

CONNECTIONS

Growing congregations that passionately engage their community to make disciples.

The Latest NCD Buzz

By Rev. Tim Phillips, Multicultural Café

What do you get when you mix an Egyptian Presbyterian pastor, several Sudanese, and a handful of Iraqi Christians? A new Arab Presbyterian Fellowship!

The Rev. Eid Hanna joins us from the Presbyterian Church in Egypt. He, his wife Devine, and little girl Rose are excited about their new adventure in Houston, home to over 100,000 Arabs and Muslims.



Rev. Eid Hanna

They have been worshipping with a group of seventeen since late October in the chapel at First PC, Houston. Singing, praying, Scripture readings, sermons - all in Arabic.

Eid has been busy making contacts with Arabic-speaking refugee families in southwest Houston. He says they have many

needs—work, English, understanding American culture, transportation, and fellowship. English classes have begun, and the women have held their first “food fair” at a local church. This gives them meaningful work, provides a small income, and puts them in contact with English-speaking Christians. They hope to find other churches willing to host a food fair. As well, Eid is looking for volunteers to help with the English classes, provide transportation, help him improve his English skills, and befriend these refugees.

If you would like to put Eid in contact with Arab Christians or Muslims you know, he would welcome the opportunity. And if you want to be educated on Arab culture, the Middle Eastern church, or Islam, Eid is ready to preach or speak to any group. Call Eid (pronounced “eed” with a long “ee”) at 832-306-6629.

Praise God for this new addition to our multicultural presbytery!

Change comes to Connections

This issue of *Connections* is the first of six bi-monthly issues that will be published for 2010. Printed issues will be mailed to pastors, churches, elders, and committee chairs. It will continue to be posted on the presbytery website for all to read (click www.pbyofnewcovenant.org–Quick Find).

If you would like to read *Connections* electronically, rather than as a printed copy, and would like to be notified by email when a new issue is posted on the presbytery website, please email Patricia Brantley at pbrantley@pbyofnewcovenant.org.

Another change in 2010 will be a change in deadline dates. Deadlines for copy will be the second Wednesday of even-numbered months:

CONCLAVES 2010

Live out Loud: Life Transformed by Faith

Planning is well underway for Conclaves 2010 when youth from across the region will gather at Camp Cho Yeh for the annual retreat planned and led by our Presbytery Youth Connection Council. As in previous years, events of the weekend will include time for worship, small group activities, a mission focus, recreation and team building, energizers, and a visit to the Spirituality Center.

Large group gatherings will make use of the new Camp Meeting Hall on the edge of Lake Evelyn. The curriculum team has been working to make the small group time more interactive than in previous years. Participants will find a variety of activities that help them delve into the theme.

This year all weekends are open to youth of all ages. Small group sessions will be grouped according to grade in school. Choose the date or

dates that best work for your church – whether that means all youth coming one weekend or bringing middle school and high school students on different weekends. Dates are:

- Feb. 19-21
- Feb. 26-28
- Mar 6-8

Teen leaders have stated that their hope is that after this weekend, youth will see the abbreviation “lol” in text messages and Facebook and will think about not just laughing out loud, but living out loud.

Cost for the weekend is \$110 per person, which includes two nights, four meals, a Christian concert, and a souvenir t-shirt. Check with your youth leader about how to register. Details have been sent to churches and are also available on the presbytery website. Deadline for group registrations is January 20. Registrations will be accepted on a first come, first served basis.

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December 8

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FROM THE COLE MINE

By Rev. Mike Cole, General Presbyter, Presbytery of New Covenant



NEW COVENANT CONNECTIONS

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"A Starfish Presbytery"

As I near the end of my seventh year as your General Presbyter, let's look at the last year in the life of our presbytery. We still have the finest staff in the denomination! This is the most outstanding group of professionals I have ever had the pleasure of working with. They are the face of this presbytery. Believe me, they represent us with excellence that is admired all across our denomination.

We have stood by our word to be involved in long-term recovery from Hurricane Ike. We have helped develop two Volunteer Villages - utilizing hundreds of volunteers in the Galveston and Golden Triangle areas. We have hired a Coordinator for Ike Recovery. We have also established a hard-working Ike Recovery Team.

We've discussed and debated some hotly contested issues, always in a civil and respectful manner. We've served our communities in a variety of ways and especially on the Day of Service and Celebration, when 3,000+ Presbyterians turned out in their own communities to make a difference. We've balanced our budget without having to resort to the draconian cuts sister presbyteries have utilized this year. Our finances and operations remain transparent to all.

We've closed two churches but are actively helping to resurrect one that could have closed. We still lead the denomination in new church developments (13). We've hosted a national Hispanic Presbyterian Men's Conference and our Hispanic women have hosted a Hispanic Presbyterian Women's Conference at Mo-Ranch.

We established a covenant relationship with the presbytery of Juan Calvino in Lima, Peru. By the way, that presbytery has taken in a new congregation and is eagerly

seeking partnerships with more of our congregations. We've sent dozens of mission teams all across the world to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We are known around the denomination for our character, integrity, and missional leadership. At a recent meeting I attended in Minneapolis, I was proudly embarrassed to have national leaders publicly praise New Covenant Presbytery as one of the most innovative and energetic presbyteries leading our denomination into a new era.

Lest we sprain our arms patting ourselves on the back, we also need to take an honest look at ourselves. So, here is my list of challenges - more or less. We need to be:

- + Doing more and using less;
- + Listening more and speaking less;
- + Uniting more and dividing less;
- + Trusting more and suspecting less;
- + Praying more and debating less;
- + Holding hands more and wringing hands less;
- + Permitting more and restricting less;
- + Evangelizing more and proselytizing less;
- + Developing people more and programs less;
- + Focusing outside more and inside less;
- + Eradicating barriers more and building walls less; and
- + Focusing on the kingdom more and church buildings less.

While on vacation this summer, Ellie and I went to visit the aquarium in Monterrey, California. It was a phenomenal display of all sorts of sea creatures, including an exhibit on starfish. I never knew there were so many varieties of starfish in the oceans - more than 2,000! They also



"I have no crisis to announce," says Mike at November presbytery meeting.

have some unique characteristics: Starfish have two stomachs; If you cut off an arm of a starfish, not only will it grow a new arm, but also the cut off arm will grow a new starfish; Starfish carry all their vital organs in their arms.

I was fascinated by the starfish and their unique character and thought to myself, "These are some characteristics that the presbytery can learn from." Then, I remembered a book on my bookshelf which I had put off reading, entitled, *The Starfish and the Spider* by Brafman and Beckstrom, and decided to read it when I returned from vacation.

It is not a churchy book, but a book about organizations that has lots of applications to the presbytery and church. The authors contend that "successful" organizations in today's world resemble starfish more than spiders. Spider organizations have a hierarchy, rigid structures, departmentalization, a chain of command and communication, and concentration of knowledge and power in a central person. Starfish organizations are characterized by decentralization, flexibility, shared knowledge, power, and

Please see **STARFISH** on Page 3

STARFISH: CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

communication.

In changing times, we need to question our assumptions about how we do what we do, so that we can be open to the change into which God is leading us. I believe that God is leading us to lead others in our denomination in demonstrating how to:

- Be permission-giving rather than rule-keeping;
- Rely on trust not compulsion for our connections;
- Encourage diverse and dispersed communication;
- Regenerate growth even in the midst of loss;
- Accentuate those things that unite us rather than the issues that divide us;
- Stand together in times of crisis;
- Passionately engage our communities in service; and
- Equip churches for discipleship and evangelism.

We need to connect, not just by geography or affinity, but through trusting relationships brought into existence and gathered by God to bless a cursed world that is:

- Tired of war and needs a people committed to peace;
- Weary of fearfulness and needs a church which is courageous;
- Jaded by self-serving charlatans and needs people who hold fast to that which is good and render no one evil for evil;
- Frustrated with survival of the fittest and needs those who will

strengthen the fainthearted and support the weak ;

- Fatigued from all the “isms” and needs a church which helps the afflicted and honors everyone; and
- Tired of bad news and needs a church which loves and serves the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The world needs a re-formed/re-forming church and presbytery which is starfish-like in character:

- Decentralized in its power and knowledge. The presbytery is at its best when lots of folks are in action rather than just a few.
- Able to regenerate new life even when losing part of its body. Even as we mourn the loss of churches, we celebrate the emergence of new fellowships among us.
- Flexible and fluid, where relationships and trust matter more than structure and statutes. We are a part of the body of Christ first and a legislative body last.

Through the ups and downs of the past year, God is continuing to prepare the Presbytery of New Covenant for the challenges that lie ahead as we grow churches that passionately engage their community to make disciples.

Starfish-ly yours,

Message from newly-installed moderator, Elder Garry Schoonover

Thanks to the Rev. Dr. Wayne Eberly for his service as Moderator of the Presbytery this past year. His caring and compassionate desire for unity was demonstrated in many ways, e.g. through the Day of Service and Celebration and his contributions to General Council discussions. All this was done while carrying on regular pastoral duties at Pines PC (whom we thank for



Rev. Wayne Eberly

sharing), the aftermath of Hurricane Ike, and the personal achievement of completing a doctoral degree in ministry (DMin). Haley's Dad did well! Thank you, Wayne!

The cross wall project is coming along nicely. Almost half of the congregations which make up the Presbytery of New Covenant have submitted a cross. To those of you who haven't done so yet, we are looking forward to receiving them at the Presbytery Center as soon as you are able. All are magnificent and are different from one another!

clerk's corner

By Rev. Diane Prevary, HR
Stated Clerk of the Presbytery
of New Covenant



The end of one year and the beginning of another is a busy time for clerks of session. It is time to gather all of the information that will be needed for the Annual Statistical Report, which is filed in January with the Office of the General Assembly. Workbooks, with instructions for online posting, were mailed to all clerks in the presbytery earlier in December. Also included in this mailing were other report forms which will allow clerks to forward information to the presbytery that will assist us with our record-keeping on your behalf. Questions about any of these reports may be directed to Janice Schessler at the presbytery office (jschessler@pbyofnewcovenant.org).

The end of the year is when many churches elect elders and deacons. Training takes place and examinations by sessions are completed and services of ordination/installation are scheduled to occur in January. Clerks are reminded that the particulars of **all** of these events are required to be part of the minutes of session as well as recorded in the appropriate sections of the Church Register.

In the PACKET for the February 6 meeting of the presbytery will be the final report of session records reviews for 2009. We are still not at 100% participation by clerks of session in this constitutionally required event, but each year the number increases. Almost to a person, clerks respond that the value of these regional events is to build relationships with other clerks and to share “best practices” in record-keeping. It is, after all, through our records that the histories of our churches are preserved.

In 2010, seven Session Records Reviews are scheduled by CLUSTERS, which recently have been reorganized. Meeting by clusters for records review will provide clerks an excellent opportunity to form even more supportive relationships. As always, however, clerks for whom the assigned review date and location do not work may schedule themselves for a different day. Dates of Session Records Review are posted on our website, www.pbyofnewcovenant.org – click Office of Stated Clerk.

It is a privilege to serve this presbytery as stated clerk. If there is any way that I can be helpful to our churches, please let me know. And, as we live into this New Year, I pray that God will shower challenges upon each congregation in our presbytery; for it is in responding to God's challenges that we often discover the most profound blessings of life! Happy New Year!

News you can use from Board of Pensions

Church treasurers and business administrators can now submit salary changes or confirm salaries online through a new feature on Benefits Connect, the Board of Pensions' secure benefits website.

Once a church treasurer or business administrator registers on Benefits Connect, he or she will be granted access to this new feature. Changing or confirming salaries will be completed through an easy-to-follow online process.

To register, go to www.pensions.org. Under the Benefits

Connect logo, click “Register.” Then follow the step-by-step instructions for creating your user profile and establishing your password.

If you have questions about registering for Benefits Connect or the new online salary change and confirmation feature, contact the Board at 800-773-7752.





Mary's Musings

By Mary Marcotte, Associate General Presbyter, Presbytery of New Covenant

I have a dream. I'm hoping that it will become an increasing reality. I dream that Elders and Deacons will fully embrace their role as spiritual leaders of their congregations. I dream that pastors and other church professionals will encourage this. I dream that folks who are called in their secular lives to a variety of professions will be encouraged to use their God-given gifts for ministry in their everyday lives and that we will understand this as an authentic form of ministry when the work they do and the content of their character reflects "kingdom rules." All of this is a part of recognizing that our communities are a mission field and the embodied witness of believers going about their daily lives with integrity, compassion, and advocacy for those without voice and power is a very good thing.

I dream that there will be opportunities for these church leaders to grow significantly in their faith and their ability to express it. I dream of intentional training opportunities for those who would like to work through a serious exegesis of the biblical texts. I dream that there would be real opportunities for these leaders to "cultivate the ability to preach" as well as opportunities to do so.

I dream that elders could and would dig into the theological richness of our Reformed tradition and understand the unique blessings of being a Presbyterian-flavored Christian.

I dream of helping leaders gain both confidence and competence in their ability to pray out loud on behalf of others. I dream of all church leaders being able to answer the question: what spiritual practice nourishes your faith?

As a presbytery, we hope that this sort of training will be increasingly possible. Folks can get a start at our annual Church Officer Enrichment event on January 23. These are just 70-minute classes, but they are a start.

Did you know that you can access FREE online instruction in the areas of Teaching Ministry, Reformed Theology, and Biblical Content? Opening Doors to Discipleship is a venture co-sponsored by PC(USA) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Check it out at www.openingdoorstodiscipleship.com and using the denominational code 31627. Our Presbyter's Lay Pastor subcommittee of the Committee on Ministry is encouraging its use as part of the preparation for Commissioned Lay Pastors.

I believe our efforts need to go far deeper than the occasional workshop or online course – and I suspect that there are interested people out there in our congregations as well. As some of our churches struggle with the realization that they can no longer pay the salary of a full-time pastor, what if one or several of the leaders took part in intentional, in-depth leadership development and sought a commission as a lay pastor? What if leaders in our other congregations were able to find deeper fulfillment in their service to the church by using all the gifts of leadership with which they have been blessed?

So this is my dream. I dream about something I'm tentatively labeling "the E Cubed project." The goal would be to energize, empower and engage Elders. Elders and other leaders could pick and choose among offerings based on their interest. Those seeking a commission would be nurtured in mentoring relationships. The need is present. Maybe it can be more than just a dream. If you are interested in dreaming along with me, give me a call or drop me an email.

Community News

Feeding the Kids satellite comes to New Covenant

St. Philip PC, Houston, has begun participation in *Kids Against Hunger - Houston Satellite* as part of the mission/outreach program of the church. *Kids Against Hunger* is a volunteer-driven effort to package and distribute humanitarian relief to children, both locally and across the world.

Believing that every individual can make a difference in the fight against national and global hunger, Richard Proudfit created this program after witnessing hungry children during a visit to Haiti. He began a program of packaging food destined for children in pockets of hunger and poverty. It provides simple, nutritious meals in dry form that can be reconstituted with boiling water. Begun in Minnesota, it now has satellites across the nation. St. Philip PC operates the first satellite in Houston.

The food mixture – soy, rice, dried vegetables and 21 vitamins and minerals – can reverse starvation, restore health, and improve children's mental and physical alertness, and has

been proven to do so.

Last November St. Philip children (9 years and older) and adults began the first packing session in a series intended to produce 30,000 meals for distribution both here and abroad. These packages were sent to the Houston Food Bank for use in its Backpack Buddy Club for school children and to Kids' Meals for use in its program to feed pre-school children. Additional packing sessions will produce pallets of packaged meals to be distributed in foreign countries where starvation is rampant.

St. Philip PC intends to expand its program and invites anyone interested in participating in the program to contact the Mission Coordinator at St. Philip, the Rev. Dr. George Pope, at 832-373-7534. "*Kids Against Hunger* not only nourishes hungry children, it also nourishes the spirit of the volunteers who come together to do their part in the battle against hunger," says St. Philip pastor Bill Poe.



Welcome Home

Homeowner Rita Welch and family receive a cross from Elder Kendall Boyd, New Covenant Ike Recovery Coordinator, during her house blessing. The crosses are handmade by the youth of Spring Branch PC, Houston, and presented to families upon their return home after completion of repairs to damage caused by Hurricane Ike.

Project Homecoming, planned by our Ike Recovery Team, includes blessing celebrations as well as gifts of household items needed by owners to set up housekeeping in their homes that have been repaired by various Presbyterian and Interfaith Volunteer Mission Teams.

CONNECTIONS DEADLINE

The next *Connections* deadline is Wednesday, February 10, for the Mar/Apr 2010 issue. This issue will be mailed February 26.

E Highlights

‘Woman, you are loved by God, never forgotten, always virtuous’

Based on John 15:9; Psalm 121, Proverbs 31:10

This was the theme for this year’s Hispanic/Latino Women’s Conference sponsored by the Synod of the Sun’s Hispanic/Latino Ministries Council. Every year during the first weekend of October at Mo-Ranch, the Hispanic/Latino Women of Synod of the Sun gather for spiritual growth, renewal, and fellowship.

Presbyteries rotate as planning committees. This year, the Presbytery of New Covenant was given this honor. Women of Emmanuel of Galveston, Juan Marcos, Iglesia Cristiana Latina, and San Pablo+ Trinity worked diligently planning all the details for this year’s conference. And what a conference it was! Twenty-six churches within the Synod participated and more than 175 individuals attended the conference.

Workshops, which were

offered in Spanish as well as English, focused on issues our women face daily. Keynote Speaker, Ruth Roman Meza, Coordinator to the Hispanic Latino Ministries Council, shared her great love as the Lord’s servant through her dynamic speaking the entire weekend. She reminded the participant that in all stages of life, as women, we are loved by God, never forgotten, always virtuous.

Many thanks to the Presbytery of New Covenant and General Presbyter Mike Cole for all the support and prayers!



Synod Hispanic and Latino women sing out praise to God during fall conference.

A Thanksgiving Story

Scotta Stanley, member of Gulf Prairie PC, Jones Creek, wanted to reach out to her neighbors and invite them to the church she so dearly loved. The year 2009 was going to be a hard year for many of her neighbors who relied on contract (temporary) work in the oil business. With oil prices dropping, there was little contract work available.

And then Scotta had an idea – a church dinner welcoming all the members of the Gulf Prairie community. What better time than Thanksgiving 2009! With \$438.39 from the church’s Outreach, \$1000 from New Covenant Presbytery’s Outreach, and a lot of hard work, Scotta’s dream came true.

The church hosted 130 members and neighbors. In addition,

178 servings went to the homes of people in the community, and leftovers were sent to the boys and girls in community homes. More than 300 meals expressing the love of a leader who set the pattern so long ago!

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Making History TODAY



By Dr. James S. Currie, Executive Secretary
Presbyterian Historical Society of the Southwest

This bulletin just in!

Recently a fellow presbyter left three volumes with a note asking if I might have any use for them. It turns out that the three volumes were bound collections of bulletins of University Presbyterian Church in Houston, covering the years from 1964-1972.

Some might not consider this a very fascinating discovery... until one starts going through them! These bulletins record the worship services held from the time the organizing pastor, John M. Minter, was called (September 20, 1964) through the Sunday when the relationship with that pastor was dissolved (February 27, 1972).

But much, much more is there than simply the years of Minter’s pastorate. One has the opportunity to see the life of the congregation grow – in worship, in the community, in the world. Baptisms, new members, weddings, deaths, outreach to the university community, the eventual construction of a building (spring 1966). All this and so much more!

In going through these weekly bulletins, I find it fascinating to recall what was going on in the rest of the world. Sometimes the bulletins give us a reminder. For example, 1968 was a tumultuous time in this country. There were classes and conferences in University Church, in the Houston area, and around the country on “the crisis in America.” Who led them? Who participated in them? Where were they held? Some of the answers are found here.

In addition to session minutes, worship bulletins and newsletters are sources of wonderful information about the life and ministry of a congregation. Anyone wondering when a certain event occurred or who was in charge of a particular activity in the life of a congregation can go search for that information in old bulletins or newsletters – assuming they have been kept, of course.

Does your church keep such documents on file? They are a terrific resource for celebrating church anniversaries. Unfortunately, often such resources are not available, either through neglect or through disasters such as fires or floods.

As we make history today, may we do so with an eye towards the future, being responsible stewards not only of the present world, but also of future generations, leaving them documents and resources that will enable them to glimpse into our lives and the legacy we will have left them.

2010 Presbytery meetings

DATE	LOCATION	SPEAKER
Saturday, February 6	St. Philip PC, Houston	Rev. Eric Hoey
Saturday, May 8	Northwoods PC, Houston	Laura Mendenhall
Sunday, July 18 (3-5 p.m.)	Pincrest PC, Houston	GA Debriefing
August 7 and 15	Days of Service & Celebration	
Saturday, November 13	St. John’s PC, Houston	TBD



Wendy's Bailey-wick

By the Rev. Wendy Bailey, Associate General Presbyterian, Presbytery of New Covenant

I was one of about 250 church leaders who attended a two-hour event with George Barna as he presented and interpreted the results of a demographic survey his research group conducted in Houston that focused on understanding “un-churched” Christians. They surveyed 400 self-identified Christians who effectively haven’t attended a church in six months or more. Here are some of their findings that I find most valuable for us:

Un-churched people don’t like to be called “un-churched.” It’s highly offensive to them. In fact, many of the things we’ve done to attract new members seem uncomfortable, undesirable, and offensive. Gifts brought to their homes, special nametags or flowers, introductions of visitors in worship gatherings seem manipulative to those who are “checking us out.” They value independent thinking, control, and being “cutting edge.” They are not as relational and less engaged with the world than churchgoers, and they don’t want to be the center of attention.

The Christians in Houston who don’t attend church are, by and large, people who have a faith and a religious life. They pray, read Scripture, and even have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that’s important in their life today. It is unwise for us to assume that those who don’t attend church are less knowledgeable about their faith or don’t care about Jesus.

Those who don’t attend church find little value in it. Most of them have had some experience with church in the past. They have a “been there, done that” kind of attitude, and they don’t see that the church offers them anything spiritually or relationally worthy of giving up time with their family or other hobbies. They say they “don’t have time,” or they “haven’t found a church we like” but what they mean is “what we see in church is less meaningful and valuable than sleeping in, going shopping, surfing the internet, or doing yard work.”

The most effective way of reaching unchurched people is through a personal invitation from a trusted friend. While not seeing value in the church, they do see value in good friendships. If a friend, someone they trust, has their best interest at heart, invites them to a specific event or worship or gathering, they are most likely to consider attending.

Here’s the bottom line as I see it... if we are going to be a church that is making a difference in today’s world, if we’re going to be a church that is growing, we need to stop thinking about programming or marketing our church and begin establishing authentic friendships with people who don’t frequent the inside of church buildings. We need to love them, respect them, and learn from them. We need to be the body of Christ to them where they are. We need to know them well enough to know when the timing is right to invite them to be a part of the community we value. And we need to be patiently persistent (though not annoying) in our inviting.

We need to be the kind of church that is valuable to people who are their own thinkers, want to have some control over their lives, who value being “cutting edge,” and who are seeking meaning in their lives. We need to focus on the things that deepen discipleship in ourselves and in others, and we need to stop being focused on ourselves – our own preferences, time schedules, comfort, and survival. We need to pay attention to the needs and preferences of those we’re inviting to be a part of us. We need to commit ourselves to being the people of God and doing the work of the people of God.

Mission &

Excerpted from an article by Rev. Whitney Wilkerson, Associate for Mission in Belfast, Northern Ireland with a temporary pastoral relationship with First, PC in Bryan

Recently, I had a rare weekend off work because all of the young people were on school holidays. Eager for time to recharge my batteries, I



BE: the perfect word to describe ministry.

holed up in a house a friend loaned me for the weekend in a lovely wee farm community called Craigtanlet. I read, I cooked, I slept, I went on walks, I watched movies, and I made the collage, pictured above. As I was drifting off to sleep my first night, I thought about what word I would put on my collage to symbolize my time there, and immediately “be” floated into my mind. As the weekend was a break from all of my usual doing, “be” was the perfect word.

Thinking more on this theme, I was reminded of something I once heard Cynthia Rigby say that has served as a ministry-mantra for me ever since. She said, “Mission is being with and for others because God is with and for us.” In a country where the effects of a legacy of violence are seen in subtle ways, a place where foreigners are not only feared but attacked, a place where poverty breeds sectarianism, there is so much I want to DO. But mission isn’t doing with and for others - it is being with and for others. Ministry is relationships, and relationships are all about being.

In my remaining time here, I want to focus more clearly on being with and for others because God is with and for us all.

- ♦ Really being here looks for me like teaching Religious Education to children from all backgrounds and responding to the constant, “But, Whitney from Houston (this is what they call me), I don’t believe in God!” with “Well, God believes in you.”
- ♦ It looks like bringing a Catholic poet in to speak to our Protestant young people about his faith and life.
- ♦ It looks like seeing Roma children on the street and hugging them and inviting them to youth clubs.
- ♦ It looks like planning a youth mission trip to Romania for next summer, so they can see where these immigrants come from firsthand.
- ♦ It looks like making friends with people who have felt hurt, despised, or ignored by Protestantism here and saying that the church isn’t always that way.
- ♦ It looks like giving soup and a bacon sandwich to students as they come home from pubs in the early hours of the morning without agenda and making sure they get home okay.

Thank you for sharing with me in this mission, in this ministry of being. I encourage you to look for the ways God is calling you to be with and for others around you, remembering that we all belong to the One who called us into being. We’re not human doings...we’re human beings. As always, you can keep up with my journey here through my blog: <http://glimpses-of-grace.blogspot.com>



A good way to share your faith is through non-manipulative dialogue over time with receptive friends while doing what you love to do together. It could be a sport, exercise, scrapbooking, or serving a cause. Look around you. Can you identify, connect, and strengthen? It’s just a step more than Texas two-steps.

Ministry

Conflict Happens

By Rev. Christena Alcorn, Clergy-at-Large

It is tempting to think that because we are doing God's work, life will always be harmonious. Sadly, that is not always the case. Conflicts do arise within church staffs or between staff and congregation members.

Presbyterian polity allows churches to request an administrative commission when stalemates occur. But bringing in an administrative commission is a major, public step. It is also one that cedes authority to the commission, with regard to resolution.

Sometimes this step is unavoidable, but often conflicts begin in small, insidious but nevertheless potentially damaging ways. If they are directly addressed early on, resolution can frequently be achieved in a more informal, more discreet fashion.

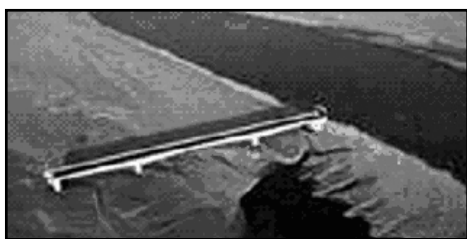
I'm pleased to offer my services to the churches in New Covenant Presbytery, with the endorsement of the Committee on Ministry. As an ordained and experienced Presbyterian pastor, also trained in mediation and ombudsmanship, I am uniquely qualified to offer mediation services that are also Christ-centered. With over thirteen years of experience in the ministry, I understand the dynamics of church staffs and congregations. My years of service in pastoral care and counseling add an invaluable dimension to a secular process.



Rev. Christena Alcorn

I can be reached at caalcorn@gmail.com, or 713-582-5356. Don't let things get out of hand – I'm here to help!

Which one moved, the bridge or the river?



Bridge destroyed by Hurricane Mitch

The bridge in the picture survived Hurricane Mitch. And why wouldn't it? It was an engineering wonder, courtesy of the best the Japanese could offer. But when it was built, it crossed *over* the river. Hurricane Mitch left the bridge alone and moved the river instead. As outstanding a bridge as it might be, it no longer serves its original purpose. It is an oddity, nothing more.

Which one moved, the church or the demographics? Generally speaking, our context in the presbytery used to be fairly simple—largely Euro American, some African American and, at least

back then, some Hispanic American and undocumented Hispanic. But the demographics have changed, due to the hurricane-like forces of international energy markets and medical expertise and commerce, and of increasing people migrations world-wide, and of declining Euro American birthrates, together with high immigrant birthrates from some populations. Does the church as it is currently situated serve these changing demographics?

The cultures of the world are moving and mixing. God's church is meant to be a functioning multicultural church to serve in his multicultural reign. Our churches can adapt to the changing demographics, or they can stay the course, outstanding in their day years ago, but now just out standing alone.

Call me and let's start talking!
Tim Phillips at the MultiCultural Café:
713-540-7272.

Classifieds

"...The Lord bids each one of us in all life's actions to look to his calling...It is enough if we know that the Lord's calling is in everything the beginning and foundation of well-doing."
(Calvin. Institutes. 3.10.6)

POSITION OPENINGS:

First PC, Sugar Land, has immediate openings for a full-time Director of Christian Education and for a part-time Youth Director. Please call the church office at 281-240-3195 for more information.

College Scholarships Available

The National Presbyterian College Scholarship Program (NPCS) offers need-based scholarship assistance to full-time students entering their first year of college at one of the participating colleges related to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Applicants must be confirmed members of the

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and carry a 3.0 cumulative grade point average from high school.

Applications for the 2010-2011 academic year are due January 31. Learn more about this and other undergraduate opportunities for financial aid at <http://www.pcusa.org/financialaid/undergraduate.htm>.

Presbytery seeking Ecumenical Liaison

Presbytery of New Covenant (PNC) is looking for a volunteer - lay or ordained - to serve as 'ecumenical liaison.' This person would serve as a communications link between PNC and General Assembly regarding local and national opportunities for ecumenical engagement. These could include workshops, conferences, webinars, educational resources, and news

articles. The liaison would establish and maintain a bi-directional communications process regarding ecumenical activities: from GA to the Presbytery and its member congregations, as well as from local entities to GA.

Anyone interested should contact Jim Taylor, Chair of Ecclesiastical Affairs, at jaywhittay@gmail.com.

Vision Initiative Grants

What do a community garden, an Advent music program for the community, an English-speaking ministry in the Korean community, an Alpha Program, guest speakers for Presbytery meetings, and a lunch program for at-risk children have in common?

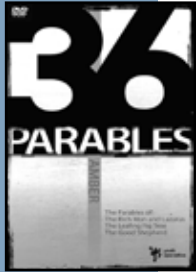
These are just some of the programs for which churches in our presbytery have received Vision Initiative Grant funds for the 2009-2010 year.

Now it is time to get your application in to the presbytery

office so that your particular program may be considered for the 2010-2011 grant year. The guidelines for Vision Initiative Grants can be found on the Presbytery website at www.pbyofnewcovenant.org under Forms (left side of home page). You will also find the application at the same place.

Applications will be received electronically in the Presbytery office January 1 to March 31, 2010.

Short Films



36 Parables – Amber Edition

By Youth Specialties

This is a new addition to the series that features modern short films inspired by Christ's parables. Leader guides are available as downloads at www.ecufilm.com. This volume features parables of the rich man and Lazarus, the fig tree, and the Good Shepherd. Each film is between five and twelve minutes long and designed for use with older youth and adults.

DVDs



Soul Searching: A Movie about Teenagers and God

DVD. 77 minutes

This documentary opens a window on the real life of teens and their search for God and is shaped by the findings of the book *Soul Searching: the Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* by Christian Smith and Melinda Denton. Teens from many backgrounds and faith traditions are followed as they talk about the complex reality of their lives and their search for God and meaning for their lives. In addition there are plans for leading both a two-hour and a three-hour process with the film.



Dream. Think. Do. Be.

A video curriculum for young adults informed by progressive theology

Each of the four segments of this curriculum appears on separate DVDs and could be taught as a standalone, five-course series. The video's components use clips from the Living the Questions series that features twenty five progressive theologians. Segments are designed to be a springboard for discussion about what's next for those who would follow Jesus. Leader's guide provides discussion questions and an exercise of prayer practice suggested by the lesson themes. Components are:

Dream. (Loving God with your Heart)

Faith as Journey, Stories of Creation, Reconciliation, Jesus, and Risk.

Think. (Loving God with your Mind)

Thinking Theologically, Taking the Bible Seriously, Evil and Suffering, Violence, and Rapture and Revelation.

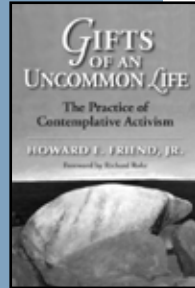
Be. (Loving God with your Soul)

A Kingdom Without Walls, Realizing God's Vision, Prayer, Creative Transformation, and Mystery.

Do. (Loving God With your Strength)

Incarnation, Compassion, Politics, Passion (Paul), and Resurrection.

Books



Gifts of an Uncommon Life: The Practice of Contemplative Activist

Howard E. Friend, Jr., a retired Presbyterian pastor, who also wrote *Recovering the Sacred Center: Church Renewal from the Inside Out*, offers essays on ten gifts that could help move us beyond partisan debates by being peace-loving but not silent doormats. These gifts include integrity, presence, paradox, solitude and silence, patience, empowering, letting go, hope, outrage, and partnership.



Holy Clarity: the Practice of Planning and Evaluation

Holy Clarity explores the most basic reason leaders of religious organizations conduct evaluations: to find and create God-pleasing clarity regarding the organization's purpose and the impact of its activities. Leadership and evaluation are not separate disciplines, she argues. Effective leaders evaluate because they need to know what is happening in their organizations and how those activities are effecting change.

Sarah Drummond first describes the way in which our postmodern culture makes clarity difficult to obtain. She then looks at holy clarity from a biblical and theological perspective and makes the case that it is a spiritual discipline that can stand on its own theological merits. She presents four approaches to evaluation that can help a leader to guide a community toward greater clarity, both when evaluating or analyzing programs and when planning and starting programs. Finally, she considers the work of clarification as a faith practice, one that can make a pastor or layperson not just a better leader, but a better Christian who is more firmly grounded in God. Each chapter concludes with a fictional case study that provides a jumping-off point for discussion and helps bring her theory to life.



Governance and Ministry: Rethinking Board Leadership

Here are a roadmap and tools for changing the way boards and clergy work together to lead congregations. Dan Hotchkiss demonstrates that the right governance model is the one that best enables a congregation to fulfill its mission—to achieve both the outward results and the inward quality of life to which it is called. In addition to distilling much of the recent wisdom about governance for the nonprofit sector, this book translates some of what is most helpful from that world for clergy and lay leaders. It also recognizes that in some ways congregations are unique and need governance structures and processes different from those that work in other organizations. Leaders must continually balance the conserving function of an institution with the expectation of disruptive, change-inducing creativity that comes when individuals peek past the temple veil and catch fresh visions of the Holy.

TRANSITIONS

Welcome to the Presbytery of New Covenant!

Rev. Dr. James Birchfield has been called to serve as pastor of First PC, Houston.



Rev. Jm Birchfield

Before entering the ministry, Jim worked in the advertising and magazine publishing business. Prior to coming to New

Covenant, Jim served Bel Air PC in Los Angeles and St. Andrew's PC in Newport Beach, CA, where he served in a variety of positions during the past thirteen years. He and his wife Marta have two adult daughters.

Rev. Lynn Hall Buckridge is serving as Parish Associate for Children and Family at Southminster



Rev. Lynn Buckridge

PC, in Missouri City, transferring from Mission Presbytery where she served as associate pastor at Covenant PC in Austin. Lynn received her

MDiv from Princeton Theological Seminary. She is mother to a 2½-year-old.

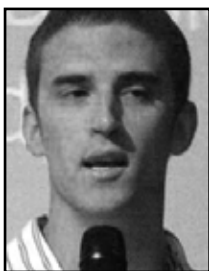
Rev. Jolene Currie is working

as Chaplain with Compassionate Care Hospice Foundation in Dickinson. She transferred to New Covenant from Presbytery of San Gabriel. Jolene does not think she is related to the Currie family in New Covenant, "at least not that I know!"



Rev. Jolene Currie

Rev. Ryan Cook, who completed his ordination exams at the called meeting of presbytery in July 2009, is serving



Rev. Ryan Cook

as Associate Pastor of Grand Lakes PC in Katy. Before coming to New Covenant, Ryan had been Candidate under care of Western Colorado Presbytery.

Rev. Thomas Edwards is serving as Associate Pastor of First PC, Kingwood, transferring to



Rev. Tom Edwards

New Covenant from Presbytery of Southern Kansas. Tom received his MDiv from Princeton Theological Seminary; a certificate in

national security affairs from the Institute for Defense and Strategic Studies; and a bachelor's degree in International Relations from the University of Southern California. He and his wife Brenda have three children. Tom enjoys his family, being "in or under" the ocean, reading, classical sacred music, sports, and fighting for worthy causes including battling against human trafficking.

Rev. Kristy Forbes is serving as interim associate pastor at St. Philip PC, Houston, transferring



Rev. Kristy Forbes

from Giddings-Lovejoy Presbytery. Her special areas of expertise and experience are in the educational ministries of the church.

She returns to Houston (and to St. Philip PC where she grew up) after eleven years in St. Louis. She and her husband Logan have a five-year-old son.

Rev. David Leard is serving as Associate Pastor of Discipleship at Northwoods PC, Houston. He has transferred from Indian Nations Presbytery. He



Rev. David Leard

and his wife Kristin Croyle Leard, have two children, ages 5 and 1½. Free time, when not playing with the children, finds David riding his mountain bike (good luck in Houston!), playing golf, eating ice cream, and reading theology.

Rev. John Melsness has been called to St. Andrew's PC, Houston, where he is serving as Associate Pastor of Discipleship.



Rev. John Melsness

John attended the University of Washington, earning a BA in International Studies. After working with college students in full time ministry for two years and spending five years as outreach youth pastor for a cluster of urban Presbyterian churches in Trenton, John attended Princeton Theological Seminary and received his MDiv with a concentration in Christian Education. He and his wife Monica have a 4 ½ -year-old daughter.

Rev. Jonathan Murray is serving as Designated Pastor at St. Paul's PC in Needville. Under care of Grace Presbytery



Rev. Jonathan Murray

before coming to Houston, he now joins his wife, the Rev. Caressa Murray, who serves as associate pastor at Webster PC. Jonathan received his MDiv from Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Attention woodcarvers: Jonathan likes the challenge of woodcarving! "But," he says, "I relax the best when driving a motorcycle with Caressa on a beautiful day!"

Rev. Rachel Grassley Young has been called to serve as Associate Pastor of Spiritual Formation at Clear Lake PC, Houston. Rachel was under care of Grace Presbytery before coming to Houston. She

received her MDiv in 2008 from Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA. Her husband Josh is Director of Family Ministries at Clear Lake PC, Houston.



Rev. Rachel Grassley Young

New Candidate introduced

Entering into covenant relationship with those in preparation

At the November presbytery meeting, Barbara McClintic was enrolled as Candidate in the



Barbara McClintic

Presbytery of New Covenant. This phase provides a time for full preparation to serve the church as minister of the Word and Sacrament.

A graduate of Presbyterian School of Christian Education (PSCE) and a certified Christian Educator, Barbara has been taking courses at Fuller Theology Seminary for five years while serving on the staff at Pines PC, Houston. She spoke of how she has met God in the community of faith, and how her inner journey sustains and informs her outer journey. "I didn't think I needed a title, but God kept nudging me," declared Barbara.

The Rev. Marie Mickey, associate pastor at First, Bryan, charged the new candidate to "remember to love God, love all of God's people, have a sense of humor, and take time to take care of yourself!"

January 1

Presbytery Center closed

January 23

Church Officer Enrichment
St. Luke's PC, Houston

January 23

Session Records Review
Clusters 8, 9, 10
St. Luke's PC, Houston

January 23-24

PYCC Prep Retreat
Camp Cho-Yeh, Livingston

February 6

Stated Presbytery Meeting
St. Philip PC, Houston

February 19-21

Youth Conclaves

February 26-28

Youth Conclaves

March 5-7

Youth Conclaves

March 13

Session Records Review
Clusters 3 and 7
Faith PC, Baytown

April 9-11

Presbyterian Marriage
Encounter

April 17

PW Spring Gathering

May 8

Stated Presbytery Meeting
Northwoods PC, Houston

June 5

Session Records Review
Clusters 2 and 11
First PC, Conroe

July 17

Session Records Review
Cluster 6
First PC, Lukfin

July 18

Stated Presbytery Meeting
GA Debriefing
Pinecrest PC, Houston

July 20-24

Youth Triennium
Purdue University

JANUARY 23



CHURCH OFFICER ENRICHMENT

FOR ELDERS, DEACONS, CLERKS, AND TREASURERS!

Have you registered for New Covenant's Church Officer Enrichment on Saturday, January 23, 9:00 a.m. to 12 noon, at St. Luke's PC, Houston? Make plans now to attend. Registration begins at 8:30 a.m.

There will be extended morning sessions for Clerks and Treasurers. All others will attend two workshops of choice from among the following:

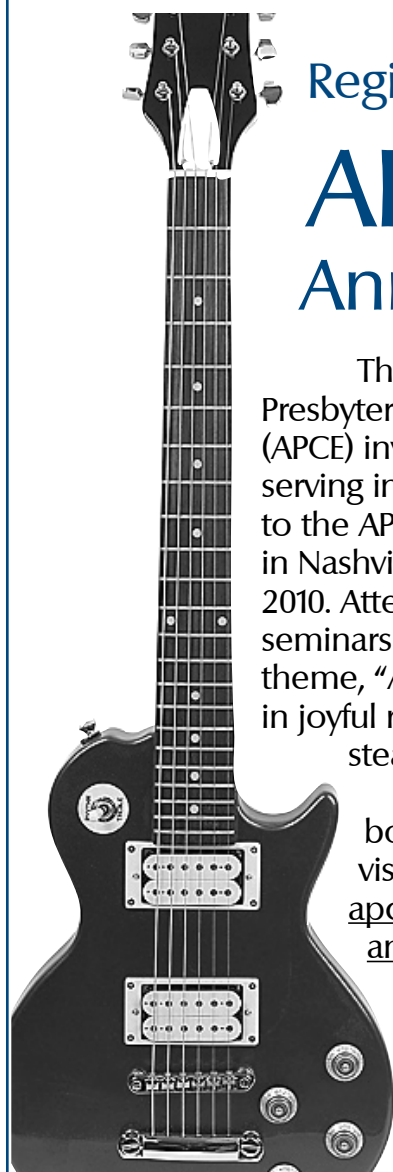
- ♦ **We're Not in Kansas Anymore - Implications for Effective Ministry Today**
- ♦ **A Fresh Word - New Ways for Sessions**
- ♦ **Managing Conflict in the Church**
- ♦ **Praying Out Loud**
- ♦ **From Gate Keeping to Door Opening**
- ♦ **I Said Yes to What? - The Ordination Questions**
- ♦ **The Five Points of Calvinism**

Registration deadline is Monday, January 18.

Send registrations to Presbytery of New Covenant, 1110 Lovett Blvd., 77006-3808 – Attn. Carrie Walker. Or, contact Carrie at 713-526-2585, ext. 205 or cwalker@pbyofnewcovenant.org.

St. Luke's PC is located at 8915 Timberside, Houston.

JANUARY 27-30



Register for the APCE Annual Event

The Association of Presbyterian Church Educators (APCE) invites all persons serving in educational ministry to the APCE Annual Event in Nashville, January 27-30, 2010. Attend workshops and seminars and explore the theme, "Awake My Soul," in joyful response to God's steadfast love.

For a conference booklet and to register, visit <http://www.apcenet.org/events/annual-next/annual-regist.htm>

FEBRUARY 18



Save the Date! Church Co-Op Texas Ministry Conference

Plan to attend the popular Church Co-Op Conference for all church staff on Thursday, February 18, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Champion Forest Baptist Church, 15555 Stuebner-Airline Rd., Houston, for education, food, fun, and fellowship – a place to learn and network. A full day of tracks for every ministry: 60+ workshops. Dr. Charles Lowery will be the keynote speaker.

Visit www.churchco-op.org for more information and details about the workshops offered.



FEBRUARY 21-23

Duerr LECTURE SERIES

The speaker for the 13th annual Duerr Lecture Series at St. Philip PC, Houston, February 21, 22, and 23, will be the Rev. Dr. George W. Stroup, J. B. Green Professor of Theology at Columbia Theological



Dr. George Stroup

Seminary in Decatur, GA. His lectures, "The Gods Around and Within Us: Our Struggle with Idolatry," will address questions about the meaning of idolatry, what form it may take in contemporary life, and what resources there are in Christian faith that can help us in our struggle to "unmask idolatries in Church and culture" (A Brief Statement of Faith).

Dr. Stroup, who received degrees from Rice University, Yale Divinity School, and Vanderbilt University, is a member of Cherokee Presbytery. He has authored many publications, most recently *Calvin* (Abdingdon, 2009), which is part of the series titled Pillars of Theology. He has served on the Committee to Write a Brief Statement of Faith and is currently on the committee considering the addition of the Belhar Confession to the *Book of Confessions*.

Mark your calendar and plan to attend the lectures to hear this engaging speaker. Rev. Stroup will preach at the Sunday morning worship services and present lectures each evening at 7:00 p.m.

All lectures are free and open to everyone. Child care is available for all ages for each lecture by calling the church office, 713 622-4807. St. Philip is located at 4807 San Felipe at Loop 610.

JULY 20-24

PRESBYTERIAN YOUTH TRIENNIUM July 20 - 24, 2010



Every three years the Presbyterian Church (USA), Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America gather thousands of Presbyterian youth and adult leaders together for worship, play, music, community building, and Bible study.

Encourage your YOUTH to take part in this amazing week!
Youth ages 15 -19 and adults over 21 are eligible to attend.

Applications are were sent to church pastors, educators, youth directors or on the Presbytery website. **Application and deposit due by Monday, January 4.**

For more information contact
Rev. Caressa Murray, caressa@websterpresby.org.

Encourage your YOUTH to apply for the
PRESBYTERY OF NEW COVENANT Delegation!

NEWS *From the Center*

Please send us your email address!

A Task Force for Communications has been meeting for several months to consider ways to enhance and extend our communications with the members of New Covenant that will give expression to the mission and ministry work of the presbytery.

To implement plans, the presbytery office is gathering email addresses from New Covenant Presbyterians who would like to be kept-up-to-date by subscribing to brief, regular emails, tentatively called Tuesday Connections.

Be assured that you will not be bombarded with unwanted emails – you will always be asked if you want to opt-in or opt-out! Right now, we want to build our list of email addresses. Please send your e-mail address to pbrantley@pbyofnewcovenant.org.

Scholarships available

Limited funds are available to pastors and members of congregations in New Covenant Presbytery that would provide scholarships of up to \$100 for leadership events. Ordinarily these scholarships will be limited to two per congregation during the fiscal year. Scholarship applications are available on the presbytery website, www.pbyofnewcovenant.org. Click FORMS on the vertical bar on the left side of the Home Page.

See the grand picture!

Recent changes to the presbytery's website (www.pbyofnewcovenant.org) now give you the opportunity to see the physical breadth of the Presbytery of New Covenant! Be sure to check out the sections in "Contact Us" on the horizontal bar of the home page.

At the very top of the page for "Churches," click on "Map of all churches in the Presbytery." Right before your eyes, you'll see the location flagged for each congregation and new church development in New Covenant. A click on a flag gives you information about that church; don't forget that you can zoom in and out for other views.

If you choose "Contact Us Clusters," you will find a link to a map that shows the congregations in each cluster.

Thanks to Dwayne Bailey, newly-elected Elder at Faith PC, Baytown, who made this possible!

Recognized for continuing education

Elders Janice Schessler and Carrie Walker (both presbytery staff members) were recognized for completing course work for Level III Certification by the Administrative Personnel Association (APA), a professional association serving the administrative staff of churches, governing bodies, agencies, and institutions of the PC(USA).

APA offers courses for accredited continuing education, such as: Office Administration, Spiritual Growth, Creating a Pictorial Directory, Presbyterianism 101 & 102, Designing for Communication, Organizing Your Space, and Writing and Improving Your Electronic Communication. Complete class descriptions are available online in the Certification Council Handbook, <http://pcusa-apa.org/pdf/certification/handbook.pdf>.

In Our Prayers

The Rev. Wilbur Stambaugh (HR) and wife Nina – Nina's mother, Mable Miller, died October 11, 2009 at the age of 101.

Elder Ann Earnest, Development Officer of Presbyterian Foundation and member of Grace PC, Houston – Ann's father-in-law, Al Earnest, died October 26, 2009.

The Rev. Jose Luis Casal (General Missioner of Tres Rios Presbytery) and his wife Cecilia – Cecilia's brother was murdered during a robbery in his home in Ecuador.

Patricia Brantley, Presbytery Receptionist and Database Coordinator – her cousin, Nancy Armstead who was like a sister to Patricia, died November 9, 2009.

Chaplain Rev. Linda Sharon and the Rev. Tom Sharon, First PC, Freeport – Linda's mother, Ruth Williams, died November 18, 2009.

The Rev. Scott Harbison, St. Luke's PC, Houston – Scott's mother in Jackson, MS, had cardiac arrest on Thanksgiving.

The Rev. Helen DeLeon, (Webster PC) – her sister Jackie's husband, Jimmy Caples, died recently.

Prayers of thanksgiving for First PC, Galveston – the congregation has returned to their church home, now worshipping in their restored Fellowship Hall until restoration of their Sanctuary is complete!

The Rev. Connie Alexander, Drake Memorial PC, Orange – extensive surgery again on her ankle – four surgeries in a period of ten to twelve days.

Good news from Huntsville! The Rev. Ken Jack's surgery in late November went very well! He is breathing better than he has in years! Ken is the recipient of a double lung transplant.

Elder Rupert Turner, past Moderator of the Presbytery and member of MDPC, Houston – dealing with a cancer diagnosis. You may leave a message to him in a guestbook at <http://www.caringbridge.org/visit/rupertturner>.

The Rev. Ted Foote (First PC, Bryan) and his wife Joanie – Joanie's brother died recently from complications of H1N1 flu.

The Rev. Kevin Boyd (St. Paul PC, Houston) – sinus surgery in December

Ms. Anita Scott, Presbytery volunteer and member of Pinecrest PC, Houston - continuing health concerns.

*HR = Honorably Retired



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