General Council Accomplishes 2018 Goals

When the presbytery committee leadership met in January, 2018, Presbytery Moderator Bob Patterson shared three goals for the year. These were the dream of Council Moderator David Green. The first was to figure out the presbytery staffing, the second was to figure out what to do with the property at 1110 Lovett, and the third was to work on communications in the presbytery.

Over a two year period, the Presbytery engaged in a comprehensive process of discerning the best way forward in terms of its goals and objectives. A recommendation resulting from this process is that the presbytery needs to “right size” its staff and facilities within available financial resources. The Personnel Committee reviewed every staff position, the Finance Committee reviewed the financial resources available to fund staff positions, and ultimately the two committees collaborated on recommendations to the General Council that included two prongs: (1) combine the two positions of General Presbyter and Stated Clerk and retain all other support positions; and (2) sell the Lovett property and relocate to space that better meets the needs of presbytery as it currently exists. This process was exhaustive, carefully and prayerfully considered, and adjustments made with additional insights or information put forth by various groups and individuals. Ultimately, the General Council accepted the two committees’ recommendations.

At the July stated meeting, permission was given to sell the property at 1110 Lovett at market value. Four different groups had expressed interest in purchasing the property. For some, market price was too high, and they decided against the purchase. In the end, one group has been enthusiastic about the purchase, and the sales contract has been negotiated. The purchaser agreed to our price, and there are no commissions involved. A “Space Force” looked at various options for relocation of the presbytery offices, and decided that moving to the old education building at St. Philip was a good place. Remodeling of the space will begin soon so that the relocation can happen in the first quarter of 2019. Goal #1 accomplished!

At the November stated meeting, the position descriptions for a General Presbyter + Stated Clerk for Administrative Process, and a new part time Stated Clerk for Judicial Process were approved. Rev. Lynn Hargrove, who has served as the Stated Clerk for the presbytery was elected to the combined position to serve a term of three years. Someone to fill the new part time position will be hired in early 2019. Goal #2 accomplished!

The Congregational Resourcing Team proposed a Digital Vitality Task Force to work with how we communicate across the presbytery. They will be developing a plan in 2019. Goal #3 accomplished!

One of the underlying goals of the presbytery staff, General Council, and committees is to inspire all to think of the organization as “We all are presbytery!” We are a committed group serving our member churches and their people throughout our geographic region. A major focus is to bring us together and to reaffirm the value of each member of this amazing body of believers... even as we work within the realities of today and plan responsibly for the future. Our vision, goals, and objectives are re-visited regularly to ensure these efforts are in alignment with what we believe are God’s purpose and will. We are finding new ways of being and doing the work of the presbytery as we move into our new reality.

The next Stated Meeting of the Presbytery will be Saturday, March 16, 2019 at St. Thomas Presbyterian Church
Our Better Angels

Recently I read Jon Meacham’s *The Soul of America: The Battle for Our Better Angels*. One of several prominent American historians today, in this book Meacham focuses on particularly critical times in American history and how presidents dealt with them. From the Civil War and Abraham Lincoln to the wave of immigration in the early 20th century and Teddy Roosevelt to the Red Scare and World War I and Woodrow Wilson to the Great Depression and Franklin Roosevelt to a second Red Scare and Dwight Eisenhower to the Civil Rights movement and Lyndon Johnson.

In each of these cases Meacham maintains that the president and those that advised and served with him were guided by a sense of what was the good and right thing to do. Sometimes it was clear what that was, and sometimes it was not. But in almost every case the decisions that were made involved great risk and were not always popular. Leaders were guided by their “better angels”.

Reading this book led me to think about who our “better angels” have been in the church. Who are those persons who took a particular position out of conscience and risked reputation because they thought it important? Perhaps it was in their own local church or community or maybe it was on a more regional or national stage.

I think of Ernest Trice Thompson, a humble and soft-spoken person and wonderful church history professor at Union Seminary in Richmond, who became the editor of *The Presbyterian Outlook* in the 1940s and stood up for integration at that time. I think of Marj Carpenter who has been an ardent advocate of Presbyterian world mission work, thus helping us to see beyond our own narrow, provincial lenses.

I think of Lawrence Bottoms who was elected the first African-American Moderator in the Presbyterian Church in the United States (the old southern branch) in 1974. He was a churchman of the highest order who worked for reconciliation in a denomination that had a history of racial division. I think of John Hannah, a quiet and winsome gentleman, who in the 1960s taught a senior high Sunday school class in Houston and went to Washington, D.C. at that same time to offer a plan for this country to get out of Vietnam.

I think of persons who in their own quiet way served as our better angels, teaching the gospel in word and by example, rarely bringing attention to themselves. At a time when voices are loud and at times seem divisive, perhaps we do well to remember those who served as “better angels” to us.

Who have been some of your better angels?
New Beginnings?

Colleagues and Friends, I am humbled and honored that you elected me to the position of General Presbyter + Stated Clerk for Administrative Process. I am using the “+” intentionally. Many presbyteries across our denomination use a “/” and the position becomes known as a “slasher.” I hope that in this new beginning for our lives together to augment rather than slash, hence the “+”!

Earlier this year, a wise person shared these words with our General Council. They came from some training with the United Way: Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing. Organizations go through these cycles of development in their corporate lives. Here in the Presbytery of New Covenant, we had a pretty good idea of who we were – one of the ten largest presbyteries in the country numerically. Twenty years ago, we had about 40,000 members spread across more than 100 congregations. We had a large staff that included multiple associate presbyters and administrative personnel.

And, then came the storming. As the denomination seemed to become more liberal theologically, the more conservative people began to feel as though their church was leaving them. Debates over human sexuality and marriage seemed to dominate our General Assemblies. In 2010, there was a gathering of seven pastors who were concerned with the decline of membership in the PCUSA, and other topics which they felt detracted from their calling of sharing the gospel message. There was a letter sent in early 2011 which suggested that the PCUSA was “deathly ill.” A few months later there was a gathering in Minneapolis which began the process of birthing the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (aka ECO).

The storming for our presbytery lasted for several years as we formed discernment teams and dismissed congregations to the more conservative denominations of ECO and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. Our numbers were reduced drastically when the three largest congregations voted to leave the PCUSA. The last congregation was dismissed at the November, 2016, presbytery meeting which coincided with the retirement of General Presbyter Mike Cole.

During 2017 and 2018, we have struggled with who are we now. At the 221st General Assembly in Detroit, we had 10 commissioners (2014). We had 8 in Portland (2016), 6 in St. Louis (2018), and will have 4 in Baltimore in 2020. We are no longer one of the largest presbyteries in the denomination, but our voice is still strong at the General Assemblies, particularly regarding the potential divestment from the fossil fuel industry.

We are not as prosperous as we once were, so the decision was made to cut the staff at the top of the organizational chart rather than at the bottom. We are in the process of selling the facility located at 1110 Lovett Blvd, and relocating our offices. It seems that as the decisions have been made that we are entering a period of norming.

I am grateful to be given the opportunity to lead the Presbytery of New Covenant into the next phase of performing. I hope that we deepen relationships across the presbytery, between congregations, and pastors, as we seek ways to reach out to our neighbors in 39 counties in Southeast Texas and beyond!

Our theme for 2019 CONNECTIONS are these words from Matthew 25: 
For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.

This issue focuses on how our congregations are feeding the hungry in their communities.

For the March | April edition, the theme will be: 
I was thirsty and you gave me drink.

Submit your articles with pictures by February 12. Thank you
Helen DeLeon is 2019 Moderator

The Rev. Helen DeLeon was installed as Moderator for 2019 at the stated meeting of the presbytery on November 17. One of Helen's goals for 2019 is to visit congregations around the presbytery. She is available to preach, teach, or have conversation. Helen serves as the Associate Pastor of Webster Presbyterian Church.

Helping the needs of school children

Webster has a long, strong tradition of partnering with Communities-in-Schools to help meet the needs of children at McWhirter Elementary and Brookside Intermediate in Clear Creek Independent School District. Our parishioners regularly provide funds to help the counselors ensure that the children under their care have the supplies, clothing, food, and support they need for a successful school year. One of these ministries is our spring food drive, “Feed My Sheep.” Many of the children rely on the school for hot meals and adequate nutrition. When the school is on break, those families who are already food insecure sometimes are unable to provide the food their children need to thrive. Every year, Webster conducts a drive to collect non-perishable food and funds to deliver to the CIS counselor at McWhirter. She then provides food baskets that are sent home to ensure that the children have the food they need to thrive during Spring break. Through this ministry, we respond to the command to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

Working together to pack meals

First Presbyterian Church, Texas City joined with Lutherans at Feed Galveston to package over 35,000 meals for food banks across Galveston County. A labeled plastic bag, a flavor pack, a scoop of soy, a scoop of noodles, precisely weighed to 455 grams, heat sealed, packed 30 to a box, loaded on the truck, and delivered ready for distribution that day. Many hands worked together on a 4 hour Saturday event in September (occurs quarterly).

Community Ministry

This ministry was organized with area churches in 1997 as an all-volunteer organization serving Pasadena, Deer Park, and Pasadena. We give food and clothing assistance to individuals and families in a crisis of need. Through this temporary assistance we strive to help them stabilize their lives and financial situations. PCM also aids our clients by identifying other assistance agencies that may provide additional temporary or long-term aid. Neither faith nor heritage are factors in determining need. We are open to all on Tuesday mornings, Thursday afternoons, and the first Saturday of every month.

PCM is located at Faith Presbyterian Church of Pasadena, 2301 South Houston Road, Pasadena TX 77502, phone 713-477-4336.

The Wonder Team

St. John's Presbyterian Church, Houston Wonder Team Sandwich Makers has been making sandwiches for Kids Meals, a Houston-based charity, for many years. Kids Meals started with one woman who tried to feed needy children in her neighborhood. When her program grew, she asked churches to help. Now Kids Meals is a strong force to make these children's lives better.

For more information, go to http://kidsmealsinc.org.
Faith Presbyterian Church, Baytown feeds the hungry - both 2 and 4 legged kinds

Last year one of our members Joyce Pennington was inundated by Hurricane Harvey. Not having access to a kitchen, she found herself on the receiving end of Meals on Wheels.

Her kitchen is back in working order, but her time of receiving Meals on Wheels gave her an idea. This Christmas she asked our congregation to join her in making Christmas Gift Bags to give to those who receive Meals on Wheels. With the help of our church, Cedar Bayou Grace Methodist Prayer Group, and members of the Kiwanis, Lions and Rotary International Clubs, we were able to provide gift bags to the recipients.

Back in 2010 we noticed that many of the recipients had pets and so we started the Baytown Animal Food Pantry. Once a month volunteers from our church deliver pet food to 32 families, providing food for 60 dogs and 30 cats. This year the four-legged friends will also get a special gift.

We at Faith Presbyterian are blessed to be home base for Meals On Wheels in Baytown. Volunteers from local businesses, clubs and churches deliver 300 hot meals to Senior Citizens in the Baytown area Monday through Friday. We also house the offices for Meals On Wheels as well as Baytown's Habitat For Humanity.

We also maintain a Food Pantry every Tuesday and Thursday afternoons that is supported by local churches and organizations. Love Network screens families that are in need and calls us with the number of people in the family and we supply them with carts of groceries. At Thanksgiving and Christmas our Witness and Outreach Committee provides turkeys and all the fixings for 25-30 families.

This is what we at Faith in Baytown do to feed the hungry - both the 2 and 4-legged kind.

First Presbyterian Church, Silsbee

After hearing God say “Feed My Sheep” for over two years I decided to clear my busy schedule and do just that.

I took half of my income tax return and got all the necessary inspections and served our first meal in May 2018. That first Friday we served 30 people! That number has grown and we now average 60-65 most Fridays. We don’t ask questions and they are free to make donations if they can, if they can’t it’s not a problem. We receive funding from our church and from an organization in our community. We have people dine in with us and lots of them take meals to go and share them with neighbors. I have a team that helps me and as long as we can we’ll continue to feed His sheep!

Eileen Williams

Meals for Harvey Responders

As we launch into our continuing Harvey Help and Hospitality stage of recovery, three churches, including us, Webster Presbyterian Church, are welcoming and supporting teams coming in from out-of-town (and out-of-state!) to rebuild our communities. Our church has been asked to provide a Sunday night meal for the entire group that arrives each Sunday, and offer hospitality for their evening orientation. This is a 3 year commitment that we made with the Fuller Foundation which has taken on the promise to help families return to their homes through generous volunteer efforts after Hurricane Harvey in neighboring communities of Dickinson, Texas City and Galveston. When WPC started this task it seemed quite daunting, almost impossible but the generous work done this year is quite a powerful message of a faith community working together for a greater cause. This program has spread beyond our church members to friends, groups from another church and a tennis team who appreciate the sacrifices and hard work those coming to Houston have made.

Support team enjoys a great meal

Support team enjoys a great meal
Good Neighbor Food Pantry

St. Stephen Presbyterian Church, Houston serves a vital function in our neighborhood of strategically providing a box of food to those in need on the third Friday of the month. This helps our neighbors stretch their budgets to the end of the month and feed hungry mouths. We partner with the Houston Food Bank.

In October of 2018 we served 89 families for a total of 450 people. Ironically these numbers have increased from the previous October of 68 families. Our neighborhood was heavily impacted by the Harvey flood and many families are only now moving back into the neighborhood.

The amazing Holy Spirit filled grace of the pantry is that SSPC is a small church with 63 members. We may be small but faith in Christ has made us mighty.

Currently we are struggling with a new requirement from the Food Bank to track our activity electronically. We are in need of both a technology person to help us input the information and a electronic tablet to serve as a check in device for our neighbors.

Volunteers: Pastor Augustin Garcia, Dennis and Zita Cunningham.

Packers Galore

A dream was realized at Pines Presbyterian in early November of 2018. The dream was to figure out a way to engage the community around the church and create a service opportunity that helped people across the world.

The solution to the dream was to invite Feed My Starving Children (FMSC) to Pines to hold a MobilePack™ event. A MobilePack™ event is when FMSC brings in a truckload of bulk rice, soy, vitamins, and protein. Volunteers from the community then gather to take the bulk product and fill individual bags with the ingredients, thus creating 6 nutritious meals per bag for starving children around the world. Over 500 volunteers from around the community filled four high energy packing shifts producing 107,000 meals which will feed 925 starving children for a year!

This was an amazing event that glorified God, fed 925 of God’s children, was an easy way to give back and gave the community an opportunity to be welcomed by the Pines congregation. We can’t wait until next year!

H.O.P.E. Helping Other People Eat

The members of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Nacogdoches collect their pocket change during the year; put it in large white cups and by the end of the year the cup is running over. During our Christmas Eve service we place a large tin wash tub in our sanctuary, and during the offertory worshippers bring their cups filled with change and dump it into the tub. Yes, he makes a racket, and of course the offertory has to be loud in order to hear it over the pocket change ringing in the wash tub. When the offering is collected, we find that green bills and checks have also made it into the tub. To say the least it usually takes two people to carry the offering into the church office following worship, praying the bottom does not fall out from the weight of the change. Each year the offering is between $3,000 and $4,000, and the money is given to Project HOPE.

Project Hope is a Nacogdoches Ecumenical Food Pantry that serves on the average 1811 individuals (or 660 families) per month. To provide food for the hungry among us, HOPE relies on monetary donations, food drives and HOPE rescues food from local grocery stores. In 2017, HOPE rescued 120,745 pounds ($17,000) of food.

Besides the Annual Christmas Eve Offering, Westminster usually has two food drives. The first being “The Mike Packers Galore

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Nourishing the community

“We are a community of broken people, learning to be loved by Jesus so we can love like Jesus” is the Identity Statement at St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, Houston. What better way to “love like Jesus” than to serve the community by providing food to those in need?

Committed to community missions, throughout the year, St. Andrew’s collects canned and dry food for the Christian Community Service Center (CCSC). CCSC operates two food pantries that serve more than 10,000 food packages annually.

We also support Hospitality Apartments as a community partner. The church regularly donates excess food for Hospitality Apartment residents. In addition, congregation members prepare and serve dinners to guests several times a year. Hospitality Apartments provides free, temporary housing in a safe, welcoming, comfortable, supportive environment for needy families with a member receiving medical treatment at any Texas Medical Center facility.

St. Andrew’s helps to nourish underserved youth through its support of the Children’s Activity Center (CAC). The CAC serves needy children in the Gulfton area.

On Saturdays, CAC buses transport children to the center where they take part in a dynamic service geared specifically for children aged five to twelve. The rest of the week they go out to a number of different neighborhoods and conduct outdoor Sunday School services of the same type. St. Andrew’s members provide lunches at times during the year for these joyful children in support of this mission.

St. Andrew’s found many opportunities to serve our challenged community in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey. St. Andrew’s housed 615 Experience mission volunteers from 32 different organizations in 2018. These teams worked on the homes of 60 families.

To mark the first anniversary of Harvey, St. Andrew’s hosted a Service of Celebration. This celebration invited all congregational members as well as the families whose damaged homes St. Andrew’s and EM teams worked on throughout the year. The day celebrated community via an inspirational sermon and music, followed by a barbecue lunch for more than 400 people. Each table radiated fellowship and strong ties of faith.

St. Andrew’s aspires to build faith through service. As broken people, ties to Jesus are strengthened when we love like Jesus by nourishing our community.

Welcome to the New Hope General Store

It’s a small store with a variety of products. We sell food, school supplies, and small toiletry products, all at low prices.

The store is the brainchild of Terry Owens, who created and pretty much handles this ministry. The store serves two direct functions. People can buy the food and place it in a nearby basket. About once a week, or as needed, the food is bagged up and taken to a local food bank for distribution to whoever has needs. If people are unable to remember the Souper Bowl of Caring, they can purchase items to donate on that Sunday. The second service is that the store provides as a food bank for New Hope. Every once in a while, we get people at our door who needs help. We are able to give them some food, toiletry items, and maybe some clean, dry socks.

More recently the store has begun selling school supplies, which are donated to a local elementary school where there is a great need due to children living in poverty.

This ministry is a self-sustaining ministry. Stocked items are bought on sale then marked up to the nearest dollar or quarter. For example a $.35 can of beans will be sold for $.50. This way there are funds to restock the store, and some left over for our occasional visitor.

Terry has been coordinating this ministry for a couple of years. He is able to change the stocking for seasonal purposes, or when there is a specific need, such as the Seafarers Christmas box collection. As for staffing, it’s a self-serve operation.
Seeking Asylum On the Border

by Rev. Brian Long, Pastor
New Hope Presbyterian Church, Katy

Unless you have detached yourself from technology, the refugees coming to our Southern border are not new news. There are thousands of them spread across the U.S./Mexico border. They have been called hardened criminals, trash, rapists, and murderers. What have not been in the media are their stories.

No one is talking about the wife whose husband was murdered because he did not get enough money to the drug cartel. There has been no headline talking about the man who lost his life after he went to the police to report a crime. These stories, and so many more can only be heard from the people at the border.

John (not his real name) travelled two months to get from Cameroon to the border South of Texas where he has been for the last two months. John’s journey, along with so many others, means not just leaving homes, but facing hunger, exposure to the elements, physical violence, rape, and more. They come with little more than the clothes they are wearing. Any supplies they left home with have long been exhausted. They brave the journey as individuals, and as families with small children in tow. John, along with people from Congo, El Salvador, Russia, Cuba, Guatemala, Mexico and other countries have travelled long and hard only to face an uncertain future. What can they expect when they get to the border? There might be a donated cot to sleep on with a donated blanket. Most sleep on a hard ground with a worn blanket. There are not enough donated tents and umbrellas. In some areas there are donated meals, maybe even two in a day. These children of God are thankful for the granola bars and water bottles that are occasionally handed out.

What happens when/if they get across the border? Despite the fact that both international law and United States law allows for an individual to cross into the United States anyway they can to seek asylum, many are still picked up and charged with a misdemeanor crime before ever having their stories told. They come into a courtroom, forty or more, in shackles, only to have ‘justice’ distributed over an hour and a half. They far too often plead guilty on the advice of an attorney they have met for five minutes. By the time they do get a hearing in a court on their asylum case, they already have a criminal record with the equivalent of a traffic ticket, and that is held against them.

Very few are granted asylum, and then find they are unprepared to live in this foreign land. They don’t know the difference between a city and a state. They struggle with the dominant language, English, and with American currency. How do they find transportation to their ultimate destination with their friends or family already here? Learning the lessons in laws and culture, and just surviving from day to day, are challenges to face. Their journey does not end once they get across the border.

Are there undocumented individuals already in the United States? Yes, there are. In the Southern United States there are unincorporated areas known as Colonias. The populations are made up of around 70% U.S. citizens. The rest are the ones that have, at least for the moment, found a hiding place. Again, there is still a struggle. Pastors who help these children of God are subject to being arrested if being caught. They live in run down dwellings, some without electricity or indoor plumbing. They subsist on the assistance from others.

In Brownsville, Texas, there is no public hospital. A child, who was critically ill, was sent to Driscoll Children’s Hospital in Corpus Christi where he died alone. His mother was undocumented and not able to pass the South Texas border patrol check points. She was unable to be with her son at the end. In Brownsville itself, an undocumented person can only go to a private hospital for an emergency. (Many emergencies could be avoided with early medical intervention.) These refugees have been accused of being a mass of hardened criminals. According to statistics on the Neighborhood Scout web site, Brownsville is safer from crime than...
Seeking Asylum, continued from page 8

Houston or Dallas. Laredo and El Paso are even safer. An ACLU representative who has lived in the valley for over 30 years reported that the criminal claims are simply not true. He has met, worked with, and befriended many, and never had a problem or concern. Aside from aforementioned misdemeanor convictions, the perceived mass immigration of criminals simply doesn’t exist.

There are even more problems on the Mexican side of the border. The government frequently removes groups from the access points to ports of entry, placing them in detention centers. It is unclear as to the quality of these centers. It is known that young women are forcibly removed and sold into sex trafficking. Those who assist the stranded peoples are in danger from the drug cartels. One individual I met arranges meals for refugees, seeks out blanket donations, and acquires other essential needs. She has been directly threatened by the criminal sector to stop her efforts. Yet she continues to work in spite of the danger.

Add to this that justice is not equally distributed. As of this writing, I was informed that no one is getting to the border in McAllen, Texas. The reason for this is not clear, but one statistic says as much as a third of the city’s income comes from Mexico. Is someone paying to keep the bridge over the river clear? That’s one theory.

Exodus 22:21 states, “Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt.” (NIV) Yet we have all seen the pictures of children and their parents running from tear gas. Furthermore, there are unsubstantiated stories of refugees paying hundreds of dollars in bribes to get onto a list to get across the border. This happens on both sides of the border.

If anyone needs further Scriptural guidance, we need to only go a little further than Christmas, where Matthew tells us, “When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.” So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt.” (NIV) Many, and perhaps the vast majority, of these people are doing just that. They are escaping very real dangers.

All is not necessarily gloom and doom. At one place, a shelter called La Posada Providencia, refugees who have made it that far can find rest, food, and even classes to begin preparing them for life in the United States. No one is turned away if they have space. The sisters work diligently to manage what few funds they have to maintain the facilities of older homes and the surrounding grounds that can house more than 30 men, women, and children collectively.

Still other organizations continue to get limited supplies across the border, or into the Colonias. Even with all this, a child can be seen going to school in the winter wearing just a t-shirt and shorts. A mother of 10 is likely on the verge of losing all of her children to Child Protective Services, rather than getting the help she needs. With the high poverty in the area, it is likely that her children will be placed in homes too far away for her to stay in touch. The answers to the dilemma at the U.S.-Mexican border are not all clear, but tear gas and a locked door on the heels of fear language and a frenzied media are not the loving solutions of Christ’s church. Furthermore, these same responses fly in the face of those beloved words inscribed on the Statue of Liberty, “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

Pines Presbyterian Church Prayer with a Twist

It began several years ago as an itch Edgar and Lesa Smith had to scratch. It was an itch that was inspired by a church wide theme, “A Year of Invitation at Pines.” Edgar and Lesa knew food was always a great way to invite people into the church, but their idea was not to invite people in, but for us to go out to them… those driving by on Kimberley Lane. The couple sought and received permission from the Missions Committee to begin Taco & A Prayer (TAAP).

What is it you might ask? TAAP is making breakfast tacos in the kitchen at Pines and handing them out for free on our front driveway! We hold signs along the street to invite those driving by to circle in the drive where we hand off a taco, juice, and if they want a prayer the driver pulls to the side where we have a prayer team that offers prayer through the window… drive thru prayers!

The neighborhood and regular passersby’s look forward to the first Friday of the month when we feed the body and the soul. This has been a very successful ministry and we’re thankful to be able to reach out and offer prayer in a unique and tasty way.
Feed My Lambs

Every summer for the last 10 years, First Presbyterian of Brazoria has led an ecumenical ministry in Brazoria to feed hungry children during the summer months. Our Feed My Lambs program is based at our church where volunteers prepare sack lunches every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday during the summer. The sack lunches also include a bible coloring or activity sheet. We deliver the lunches to children on five different routes in Brazoria, as transportation is a problem. Although schools in the area have begun providing summer meals, many children are unable to get to those locations.

This year we delivered over 5,000 lunches with about 35 volunteers working over 750 hours to feed hungry children in our community. We were blessed to receive a grant of $1,500 from the Lynn Johnson Social Justice Fund this year, and we have regularly received funding from Presbytery grants over the past years. The First United Methodist Church and the Primera Iglesia Bautista provide many of our volunteers and support our ministry financially, but we also receive donations and assistance from other churches and civic organizations. Volunteers range in age from about 8 to over 80, providing opportunities for service for all ages and skill levels.

In addition to our Feed My Lambs ministry, we have a food pantry year round, a blessing box, and we provide Thanksgiving and Christmas food baskets for families in need.

S3 Ministry

In June of this year, the congregation of A Community of the Servant Savior, Houston introduced a beloved new event into our worship calendar that we call S3. S3: Saturday, Service & Supper falls on the third Saturday of the month. We have our service at 5:00 p.m. on Saturday evening instead of Sunday morning, and it is followed by a shared meal and a fun fellowship activity. It is a time of feasting in many ways; on the Word, on a meal prepared by many loving hands, and on the good company of our feisty little church family. We always leave feeling well-fed in so many ways.

Instead of the usual 1-2 hours of church attendance on a Sunday morning, S3 means folks stay three of four hours, though the time together flies by.

S3 has given us a chance to get to know one another better, to work together in the kitchen, to play together around tables, to share jokes and stories, and fill our sanctuary with laughter and the hilarity of children who might be up a little past their bedtimes. It has been a great joy to make new space for the nourishment that comes from being immersed in a community built on love.

Pathways Church of Houston

The annual turkey dinner for the homeless and food pantry workers at Pathways Church was December 6. In addition to the hearty meal, a travel bag including a blanket, underwear and toiletries was given to each person in need. All homeless in the area are invited to attend.

For almost 30 years, the Pathways food pantry has fed 500 to 600 people in our community each month. It also distributes food from the Channel 13 food drive and has held food fairs in conjunction with the Houston Food Bank. The Pathways food pantry volunteers are all retirees. This ministry was begun by the members of St. Giles Presbyterian Church which dissolved several years ago. They gave the church property to the Pathways group who have continued this important outreach.

Bethel Presbyterian in East Columbia

For many years, Bethel Presbyterian Church has had a Christmas food basket mission for people in our area living on limited incomes. Last month, we took part in a cooperative, ecumenical food drive for local schoolchildren living with food insecurity. A week off from school meant a week without the breakfast and lunch provided at school.
Sunday in the Park

On the Third Sunday of each month, members of Pioneer Presbyterian Church, along with members from surrounding churches in our community, join together, from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., at Weiss Park located in downtown Beaumont, Texas, to feed the homeless. This service is a non-denominational effort and began five years ago, and is lead by Pioneer Church member, Mary Ann Williams. Homelessness has risen considerably in Beaumont and in other cities, as well, thereby prompting the need to take action!

“Sunday in the Park” volunteers prepare hot-delicious balanced meals and carry the food to the park for the homeless who gather in large numbers, most third Sundays, exceeding 100. Funds for the meals prepared are donated by the workers and local churches. Pioneer Presbyterian Church takes up a special offering on the second Sunday of each month to assist in defraying the cost of the meals served to the homeless. Donated clothing and personal supplies are also given out to the homeless during the serving of the meal.

Thanksgiving Meal served on Sunday, November 18, 2018. The Homeless were treated to a full Thanksgiving Dinner (turkey, dressing, vegetables, dessert and tea)

Church really isn’t church without food

First Presbyterian Church, Trinity tries to help “feed God’s sheep” in many ways. Financially, through the church and Presbyterian Women, we give quarterly donations to several organizations. These include: Presbyterian Children’s Homes and Services to help children in need; our local Martin Senior Center that serves meals daily and takes “meals on wheels” to seniors in need; the Burning Hope Baptist Church S.O.U.L. soup kitchen that provides two meals a week to families and individuals; and Solomon House of Hope which is a local residential program for women recovering from addictions. Our largest fundraiser of the year to provide for these and other organizations is our annual bazaar. This includes a soup and sandwich lunch, and a bake sale. Without our cooks, there would be little money to support these programs.

In return for our support, we often attend the food based fundraisers of other churches in the area! Trinity is a community that works together to help others. When possible, we also donate to The Trinity Loaves and Fishes Food Pantry where a member has worked at least 10 hours per month for the last 11 years. She also serves as one of the people who does the online ordering to provide food from the Houston Food Bank. This food pantry provides some food assistance to over 400 families (at least 1,000 individuals) each month.

Atascocita Presbyterian Church

We are very involved in a program called “Family Promise” 4 times a year a group of 3 families come and stay with us for a week. We fix them dinner and supply food for other meals. It is a very good time of fellowship and meeting others whose circumstances are so different from our own. Each night a different group prepares a home cooked meal, no fast food. It is interesting because the families have told us that many of the other churches did not cook the meals, so when they come to our church they do so with a hungry stomach, ready for some great cooking and sharing time.

We are also quite involved with HAAM (Humble Area Assistance Ministries). Their food pantry is dependent on the Houston Food Bank and the local churches for keeping the shelves stocked. We are told what items are needed and then our congregation members donate them to the church so they can be delivered to the Food Pantry. It is a well oiled machine that allows the children of our Preschool, CLC to get involved. This Thanksgiving, we collected a record number of stuffing mixes and gravy packets. I know it doesn’t sound like much but we collected three carloads full.
“When did we see you hungry and feed you?”

Food pantry

Dictionary Definition:
1. Feed – Giving food or nutriment.
2. Feed: To lead, guard, and protect; in a scriptural sense, to supply with something.

Helping Hands - Our Youth Group sponsors a Helping Hands project each Christmas season to provide food or other necessities to those in need. This year they are collecting personal care items.

Seafarers Boxes - The congregation generously gave items and assembled 34 Seafarers' boxes which were taken to the Houston International Seafarers Center. A Gideon International member gave beautiful New Testament Bibles to be enclosed in each box. Chaplain David Wells visited and spoke to our congregation about this ministry.

Operation Christmas Child - We assembled 18 Christmas Child boxes filled with school supplies, personal items and toys and donated approximately $280 to the ministry to help defray shipping charges.

Bible Study – Our congregation is spiritually fed weekly with a Bible Study and Prayer Group that meets each Tuesday at noon. The Bible Study averages 9-12 people including some who are not members of First Presbyterian.

Diaper Disciples is a vibrant ministry provided by the church and serves approximately 70 non-member families from the community. Nearly 3000 diapers are distributed at no cost to recipients every other Saturday.

Learning English as a Second Language is hunger identified in the Bay City community. One of our members is a dedicated Literacy Volunteer who conducts English classes each week at our church at no fee.

First Presbyterian Church of Bay City answers God’s call to testify to the truth of Jesus Christ by using our time on Earth to serve others.

Presbytery Work Day

Thank you to those that came out for the Harvey work day! We had the pleasure of working on a home with 3 generations living on the 2nd floor, ages ranging from 80 to less than a year old. We worked alongside a group from A&M, this group started after Harvey and has been coming to Houston regularly since the storm. It was wonderful to these young adults not only working hard but taking the time to care for the home owner.

The home owner spoke to everyone as the day was wrapping up saying “as you go, I ask you to stay with this family with thoughts and prayers. I have also asked for the list of volunteers and want to know you are not nameless and faceless numbers of volunteers but that we will be praying over each of you and your families.” So often groups can work on a home and never take the time to hear the stories of the home owner and this experience really showed the impact of taking the time work talk with and pray with those we are working with and for.

I enjoyed the opportunity to speak with members of ChristChurch, Bellaire who came out to support the Hurricane Harvey work day. I learned more about their efforts with Harvey recovery as well as their passion to continue helping! Please continue to pray for those affected by hurricane Harvey and if you would like to be involved in hurricane Harvey recovery efforts please contact me at bkauffman@pbyofnewcovenant.org.

L to R: Remi Van Compernolle, Karen Presley, both of ChristChurch, Bellaire and Beth Kauffman, Recovery Coordinator
Calling all Youth Groups of our Presbytery!

Conclaves 2019

Join us for fun and faith-filled weekends, February 22-24 and March 1-3, 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.

Who? Middle and high school youth and Adult Advisors
- Adults must be 21 & older;
- Ratio 1 adult: 5 youth by gender

Where? Cho-Yeh Camp & Conference Center, Livingston, TX

Cost? $145 / person
- includes lodging, meals, a Christian concert and conference t-shirt

Registration will be completely online this year. Register beginning in January online at: https://www.cho-yeh.org/retreats/types/conclaves/

Conclaves Mission Project

The Mission project will be Comfort Cases, that consists of a small backpack or duffle bag with the purpose of providing comfort for youth as they enter the foster care system. The backpacks are full of essentials for the first few days in a new place as well as comfort items to help ease a scary transition.

Items needed to make cases are:
- Large backpack and duffle bag
- Pajamas
- Toothpaste (travel size)
- Lotion (travel size)
- Stuffed animals
- Deodorant
- Fleece (to make blankets)
- Shampoo and Conditioner (Travel size)
- Soap or Body Wash
- Journal and pens

For more information, contact Kristi Blankman at kblankman@pbyofnewcovenant.org

If you have any question about PYCC, Conclaves or Triennium, contact Kristi Blankman, Coordinator for Youth Ministry at 713-526-2585 or kblankman@pbyofnewcovenant.org
Mo-Ranch is a retreat center nestled in the Texas Hill Country along the Guadalupe River near Hunt, Texas. Here are some opportunities to get away in January, February and early March:

**College Connection Retreat**
**January 7-10, 2019**
2019 theme: “Welcome one | welcome all” as presented by keynote speaker, Bee Moorhead.
We are called to work toward the holy dream that God has for all of God’s children, as we live our lives of faith in the light of God’s deep and wide welcome. Tackle real issues that impact our world, and that demand a faithful, engaged response from us, like immigration, inclusion, and how to engage public issues guided by faith.

**Anxious To Talk About It**
**January 22-24, 2019**
2019 theme: “Wait, we’re talking about what? I’m not so sure I want to do that…” as Presented by keynote speaker, Carolyn Helsel.
Professor and pastor Carolyn Helsel draws on her successful experiences with white congregations to offer us tools and practices to explore the anxious feelings that can come up when talking about racism. Move through the anxiety and learn to join the hard conversations with less fear, more compassion, and more knowledge of self, others and the important issues at stake.

**Silent Directed Retreat**
**February 1-3, 2019**
Presented by conference leadership, St. Peter Upon the Water: A Center for Spiritual Direction & Formation
Take time away from the noise and distraction of everyday life to rest and listen for God. God longs for relationships with us – a loving, growing relationship. Prayer is relationship and silence is simply making a space from each other for us to listen to God, but not to be silent with God. Each participant will be offered an hour of spiritual direction from one of the trained directors from St. Peter Upon the Water. Retreat leadership will be available to discuss what is surfacing in your prayer, your heart and your relationship with God.

**Knitting & Needlework Retreat**
**February 21-24, 2019**
Presented by conference leadership, Lesley Rayl Saunders
“Knitty By Nature” is a four-day retreat where knitters of all stages and abilities are invited to come stitch together. The focus of this retreat will be on knitting, crocheting and needlework, but all creative outlets are welcome! There is a place for you here—whether you are well-versed in the world of yarn, or whether you’ve just picked up your first set of knitting needles. You’ll learn some new techniques, share expertise, ask lots of questions and have time to work on some of your own projects. Expect to laugh, learn, worship, visit, pray and enjoy all that Mo-Ranch has to offer.
The Duerr Lecture Series

The Great Ends of the Church: For the Fullness of Life

St. Philip Presbyterian Church
February 24, 25, & 26, 2019
Preaching Sunday at 8:30 and 11:00
Lectures each evening at 7:00 p.m.

SPEAKER
Rev. Dr. Clifton Kirkpatrick
Professor of World Christianity and Ecumenical Studies, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary
Stated Clerk Emeritus for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

The lectures will focus on one of the “classics of the faith” for Presbyterians, The Great Ends of the Church. Dr. Kirkpatrick will explore the contemporary relevance of this historic call to faithful Christian living while exploring how God might be calling us:

- To be faithful evangelists;
- To create caring communities both within and beyond the church;
- To be open to fresh winds of the Spirit in our worship;
- To uphold the truth of the gospel;
- To be on the front lines of the struggle for peace and justice, and
- To be a living demonstration of what God intends for all humanity.

Great APCE Share: Come Now to the Waters
Thursday, February 28, 2019
11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.
Presbytery Offices, 1110 Lovett Blvd., Houston

Please join us for a time of fellowship and hospitality as we gather to share resources and experiences from the Association of Presbyterian Church Educators 2019 Annual Event in Galveston, TX. Everyone who attends the conference is invited to share information and handouts from one or two of their favorite workshops, or maybe a favorite resource you discovered at the conference. And those of you who are unable to attend would certainly miss this opportunity… you would have left with an abundance of information to enhance your ministry. So, come and find refreshment through the sharing of knowledge and fellowship. We can’t wait to see you!

If you are a volunteer, paid staff person, teaching elder or just curious, you are invited. It will be our pleasure to serve you lunch, complete with a beverage and dessert! Your RSVP will assist our planning. Please send replies to anne.aiko.wilson@gmail.com by Monday morning, February 25.

This session will be facilitated by folks with a seasoned heart for education. Please feel free to contact any one of them if you have questions.
Connie Nyquist (lnyquist@sbcglobal.net)
Kim Shrull (kshrull@earthlink.net)
Anne Wilson (anne.aiko.wilson@gmail.com)

Splendors of Eastern Europe
with The Passion Play of Oberammergau

11 DAYS | June 3 - 13, 2020
Hosted by Pastor Andy Gans

For a brochure and more information, please contact Pastor Andy Gans at 713-467-2234 or andy@pinespc.org
http://pinespc.org/trip-to-eastern-europe

Space is limited
Book now to avoid disappointment
This is your last chance to experience the world-famous Passion Play of Oberammergau until 2030!
Come to the waters of Galveston and be refreshed! Come for one or two or three days. Come and bring your whole team. There will be over 90 workshops offered, so there is something for everyone. Our very own Kathleen Davies, Omar Rouchon, Keatan King, Jonathan Britt and Mary Currie are leading sessions and Anne Wilson is co-chair of the event. There will be a “truly Texas” welcome party, intriguing off-site opportunities, meaningful worship and plenary offerings, and so much more.

Our local committee has been working to bring conference attendees the very best that Galveston has to offer. We are looking for folks willing to help at the registration desk and with other conference activities. Please consider giving a few hours of your time to share in extending hospitality to those who join us in Galveston. We thank you in advance! You can sign up here to work at the registration desk: https://www.signupgenius.com/go/70A0E4EAA72EA0F58-annual. If you would like to assist us at the welcome party on Wednesday night, please email Connie Nyquist at lnyquist@sbcglobal.net.

Registration is still open and you can register now by clicking or typing in this link: http://www.cvent.com/events/apce-2019-annual-event/event-summary-46f1ddabe96b4d4d9650a14f82e37c2c.aspx?RefID=APCEnet

See you in Galveston! Welcome to the waters!