiled in a book about stained glass windows in the region. Our church will receive (5) complimentary copies of the book.
- Christian Education – Lenten Devotional Books on Order. Some

youth have signed up for camp at Makemie Woods.

- Treasurer’s Report for January 2009 – General Fund showed a deficit of \$700; Sanctuary Fund showed a deficit of \$900. The Treasurer and the Finance Committee are looking into refinancing/combining loan for refurbishing and loan for courtyard to get the best possible loan/payment possible.
- Witness – International Missions Dinner on Wednesday, March 18. Souper Bowl of Caring garnered \$528. Our missionaries, the Adamases, will retire from Korea on 12/31/09 with their final retirement on 3/31/10. Stamps for missions were able to garner funds to send \$7,389 to the Congo; \$3000 went to the purchase Bibles in the Tshiluba language – they currently only have selected pages from the Bible. Mission yearbooks have been ordered.
- Worship – Lay readers have been scheduled for the year. Jeffrey Quinn will supply the pulpit on March 8. Have not heard from any downtown churches about Lenten services. We will see about having a service of our own if no one else approaches us about services.
- Youth – Met with Karen Diggs to plan service projects and social activities. The youth served at Oasis this morning – 7 youth and 5 adults worked. We’re the only church in the city whose youth help at Oasis. Working on plans for a Youth Sunday on May 31.
- Personnel – Committee recommended and Session approved church staff salary increases.
- Presbytery Meeting Report – Alice Butler reported on the meeting. The proposed amendment to the Book of Order relating to change in ordination

standards was not approved by this Presbytery.

- Statistical Report – Received; posted on bulletin board. [Synopsis elsewhere in newsletter.]

* On February 22, during the 1100 worship, Dr. George Oehler installed Michele Graupmann and Rudy Simpson as Deacons.

Souper Bowl of Caring

On February 1, 2009, the day of the NFL Super Bowl, our Youth collected \$528 for the “Souper Bowl of Caring”. The money collected goes to Operation Attack to help feed needy people in our community.

Thanks to the Youth and their leaders for this donation. Thanks to God for the fine young folks who make up our Youth.

Stamps for Missions

Mrs. Peggy Reinhold sends the following report:

2008 Report of Stamps for Missions

On hand as of January 1, 2008	\$ 23.23
Rec. from stamp sales, gifts	<u>7365.70</u>
	\$7388.93
Postage for 70 shipments	532.98
Subscription half yr.	
Linn’s Stamp News	10.00
Subscr. Full yr. “ “ “	45.95
Sent to Presbyterian Church – Congo	1300.00
Sent to UPreco [Theology School] – Congo	1500.00
Sent to scholarships – Congo	1000.00
Sent to Congo to purchase Bibles	<u>3000.00</u>
	\$7388.93

Mrs. Reinhold says 2008 was a record year for the Stamps for Missions project, thanks to the support of many contributors and volunteers. The project received stamps from individuals and churches in 39 states. The final payment was made on a smaller printing press and assistance was sent to help UPreco in its financial crisis. Bibles purchased are resold at a subsidized price to students and pastors, who previously had only pages from old Bibles.

She reports that “mind-boggling needs” continue all over Congo. Financial support is important and appreciated; constant prayer is needed.

Thanks to Norma and Lanier Halterman for this information and for their work in support of this program.



March

- 1 Edna Broadhurst
- Cathy Miltier
- Jeff Hice
- 5 Susan Newsom
- 6 Bob Powell
- 9 Madeline Hice
- 12 Burma Smith
- 13 Penny Brangan
- Mary Fitzwater
- 14 Roger Newsom
- 15 Lanier Halterman
- Scott Fletcher
- 19 Lee Price
- 21 Mallory James
- 22 Minnie Riley
- Jennifer Patgorski
- 27 Kelly Fletcher

ZUNI “DAY IN THE COUNTRY”



On Saturday, April 25, the Presbyterian Group Home at Zuni will hold their “Day in the Country” event. This event at Zuni is a 35-year tradition, bringing together the residents at Zuni, their families, the local community, and church groups. There will be performances, hay rides, peanut roasting, and other kinds of fun. The residents at the home love this event and go all out to make everyone feel welcome. Come to Zuni and see the campus, meet the residents and staff, and enjoy some mighty fine down-home cooking! Flyers with more details are posted on bulletin boards around our church.

April

- 2 Tara Taylor
- 4 Harvey Spiers, Jr.
- Julia Newsom
- 7 Emily Newsom
- 11 Norma Halterman