Looking Forward, Looking Back: Presbytery Meets November 19

Pasadena, here we come for the November 19 meeting of the Presbytery of New Covenant. Landon Whitsitt is getting excited about being with us as our keynote speaker. Since his term as Vice Moderator of the 219th General Assembly, Landon has been on the national stage of our denomination. He serves as the executive of the Synod of Mid America, where he challenges churches across the nation to grow through his Theocademy series, teaching us about what it means to be Presbyterian, what it means to be a ruling elder, and confirmation for our youth. The newest topic is “Love an Other,” which stars one of the co-moderators of the 222nd General Assembly, T. Denise Anderson. You can get to know Landon through his v-log which is found on YouTube. Landon will help us look forward into the future of our denomination.

We will look forward as we help to shape the denomination as we vote on amendments to the Book of Order, the constitution of the PC(USA), and offer an omen for the next General Assembly. We will look forward as we prepare a candidate for ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. We will celebrate our Seafarers’ Ministry and will collect an offering for them during worship. We will look forward as we hear about some of what we will be doing in 2017.

As we look back, we will celebrate the retirement of two long-time members of the Presbytery of New Covenant. One is Ben Stewart who has served as a chaplain at the Port of Houston for 20 years. The other is our general presbyter, Mike Cole, who has served in this role for the past 13 years. Previously he served as moderator of the presbytery and on the Committee on Ministry and other committees. Mike’s vision helped to begin the Jewish-Presbyterian dialogue group, the Muslim-Presbyterian dialogue group, and the recently formed Racial Reconciliation Team. Let us celebrate the contributions of Mike and Ben as we look back!

Looking back...looking forward! We look different than we did just four years ago with the departures of several of our brothers and sisters in Christ. And we will learn together what it means to live into “We are New Covenant!” as we begin our next steps as a presbytery.

Amending Our Constitution
By Rev. Lynn Hargrove, Stated Clerk

In the months after the General Assembly meets, the 171 presbyteries have the opportunity to vote on the various business items that have to do with changing either the Book of Order or the Book of Confessions, which are the two parts of the constitution of the PC(USA). Once all of the votes are completed, the revised Book of Order is released in the year following the assembly.

This year the presbyteries will be voting on several items. Our presbytery will vote at our November 19 meeting. Here is a brief description of the items for consideration:

Youth Protection Policies:
G-3.0106: This section of the Book of Order mandates that councils (sessions, presbyteries, synods, GA) have a sexual misconduct policy and a child protection policy. The recommendation is to add “and youth” between the words “child” and “protection.”

On parity in representation on committees: G-3.0109: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through.]

Constitution continues on page 3
“Our Next Adventure”

I’m not an adrenaline junkie. I’ve never been fond of roller coasters or rides that spin. I’ve never been rock climbing or sky diving. I wouldn’t even think about swimming with sharks (although some days in the church might seem like it). I try to do most things in moderation and don’t really want to feel my heart beating out of my chest. Despite my best intentions, I may be a problem for the church of the future. And you may be, too, if you are avoiding adventure in your discipleship.

The words “adventurous” and “Presbyterian” don’t normally occur in the same sentence, but I’m challenging all of us to become more adventurous in our discipleship and living, not for the purpose of heart palpitations but for heart revival. As I have visited our congregations over the last couple of years I’ve noticed that most of us have settled in for a safe and predictable journey with Jesus. We’ve gotten very comfortable with our traditions and have surrounded ourselves with folks very much like us.

But Jesus recruited disciples who were very unlike him—rough and tumble fishermen, a tax collector, a scoundrel, an impetuous one, a compassionate one, and others whose lives were unremarkable—but very like the rest of the world. Jesus understood that his church would need a diverse base in order to become unified (another premise that defies our logic). It may be that Jesus saw his ministry as a great adventure, going unexpected places with surprising people to do extraordinary things.

Adventure is something Ellie and I have planned (does one “plan” an adventure?) for ourselves in retirement. My last day in the office will be our Open House on December 8, and I officially retire on December 31, 2016. We plan to put our house on the market in February and move to Woodland Park, Colorado in the spring. We are moving away from family (that’s not our motivation) into an area we have purposely chosen for our retirement adventure. Before you ask, yes, we have lived in the Rockies before and know what to expect from the weather. No, we don’t have a house there. We have to wait until we sell our house here before we can buy one up there. Yes, we will be living in transitional housing until we find our next home. We know that we will be moving anonymously into a community where no one knows our name and even if they did, it wouldn’t matter. Frankly, that is part of the attraction for us—doing something unpredictable and a bit risky.

It will also make it a bit easier to honor my commitment to proper ethical behavior for a former pastor. In a couple of months I will be the former General Presbyter. As such, I need to give space to the Transitional Presbyter who follows me and then the General Presbyter who follows that person to do their work unhindered by my presence. Some geographical separation will make it easier for me to resist the temptation to offer my “expert” advice and for you not to seek it. Selling our house, moving, and finding a new home will also distract me from how much I will miss you.

I’ve been a part of this presbytery for 24 years and was a candidate under care of the Presbytery of Brazos (a predecessor presbytery) while in seminary. I’ve shared half my adult life with you and have been through a lot of “stuff” with you. We’ve laughed, cried, argued, planned, worshipped, prayed, agonized, exulted, questioned, complained, explained, expounded, propounded, rebounded, and rejoiced together. I wouldn’t trade a single one of those moments (even the agonizing ones) for something less demanding.

In the coming weeks, I will be changing my email, my cell number, and my Facebook account as our new adventure begins. I’ll send notices of my new contact information so that those who wish to stay in touch as friends will be able to do so.

The other part of my adventure will happen right here in the Presbytery of New Covenant. I will be eagerly watching as new leadership works with the best presbytery in the denomination. I will smile every time I hear someone compliment the presbytery for its dynamic leadership. I will rejoice with you from afar as you live into a new vision and show the rest of the denomination how a twenty-first century presbytery is supposed to be. I will exult as our outstanding group of new and young pastors and elders assumes more leadership. I will swell with pride as the presbytery continues to reach across boundaries and break down walls of separation.

Our adventures are taking us in different directions, as it should be. In some ways I envy the leaders who will have the privilege of serving with you (but not enough for me to un-retire!).

“The Lord bless and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.”

In Christ,

From the Cole Mine
Rev. Mike Cole, General Presbyter
Presbytery of New Covenant

The Presbytery of New Covenant
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Constitutional, continued from page 1

through; text to be added or inserted is shown as italic.] “A committee shall study and recommend action or carry out decisions already made by a council. It shall make a full report to the council that created it, and its recommendations shall require action by that body. Committees of councils higher than the session shall consist of both teaching elders and members of congregations, with at least one half being members of congregations in numbers as nearly equal as possible.”

Reclaiming the title “Minister of Word and Sacrament”: There are many places in the Book of Order that are suggested for revision to either add the term “Minister of Word and Sacrament” or substitute those words for the words “Teaching Elder.” When the new Form of Government was approved several years ago, the term “Teaching Elder” was reintroduced to demonstrate the difference in the roles of presbyters (elders). In the PC(USA), there are “ruling elders” and “teaching elders.” This has been confusing for some people, and the request was made to go back to “Minister of Word and Sacrament” instead of Teaching Elder. The places that are being suggested for edits are: F-3.0202, G-2.0102, G-2.0301, G-2.05, G-2.0501, G-2.0701, G-3.0307, and W-4.4001a. Additionally, in G-3.0307, the proposal is to add language to clarify the term “ruling elder commissioned to pastoral service.” The addition includes adding the words “also known as commissioned pastors” and “commissioned ruling elders.”

The Directory for Worship and the Rules of Discipline will also be edited to conform with the changes in the Foundations and Government sections of the Book of Order.

Renunciation of the Jurisdiction of the Church: There are two revisions proposed that address when someone renounces the jurisdiction of the Church. The first is to add the words in italics to this paragraph in G-2.0509:

“Whenever a former teaching elder has renounced jurisdiction in the midst of a disciplinary proceeding as the accused, that former teaching elder shall not be permitted to perform any work, paid or volunteer, in any congregation or entity under the jurisdiction of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) unless and until the person rejoins the church, comes forward and renews permission to perform work under the jurisdiction of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (G-2.0509), no time limit from the time of the commission of the alleged offense to the filing of charges shall apply. Charges based on all accusations that had been made by the time that the former teaching elder had renounced jurisdiction may be brought regardless of the date on which any such offense is alleged to have occurred.”

Certified Service Requirements: A minor change is suggested for G-2.1101, striking a prepositional phrase and substituting the word “of”:

“Persons may be certified and called to service within congregations, councils, and church-related entities, serving in staff positions. These individuals endeavor to reflect their faith through their work and to strengthen the church through their dedication. They should be encouraged by their session and presbytery to meet, or be prepared to meet, the certification requirements in a handbook provided by...”

A national certifying body approved by the General Assembly. Names of those who have earned certification through a national certifying body shall be transmitted to the appropriate body of the General Assembly, which will forward them to the stated clerk of the presbyteries in which those persons labor.”

The Ministry of Members: The proposed revision is to add the words, “caring for God’s creation” to section G.1-0304 in the list of ways for church members to be involved in the ministry of the church.

Access to the Lord’s Table: The revision asks for the current language found in W-2.0401a and b to be replaced with the following:

“Theology of the Lord’s Supper “

a. The opportunity to eat and drink with Christ is not a right bestowed

Constitution continues on page 9
Anyone who has spent much time with me knows how much I value ongoing, lifelong learning and faith formation. I’m a self-described learning junkie and bookaholic. Anyone who looks into my office will note the piles of books—those being reviewed for our resource center as well as those from my personal library. Yet aside from my natural inclination, there is much to commend a commitment to lifelong learning in all portions of life. Researchers find that those committed to ongoing learning tend to be happier, healthier, and more resilient. I believe this ongoing growth applies not only to learning new technology or new bodies of information. I believe fully in the importance of continuing the journey of faith.

Faith development is not just about what we know about God, but how we experience God and seek to follow God's will and purpose for our lives. And while the capacity for faith is a God-given gift, we in churches are entrusted with providing good growing conditions to encourage thriving, vigorous, fruit-bearing faith.

Can you imagine deciding that once you learned your alphabet, you needn’t bother to learn more about reading? Or that once you could play a scale, you had mastered the art of making music? Of course not! These are simply steps along the way. Daniel Aleshire, an influencer of my understanding of faith formation, puts it this way:

Learning in the context of Christian life involves the process by which people are introduced to the Christian community—its stories, people, ways, and vision of the world—and are incorporated into that community, experiencing its fellowship, participating in its mission, and moved by its passion... To learn is to mature in the capacity to live in relationship to the truth and to respond with obedience to that truth. Learning occurs in the interaction of the Christian story, community practice, and the individual’s changing awareness of self and others. —Daniel Aleshire, *Faithcare*, p. 51

I’m left with this question: What does it look like to be on a life-long journey of spiritual growth and how might the combined wisdom within our presbytery help resource our congregations in supporting this growth among our members?

When I raised the idea of a special project to develop guidelines for milestones in spiritual growth and how might the combined wisdom within our presbytery help resource our congregations in supporting this growth among our members?

Dear Presbytery Friends!!

Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to have a two-month extended vacation. I was elected as an alternate to General Assembly so I used this time as continuing education to attend the 222nd General Assembly in Portland, Oregon. I witnessed history: the installation of co-moderators, the Rev. Denise Anderson and the Rev. Jan Edmiston; and I took a picture with the newly elected, first African American Stated Clerk of the PC(USA), the Rev. J. Herbert Nelson (WOW!). I went on a day-long mission trip along the coast of Oregon to Astoria; simply beautiful! Each day I would say, “Thank you, God, for the many blessings.” I was also able to attend a National Business Administrator’s conference in Grapevine, Texas. The remainder of the time was spent helping my 84-year-old mother.

I am grateful to everyone in the presbytery who made this happen. Thank you for the encouragement and support that you have showed me over the past 48 years.

Love you all, Sharon Gibson Darden

Patricia Brantley of Presbytery of New Covenant

Lynne Ruth, Retired from St. Paul PC in Houston

Sharon Darden and Rev. J. Herbert Nelson, Stated Clerk of PC(USA)
As a way to support victims of violence and call for healing and reconciliation, several churches within the Presbytery of New Covenant have started a series of “Get Together” benefit concerts. The idea is to have one of these concerts at different Presbyterian churches every two months or so, at least to start. Each service should be concerned with the theme of violence and reconciliation and take on the “flavor” of the host congregation. Each host congregation will decide how to divide the offering with full disclosure.

The first concert was on August 28 at St. Paul Presbyterian Church in Houston and was called “Get Together: A Concert for All People to Stand Against Violence.” Music was provided by choirs, bands, and pastors of New Covenant along with their friends. The Rev. Dr. Kevin Boyd, the pastor of St. Paul, said, “It is our belief that no one should be the victim of violence on the basis of race, gender expression, or religious belief. We do not have to agree on the details of any of these matters to know that violence is not a Christian response. We are not just standing against violence. We are standing for love.” City Councilman Mike Laster updated the group on what Houston is doing to combat violence in our city. The recipients of the Love Offering collected that evening were the families of the victims of the Orlando Shootings and the Dallas Police Officers. The donations were divided and $341.00 was contributed to each of these three charities: Pulse Victims Fund, Assist the Officer Foundation, and We Love You Project.

A second benefit concert was on October 16 at St. John’s PC in Houston. It was called, “Get Together: A Concert and Healing Service Toward Racial Reconciliation.” Music was again provided by bands and pastors and friends of New Covenant, and $569.26 was collected as a love offering for victims of violence.

If you would like to be part of planning these concerts or are interested in having your congregation host one, please contact Rev. Kevin Boyd at kboyd62@yahoo.com.

PC(USA) Planning Calendars are Available

The PC(USA) 19-month planning calendar (June 2016–December 2017) contains many aids for pastors and other church leaders. It includes lectionary for Sundays and special days, liturgical days and colors, resource information for PC(USA) programmatic emphases, and color foldout synod/presbytery and world maps. It also contains updated synod, presbytery, and Presbyterian Mission Agency staff directories. Limited copies are available for $10 each from Patricia Brantley at pbrantley@pbyofnewcovenant.org or 713-526-2585.

Reading History with Our Eyes Instead of Our History

Most of us hear sermons on a weekly basis. Some of us preach sermons on a weekly basis. Sermons are meant to be heard, not read. They are intended for a specific audience at a specific time and in a specific place. That’s why no sermon can be repeated, effectively, and certainly no one can preach someone else’s sermon, at least not without attribution. Not only will preachers have a different “take” on the same passage, but the context in which they preach will be different. The Spirit will be at work among different congregations.

And yet, all can learn from reading what those who have gone before us have preached. Over the past 200 years there have been many gifted preachers in the various churches and presbyteries of what is now the Synod of the Sun. Recently, I had the opportunity to read a sermon by a gifted but little known preacher who lived outside our region. His name was Vernon Johns. He served churches in Virginia, West Virginia, and Alabama. In fact, he was the immediate predecessor to Martin Luther King, Jr. at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama.

As I understand it, the sermon by Johns is the only published sermon that he preached. The text is Matthew’s account of the experience of Jesus and three of his disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, and the sermon is entitled “Transfigured Moments.” It is a powerful and insightful sermon on a passage that is an admittedly difficult one for many preachers. One of the lines refers to how we look at history. While mountaintop experiences may not be normative for most, Johns points out the valuable perspective one can have from that vantage point.

At one point Johns tells of a missionary in the Balkans who took a small boy who lived at the base of a mountain up to the summit. When they reached the top, the boy exclaimed, “My! What a wonderful world! I never dreamed it was so large.” Later in the sermon Johns observes that “Up there we can read history with our eyes instead of our prejudices.” That’s the line that caught my attention.

Writing and reading history requires perspective. If we are too close to the events, we might be influenced, either wittingly or unwittingly, by our own prejudices. But taking the long view enables us to see more and to see everything in a larger context. History is more than telling “what happened.” It is trying to put what happened in a larger context that helps us “read it with our eyes instead of our prejudices.”

As we make history today, may we do so with a keen awareness of the larger context in which we live and breathe.

In order to be better stewards of our environment, we will start sending Connections via email in January 2017. If you prefer to receive it in print, please contact Patricia Brantley, Circulation Manager, at pbrantley@pbyofnewcovenant.org or 713-526-2585, ext. 101.
Presbyterian Women Thank Offering Grants Awarded

By Janice Bradshaw, PW Presbytery of New Covenant Moderator, and Carol Davis, PW Synod of the Sun Moderator

Presbyterian Women (PW) collect the Thank Offering in the fall of each year as a tangible way to express their gratitude for the special blessings in their lives. The offering funds a wide variety of projects with at least 40% supporting health ministries throughout the world. The remaining 60% funds new, creative ideas for mission. The 2016 goal for the Thank Offering is $900,000.

The PW at First Presbyterian in Bryan, Texas hosted a Thank Offering Program in November of 2015 and invited Jackie Pacha, Executive Director of Brazos Valley Center for Independent Living (BVCL), to be a guest speaker. After the program, BVCL was encouraged to apply for a Thank Offering grant, and Judith Jerry of the Creative Ministries Offering Committee of PW PC(USA) notified BVCL that they had been awarded a $25,000 grant for its “Independence on the Move” Initiative. The grant will allow the center to convert an accessible bus into an outreach vehicle, providing transportation and training for individuals with disabilities. This will allow the Center to take their services to clients who are unable to come to the Center in Bryan, Texas. BVCL’s mission is to promote the full inclusion and participation of individuals with disabilities in all aspects of community life.

A Thank Offering Grant has also been awarded to Living Water International. The $40,250 grant will be used to purchase a drill rig for use in Haiti. Living Water will work with people in Haiti to drill water wells in several communities. The rig will be crated and shipped to Haiti to provide safe water in multiple sites in a country where at least 36% of the population lacks access to safe water. The dedication ceremony for the drill rig was held September 7 at Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church in Houston, Texas. A total of $100,000 was raised to fund the drill rig from PW and other contributing churches and individuals. Living Water International works in more than 20 countries to provide safe water and spiritual hope as each new well is drilled. Staff work with the local people in teaching personal hygiene, sanitation, and water storage. They work in partnership with local churches whenever possible.

At the headquarters of Living Water International, 4001 Greenbriar Drive in Stafford, Texas, there is an exciting, interactive exhibit for children called “The Story of the Thirsty.” It is appropriate for children from five years through middle school, although older children and adults will find it valuable. “The stories and activities in the exhibit encourage students to uncover hidden facts about water and develop empathy for the thirsty. The study center leaders focus on God’s call for each of us to love others, to help relieve suffering, and to share the Good News of Jesus Christ.” To schedule a student tour, contact Carol Long at 281-207-7800.

Mission

Mental Health 101: Equipping Faith Communities to Better Serve Those Broken By Mental Health Difficulties and Disorders

By Rev. Charlotte Kibler, Honorably Retired

Individuals struggling with mental health problems are more likely to go to a member of the clergy before a physician or mental health care provider.

- One in five adults in the United States is struggling with a mental illness.
- 60% of adults and almost 50% of children and adolescents receive no mental health services.
- There are ten times as many mentally ill persons in our jails and prisons as in state hospitals.
- 30% of the homeless struggle with a mental illness; five times the normal rate.

Do you feel equipped to serve those struggling with a mental illness? Your faith community can make a difference. Let us teach you the 3Rs:

- RECOGNIZE the signs of mental illness
- REFER those struggling to professional care
- RESTORE lives through supportive community

The Hope and Healing Center offers FREE training to equip faith communities to better serve those with mental health difficulties and disorders. Contact Matthew Stanford, Ph.D., Center Director, at mstanford@hopeandhealingcenter.org for more information or to schedule a Mental Health 101 Session.

Church Celebrates Groundbreaking

By Ruling Elder Paul Hurst, First PC in Tomball

First Presbyterian Church in Tomball celebrated a Groundbreaking Ceremony on Sunday, September 11, for their new Fellowship Building. The new 6,000 square feet facility, which is being constructed this fall and spring, will better serve the community and outreach programs. The weather was perfect and the turnout was even better. Refreshments were served while a special group of dignitaries gathered for the event along with a photoshoot. It was a great gathering to celebrate a new milestone in the life of the church!

From left: Sherrie Meicher from Congressman Michael McCall’s office; Bruce Hillegeist, President of Tomball Chamber of Commerce; Dalton Burrows, Boy Scout Troop 623; Dave Coles, Presbytery of New Covenant; Dr. Robert Rush, Pastor of First Presbyterian; Lynn Hargrove, Presbytery of New Covenant; Russell Petrucciani, Nukote Construction; Amber Flanagan, Toddco Construction, and Kim Kimbrell, Third Coast Architects
Ministry

Seafarers’ Christmas Ministries

The Presbytery of New Covenant is unique in the U.S. in that we have three chaplains providing ministry to seafarers on more 8,600 ships that come into the Port of Houston annually. They work with chaplains from the Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Chinese Christian, and Baptist churches and with two Buddhists, all of whom are committed to ministering to the needs of the forgotten people of the sea. One important facet of this ministry is providing Christmas boxes to seafarers. The boxes bring cheer, God’s love, and practical gifts to people from around the world that must be away from family at Christmas. The crew on the ships truly appreciate the love and hospitality offered by these Christmas boxes. They are thankful for the work, but they miss their families, friends, and home communities, especially at Christmas.

If you’re interested in providing Christmas boxes for seafarers, here are a few suggestions of what to put inside of a large, wrapped shoebox: socks, washcloths, bars of soap, toothbrushes, toothpaste, handkerchiefs, pencils, pens, paper, cards, paper clips, sewing kits, cotton swabs, adhesive bandages, cups, gloves, zip lock bags, small calendar, packs of tissues, decks of cards, razors, combs, flashlights, chewing gum, hard candy, rubber bands, holiday cards, hotel samples (shampoo, conditioner, hand cream), and knit hats. The Christmas boxes are personally carried to each ship by the Port Chaplains and mean a lot to the Seafarers. You may bring filled Christmas boxes to the presbytery meeting on Saturday, November 19, at First Presbyterian Church at 4647 Preston Road, Pasadena, Texas.

Another opportunity to share with the seafarers is by Christmas caroling. On Saturday, December 3 and Saturday, December 17, groups will cruise the ship channel and sing carols to the seafarers. The maximum number of adults for each evening is 90 (no children, please). A government-issued photo ID is required as well as advance reservations, which should be made by contacting Rev. David Wells at wells6652@msn.com or 713-443-4262 at least one week prior. Check in by 5:30 p.m. (allow extra time for possible train traffic). Departure is at 6 p.m. with return around 8 p.m. Carolers are also invited to the Seafarer Center after caroling for a party. More details are available on the presbytery’s website (www.pbysfncovenant.org).

Thank you for showing hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it (Hebrews 13:2).

Hurricane Matthew Relief Support

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) urges your support for those affected by Hurricane Matthew. Financial support for relief efforts can be designated to DR000193 with reference to Matthew. Gifts can be made online at http://bit.ly/MatthewPDA, by phone at 800-872-3283, or by check, which may be mailed to PC(USA), PO Box 643700, Pittsburgh, PA 15264-3700.

Church Celebrates Rebuilding After Arson Fire

Less than one year after their sanctuary was destroyed by an arson fire, Westminster Presbyterian Church in Galveston will celebrate the completed rebuilding of its sanctuary with a rededication service, and the entire community is invited. The ecumenical rededication service will be on Sunday, December 4, at 4 p.m., followed by a free BBQ dinner.

Since the fire, Westminster has been holding worship services in their fellowship hall. They are looking forward to worshipping in their sanctuary again and to sharing the celebration and their gratitude with all those who have been a part of their recovery. Many congregations and individuals have helped through their contributions and their prayers and encouragement. Westminster is thankful for the efforts of Galveston fire and police departments on the night of the fire and for all those who have helped in a variety of ways since. As one of the longtime members said, “This building stands by the grace of God and this congregation also.”

At the rededication service, Westminster will invite an offering to help hungry families around the world through Heifer International. Afterwards there will be an opportunity to visit a living gift market to donate towards specific animals like pigs, chickens, and goats as an alternative to commercial Christmas gifts.

Westminster Presbyterian Church in Galveston was founded in 1895 as an outreach from First Presbyterian Church to the “west end” of the island. Westminster moved to its current location in 1960 when they purchased the land at 5127 Avenue U and moved the Fort Crockett chapel to serve as their sanctuary. The church’s education building was formerly the fort’s ice house. They look forward to worshiping in their rebuilt sanctuary and continuing their rich history.

FPCC Receives Grant for Homeless Project

By Penny Bell, First PC in Conroe

First Presbyterian Church in Conroe (FPCC) recently received a $2,000 grant from the Presbytery of New Covenant’s Outreach Committee for the church’s “Homeless Project.” The funds will be used to purchase food for meals at the Salvation Army in Conroe, the Conroe House of Prayer, and Family Promise in Conroe, where church volunteers assist every week.

The grant funds also will enable First Presbyterian to provide, through these agencies, shelter, jobs, job training, counseling, clothing, household goods, and other tangible help so that the clients can regain their independence. Thanks go out to Presbytery of New Covenant for making it possible to expand FPCC’s most-needed mission efforts.
30 Days with the Belhar Confession: Reflections on Unity, Reconciliation and Justice

The Belhar Confession was approved as part of PC(USA)’s The Book of Confessions at the 222nd General Assembly. This 30-day useful companion to the Belhar Confession weaves together Scripture passages and the Confession’s timely themes of unity, reconciliation and justice. Written by a diverse collection of scholars, theologians, and church leaders, it is the perfect resource for individuals, study groups, or entire congregations wanting to familiarize themselves with the Confession through prayer and reflection. The confession in its entirety is included at the back of the resource. Available through the PC(USA) store at http://store.pcusa.org/2435816004.

Names for the Messiah: An Advent Study

By Walter Brueggemann

Groups seeking a four-week Advent study for their small group or personal use may well be inspired by this meditation on Isaiah 9:6 from acclaimed Old Testament scholar Brueggemann. Each of the short chapters take on a particular phrase made memorable by Handel’s Messiah—Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Each title is explored in the context of Isaiah’s day, the context of the early church, and that of believers today. Prayers and reflection questions for each chapter make this a highly usable resource.

Journeying with Matthew: Reflections on the Gospel

By James Woodward, Paula Gooder and Mark Pryce

What a fine preaching companion for the coming lectionary cycle! Worship teams could make good use of it as well as they make use of the great questions, prayers, and poems that accompany observations of the Biblical texts. This is a particularly helpful volume for those who wish to develop the liturgical seasons following a narrative and thematic arc based on the gospel readings.

On God’s Side: What Religion Forgets and Politics Hasn’t Learned About Serving the Common Good

By Jim Wallis

Wallis lifts his voice to address the profound call to reason, reconciliation, and passion for social justice and peace. He invites us to be agents of God in blessing the world. Part one addresses inspiring the common good, and part two addresses practices that would support this transformation. The epilogue features ten personal decisions for the common good. Although written in 2013, Wallis’ message resonates loudly in our current national debate. His final charge is that each of us must find the intersection between our personal good and the common good and that this is the best contribution to our future.

Overcoming Depression: The Curse of the Strong

By Tim Cantopher, M.D.

Beginning with the affirmation that depression is a physical illness from which recovery is possible, this book is highly recommended both for those who are dealing with depression and those who love and care for them. It offers warm support while sharing current research on the mechanics of this illness, medical treatments that work, lifestyle measures that contribute to resilience, and problem solving skills including mindfulness and time management.

A Letter to My Anxious Christian Friends: From Fear to Faith in Unsettled Times

By David P. Gushee

Ethicist and public theologian Gushee takes up 20 fear-inducing topics of our day, or at least 20 highly-charged topics, in his call to remember the repeated message of Scripture to fear not. Money, guns, abortion, police, race, our national divisions, and public education all become fodder for conversation as the author attempts to move us toward conversation and away from divisive rhetoric.

Prosecuting Jesus: Finding Christ by Putting Him on Trial

By Mark Osler

The author, a former Federal prosecutor, had never been able to find a Jesus who seemed particularly real to him—until he put Jesus on trial. Drawing on his legal experience in the courtroom and as a professor, Osler gathered some friends and colleagues to stage a trial of Jesus in their church, as though it was happening in a modern American criminal justice system. The event was so powerful that he began to receive invitations to take the show on the road. In the process, Osler discovered himself in the midst of discovering Jesus. Osler’s juxtaposition of the passion of Christ and capital punishment gave new depth and meaning to his faith and to those who have seen the show in locations across the country.

Grace for the Journey: Practices and Possibilities for In-Between Times

By Beverley and George Thompson

Transitions can be scary times. Perhaps nowhere is this truer than in our churches and especially in this time of rapid cultural change. This is not a how-to-fix-it book. Instead the authors offer a variety of practices that can help churches find new energy as they explore new ways of being in ministry together. Suggestions are made for the important steps of finding who you are and where your passions rest, excavating history, and finding new treasure that allows new dreams to unfold. The final chapter addresses dealing with pushback to change.
Calling All Youth Groups of Our Presbytery!

CONCLAVES 2017
February 24–26, and March 3–5

Presbytery!

This year’s theme is IGNITE: A Life on Fire!

Who? Middle and High School Youth and Adult Advisors; Adults must be 21 years old or older; Ratio 1 adult: 5 youth by gender

Where? Cho-Yeh Camp & Conference Center in Livingston, Texas

Cost? $135 / person, includes lodging, meals, a Christian concert, and conference t-shirt

Registration Packet available at: www.pbyofnewcovenant.org (Packets will also be mailed to each church.)

Register online at: www.campcho-yeh.org/retreats/reservations-and-pricing/conclaves

Registration DEADLINE: Thursday, January 26

Turn to the Living God

The Evangelism and Church Growth Committee reviewed and encourages congregations to make use of the pamphlet, “Turn to the Living God: A Call to Evangelism in Jesus Christ’s Way.” This 25th anniversary edition recognizes that we have an outwardly focused mission to proclaim our faith to the ends of the earth. It is available as a free pdf download at: https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/Turn-to-the-Living-God-25th-Anniversary-Edition.pdf

Youth Rally

Sunday, November 13 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.
ChristChurch Presbyterian
5001 Bellaire Blvd, Bellaire, Texas

Join us for fun and faith-filled weekends at Camp Cho-Yeh this spring! Our Presbytery’s Youth Connection Council (PYCC) is planning two retreat weekends called CONCLAVES that will enable your youth to grow closer to one another, connect with other youth from all over our presbytery, engage in small groups, experience dynamic worship, and, of course, have a blast playing games and making new friends! Youth will also participate in a mission project and explore ways to connect with God in our Spirituality Center. This year’s theme is IGNITE: A Life on Fire!

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Seeking a Transitional Presbyter

As you may know by now, Rev. Mike Cole, General Presbyter of the Presbytery of New Covenant, is retiring as of December 31, 2016. He has been an agent of change and constancy in our presbytery for the last 13 years plus. As he and Ellie start their next adventure, we’re already busy looking for a Transitional General Presbyter.

The Presbytery of New Covenant is made up of 99 churches and worshipping communities in Southeast Texas, and we’re seeking a Transitional General Presbyter with excellent leadership, organization, and people skills. We seek a “servant leader” to guide and accompany us as we seek to embrace and live into our strategic plan for the future of the presbytery’s life and mission. Candidates should be ordained as a Ruling Elder or Teaching Elder (Minister of Word and Sacrament) with solid knowledge of Reformed Theology and PC(USA) polity.

For more information including the job description and submission information, please go to the presbytery’s website at www.pbyofnewcovenant.org (go to Congregations then Church Jobs)— or just go to bit.ly/TransitionalGP. If you are interested, please contact the nominating committee at NewCovenantTGPNC@gmail.com.

If you have questions about the Presbytery of New Covenant, contact the Synod of the Sun Acting Synod Leader and Stated Clerk, Ruling Elder Valerie Young, at valerie.young@synodsun.org.
what’s happening ...
upcoming events and gatherings

November 8
Election Day; Day of Prayer for Our Nation
Houston, Presbytery Office

November 10
Healthy Boundaries
Houston, St. Thomas PC

November 13
Youth Rally
Bellaire, ChristChurch Presbyterian

November 15
Healthy Boundaries
Angleton, First PC

November 19
Presbytery Meeting
Pasadena, First PC

November 24–25
Presbytery Center Closed
Thanksgiving Holiday

December 6
Deadline for January/February edition of Connections

December 8
Presbytery Open House
Houston, Presbytery Office

December 23–26
Presbytery Center Closed
Christmas Holiday

A Safe Place:
Retreat for Bereaved Parents

At A Safe Place, bereaved parents find a place to share their grief with others who have experienced the death of their child. The retreat is facilitated by other bereaved parents, professional counselors, and ministers. The main goal is to provide a safe, spiritual environment where bereaved parents are able to share their grief and find hope and healing. Registration is open at www.moranch.org/attend-a-conference/adult-conferences/safe-place/.

November 11–13 at Presbyterian Mo-Ranch Assembly, 2229 FM 1340, Hunt, Texas 78024.

For All Humanity Luncheon

Interfaith Ministries (IM) will be hosting a For All Humanity Luncheon on Thursday, November 17, at the Hilton Post Oak at 2001 Post Oak Blvd. The luncheon celebrates the rich cultural and ethnic diversity that make Houston such a vibrant community. Proceeds from the luncheon help IM’s Refugee Services program, which resettles annually more than 1,500 refugees fleeing persecution and violence in their homelands. More than 90 percent of these refugees are self-sufficient members of the Houston community within six months of arrival.

A reception and market place will start at 11:30 a.m., followed by the lunch and program at 12 p.m. Individual ticket prices start at $200; table sponsorships at $2,500. For more information visit www.imgh.org or contact Lauren Peterson at 713-533-4972 or lpeterson@imgh.org.

St. Andrew’s Presbyterian at 5308 Buffalo Speedway in Houston, presents its next Coffee House Live on Thursday, November 17, featuring Los Texmaniacs. Doors open at 7:00 p.m., and the show starts at 7:30 p.m. There is never a cover, and all are welcome to come enjoy the performance and musical fellowship time.

Los Texmaniacs play “hip music that everybody in the world can relate to, with the traditional conjunto elements," says Texmaniacs leader Max Baca of their Texas Mexican sound. Four masterful instrumentalists, Grammy-anointed bajo sexto player Max Baca, an accordionist, bassist, and drummer, breathe new life into the century-old music of the Texas Rio Grande Valley. Los Texmaniacs are Grammy award winners and two-time Smithsonian Folklife Festival participants. This show is supported in part by a grant from the Texas Commission On The Arts.

The chapel at Presbytery of New Covenant will be open from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Tuesday, November 8, Election Day, to allow individuals to come and pray for our nation. Please feel free to stop by and offer up prayers at 1110 Lovett Blvd, Houston, Texas.
Experience four days away from the holiday madness! Surround yourself with fellowship, worship, and the Christmas Spirit at Mo-Ranch’s Holiday Gift Making Retreat. Grab a friend and enjoy a gathering of fellow craft lovers, creating homemade gifts together. The retreat leadership will guide you through hands-on Christmas craft workshop courses during this long weekend retreat. See gifts and crafting options, registration details, and information on 24 possible CPE hours at www.moranch.org/attend-a-conference/adult-conferences/holiday-gift-making-retreat/. December 1-4 at Presbyterian Mo-Ranch Assembly, 2229 FM 1340, Hunt, Texas 78024.

Please St. John’s Presbyterian Church in Houston for their annual Living Gift Market on Sunday, November 20, from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. in McPhail Hall. This unique market offers affordable, socially responsible, and handcrafted gifts. It also supports many of St. John’s important missions including Living Waters for the World, Lulwanda Children’s Home, Houston Seafarers Ministry, Anchor Houses, and more! The Silent Auction will help fund future mission trips. St. John’s is located at 5020 W Bellfort in Houston.

The Association of Presbyterian Church Educators (APCE) will host their annual conference in Denver, Colorado, from January 25 through 28, 2017. The theme is “God With Us in the Chaos,” and the event promises to restore your spirit and re-energize you for ministry. Mary Marcotte, Associate General Presbyter of Presbytery of New Covenant; Rev. Jon Burnham, Pastor of St. John’s in Houston; and Anne Wilson of St. Philip’s in Houston are among the workshop leaders. Anne Wilson will also receive a lifetime achievement award. The conference will be held at the Denver Marriott Tech Center and registration is now open at apcenet.org.

Presbytery of New Covenant invites you to our Christmas Open House on Thursday, December 8 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Ham and turkey will be provided. If you’d like, bring a dish or dessert to share. Join us to “Mingle and Jingle” at 1110 Lovett Blvd, Houston, Texas.
Prayers for Praise and Concern

General Prayers
Congregations and individuals who are in transition
Continued recovery efforts in Louisiana after the historic flooding
Jasper, First PC after a break-in in September
Those impacted by Hurricane Matthew

Praises
Marielle (Mollie) Caroline Raspino—Granddaughter of RE Bill and Rev. Lynn Hargrove, Chair of Committee on Preparation for Ministry and Stated Clerk of the Presbytery, respectively—born Sept. 16
Owen Lee Cornell—Son of Kathy and Rev. Alex Lee-Cornell, Pastor at Houston, St. Stephen PC—born Oct. 2

Health Concerns
Rev. Connie Alexander, HR
Rev. Mauricio Chacon—Member of the presbytery serving as Affiliate Associate Pastor for Latino Ministries at Memorial Drive PC
Rev. Jim Gill—Baytown, Faith PC
Rev. Jake Gonzales, HR
Rev. Joseph Kho, HR—Former Pastor at Houston, Formosan PC
Mike Schofield—Sugar Land, First PC and former member of Committee on Ministry
Craig Wood, CRE—Pastor at The Woodlands, Alden Bridge

Deaths
Lanorma Gaskin—Mother of RE Bart Gaskin, Beaumont, St. Andrews PC—Aug. 17
Mother of Rev. Tom Edwards—Port of Houston—Aug. 27
Father of Rev. Deborah Cooper—Member at Large—Aug. 30
Father of RE Garry Schoonover—Katy, Grand Lakes PC and former Moderator of the presbytery—Sept. 3
Rev. Carl E. Mills, HR—Sept. 4
David W. Koester—Father of RE Pete Koester, Webster PC and Treasurer of the presbytery—Sept. 13
Rev. Bruce Fisher—Retired Member of New Covenant who served at A&M PC among others—Sept. 27
Odis Brantley—Father-in-Law of Patricia Brantley, Database Coordinator of the presbytery—Sept. 29
Carolyn Baker—Wife of RE Forbes Baker, Director of Finance of the presbytery—Oct. 2
Doug Cleveland—Brother of Rev. Shelley Craig, HR—Oct. 13

RE = Ruling Elder | HR = Honorably Retired | CRE = Commissioned Ruling Elder