

CONNECTIONS

Growing congregations that passionately engage their community to make disciples.

State of the Presbytery – View from the Future

By Rev. Mike Cole, General Presbytery
Delivered at the February 5, 2011,
Presbytery meeting - from a 2016 perspective

Joel 2:28 "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions." (NIV)

It is great to be here on February 6, 2016, to present my 13th State of the Presbytery assessment in this semi-virtual presbytery meeting. If you are having any difficulty viewing us on Skype or Google, please tweet: @PresbyteriansRCool.

As I begin, I want to thank our wonderful hosts for this meeting, First African, Biyaya, and Second Thien An Churches. It is exciting to be meeting in the Presbyterian Multicultural Center of Southwest Houston, on the land that was referred to back in 2011 as the Fondren/Fuqua property. It seems like just yesterday that the leaders of these three congregations took the initiative to seek the presbytery's permission to develop a church site that would house all three congregations. And here we are five years later in a great building that demonstrates the unity of the Spirit and the engagement of the community.

When the leadership met back in early 2011, we began

charting a course for the presbytery that would help us live into our vision of five years earlier - "growing congregations that passionately engage their community to make disciples." Through a series of mini retreats we wrote a future story for our presbytery, imagining what God expected of us between 2011 and 2016. You're all familiar with that future story since we published it and discussed it thoroughly in 2011. Now it's up to us to determine how we have done. Have we lived up to the vision set forth in 2011?

In 2016 we are known as an "emergent presbytery," meaning that we are striving to be nimble and flexible enough to connect and assist our congregations in ways that advance the kingdom of God. We have prayed and fasted as we have sought the Lord's will. Following the lead of our former Stated Clerk, Diane Prevary, who showed us how session records reviews could be done effectively on a decentralized basis, we began allocating other tasks to geographic gatherings within the presbytery. In addition to session records review, we now do triennial visits, Pastor and Commissioned Lay Pastor examinations, Transition Teams, Future Story Teams and Vision Consultant Teams, pulpit swaps, officer enrichment, and educational events in geographical



Rev. Mike Cole

gatherings rather than in a centralized location.

We have utilized technology to eliminate much of the distance traveled by folks back in 2011. Committees now meet quarterly in person and in between by video

conferencing. Tuesday Connect, begun in 2010 with a circulation of 2,400, now goes out to 10,000 people throughout the denomination. Our web site, undergoing its 8th revamp, is not only resource-laden, it is also "wiki-like" in that users can contribute to the knowledge base of our presbytery. Our emphasis has been on building partnerships between congregations. In addition to the usual reporting of statistics, we began measuring what matters - service and worship

Spurred on by the success of a 2011 water project to Cuba sponsored by three congregations - ChristChurch, St. John's and Clear Lake PC, the Outreach Committee maintains a database of mission accessible by all, which lists the tremendous variety of

Please see STATE on page 2 in Cole Mine

Seeking new Stated Clerk

Stated Clerk Diane Prevary plans to retire near the end of this year. A search committee has been formed to find New Covenant's next stated clerk. If you are an elder or pastor interested in a 40% time position, you will find materials about the position, including an application and questionnaire on the home page of the presbytery's website, www.pbyofnewcovenant.org.

Application and questionnaire must be emailed to pncStatedClerkSearch@gmail.com no later than Friday, March 18. The committee welcomes your application for Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of New Covenant and looks forward to exploring with you whether your gifts meet the needs of our presbytery for this key position.

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FROM THE COLE MINE

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



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mission projects undertaken by our congregations. This allows congregations to connect directly with one another in sponsoring and supporting multiple mission projects.

Our Stewardship Team maintains a database of "pro bono" services offered by Presbyterians for Presbyterians - legal, accounting, business, mechanical, technical, labor, and other expertise is provided to our member churches in exchange for a commitment to mission in an amount equal to the cost of the services.

Our Congregational Resourcing Team promotes partnerships between congregations of all types - small, medium, large, NCD and fellowship groups - providing people power and resources to one another. Ten congregations in communities with at least 40% Latino population have responded to the challenge to initiate a Latino ministry.

While some feared the dividing of the presbytery into smaller regional gatherings would diminish our sense of unity, quite the opposite has happened. The more congregations have been connected with one another in ways that promote mission and vision, the more sense of unity has developed. The more we've connected, the more truth there was in the often quoted statement of 2011, "The presbytery is us." The reality that the presbytery really is "us," helped generate a greater sense of trust among us.

Not that we don't have our divisions and differences still, but there is a growing sense that there is far more that unites us than divides us. We have become known as a presbytery for gracious comings and goings. Guided by our gracious separation procedures, we resolved a few inquiries and requests to withdraw from the denomination with a modest amount of anxiety and little rancor. We've also received a

few churches into our presbytery by transfer from other presbyteries and denominations.

Once we paid off the last of our debt on the copy machines (if you weren't around for that, don't ask!), got our financial house in order, and demonstrated that the leadership of this presbytery can manage finances with integrity, more churches and individuals trusted us to be good stewards of the resources of this presbytery. Financial trust is not the only trust we have re-established. As we have moved to become a more Spirit-motivated presbytery and less concerned with control, our congregations and pastors have realized that the elected and paid leadership of this presbytery really do love Jesus Christ and want to help advance the kingdom of God.

Back in 2011, we heard a startling statistic that served as a wake-up call for us to take more seriously our responsibility to partner with our younger generations in growing a vital and relevant church. The statistic that jarred us was this: in 2011 85% of all active pastors (those serving churches) were 58 years or older. The reality that in ten years 85% of the pastors at that moment were likely to be retired shocked us and galvanized us into doing something besides bemoaning the lack of young people in our congregations.

Now in the fourth year of our young elder/young pastor partnership initiative, we have seen a marked increase in the number of those under 40 who are active in regional gatherings and even presbytery gatherings. Initially, we thought of calling it coaching for young elders and pastors, but quickly decided that those of us who were more experienced had at least as much to learn from them as they did from us.

Many of our churches have promoted one-on-one partnerships and support groups between elders

of different generations which have resulted in the heightened involvement of all at the local level and beyond. Our presbytery has initiated the same kinds of partnerships and support groups among pastors, asking our more experienced pastors to partner up with a less experienced pastor for prayer, encouragement, and sharing resources.

New church incubation has continued to be a strength of this presbytery. Beginning in 2011, we chartered three congregations and established four new church developments to keep our total of NCDs at 13. That makes a total of seven churches chartered in the last ten years, a record not matched by any other presbytery. In addition, we partnered with ten new faith communities who are meeting in homes throughout our presbytery seeking new ways of being the church.

I don't want to candy-coat all the changes and transitions through which we have come since 2011. Some of the changes have been difficult and challenged our notions of what a presbytery is or should be. In 2011 our staff was composed of eight full-time and five part-time employees. Today our staff has six full-time and two part-time employees. That number will likely be further reduced by two retirements in the next year - mine being one of them.

However, there are several bits of good news with these staff reductions: The reductions were due mostly to 'natural causes,' i.e., retirements and new calls. We have been blessed with the volunteer services of recently retired church professionals who help us continue to connect with congregations and pastors.

In 2011, our committees began meeting in different churches in the evenings to increase our

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participation of those still in the workforce and heighten our awareness of the loving diversity of this presbytery. This meant that those who lived in Houston had to travel a bit more for meetings, although our virtual meetings by computer eased the inconvenience. Night time meetings meant that agendas had to be tightened up to make the most of people's time. But we gained some younger Presbyterians on our committees in the process.

Back in 2011, at a staff meeting your deeply committed staff engaged in discussion of global proportions - wondering whether it was true that toilets in Australia flushed in a counter-clockwise direction. I decided to Google for the answer by asking the question: Do toilets in Australia flush in the opposite direction? After checking out numerous web sites, I discovered that the counter-clockwise flush in Australia is a myth. However the funniest response to my question was from an Australian who said, "Australian toilets flush down. If American toilets flush the opposite direction, you are in a lot of trouble."

Sometimes we think the way we are looking at a situation is the only way it can be viewed, until someone presents a different perspective. Part of what we learned back in 2011 was that there are multiple ways of framing a God-centered future story of a church, a presbytery, and a denomination. The truth of this came home to us in the first week of February 2011. A letter signed by a number of pastors of large congregations, including four of our own pastors, was distributed to the denomination, calling for a transformed way of being PC(USA). Even as some in the church were beginning to dismiss the letter and its concerns, a letter from the denomination's Moderator, Stated Clerk, and Executive Director of the GAMC was distributed to the church calling on all Presbyterians to come to the table and engage the discussion of our future together, rather than cast any proposals aside. In the years since then, we have learned once again what it means to be "Reformed and always Reforming."

Through all the changes in

our presbytery there have also been some other exciting developments. We sold some of the property we had on the market for years and partially replenished the Miller Vision Fund, which has now funded more than \$443,000 in projects in our churches. We are leasing space in the presbytery office building to six Presbyterian-related non-profit agencies, creating a Presbyterian Mission Center on Lovett. Our presbytery is an integral part of the Emergent Presbytery Initiative which seeks to merge the best of our ecclesiastical heritage with emerging concepts of how God is using the church today. New Covenant Presbytery is at the forefront of ecumenical and interfaith dialogue. Growing from modest beginnings of a Jewish/Presbyterian dialogue, our presbytery now participates in regular dialogue with many protestant and Roman Catholic churches, Muslims, and other faith groups to promote respect and deeper understanding of different faith traditions.

New Covenant Presbytery is also continuing to enlarge its territory as a worldwide mission partner. In addition to our covenant relationship in Central America with CEDEPCA and South America with the Presbytery of Juan Calvino in Lima, Peru, we have formed a covenant relationship with the Presbytery of Matanzas in Cuba and are exploring other opportunities for mission covenants outside our borders.

For the last five years, God has led us through some dynamic and even transformational changes in the way we "do" presbytery. It was clear in 2011 that the status quo for this or any other presbytery was simply not an option. I'm very proud of the effort the leadership of our presbytery have put into finding the mission God has in mind for us and connecting with all our churches to meet the Lord there.

Several years ago I had some back trouble that was very painful. My doctor sent me to a therapist who taught me some exercises I could do to accelerate my rehabilitation. The therapist also gave me some advice that turned into an ecclesiastical strategy. When I was lying on a therapy table in the midst of dozens of others having physical therapy,

Continued in next column

clerk's corner

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



As I write this column, clerks of sessions across our presbytery are entering important data into their computers, completing Annual Statistical Reports due in Louisville this month. Not a few are probably wondering *why in the world am I doing this? What can Louisville possibly want with this information?*

The Annual Statistical Reports are reviewed by Research Services (a service of the Office of the General Assembly) and used to gather important information about our denomination: membership gains and losses; number of baptisms; participation in Christian Education programs; financial resources; racial ethnic composition of congregations; and so on. Once this information is submitted, Research Services creates a valuable resource for each congregation - *Ten Year Trends*. It is presented in graphs and tables, and includes narrative comparison to other churches of comparable size in the PC(USA). When one year's information is received, it is added to the current trends document and the oldest year drops out. The next edition of *Ten Year Trends* will cover 2000-2010.

To obtain *Ten Year Trends* for your congregation, go to the denomination's website: www.pcusa.org. Search "Ten Year Trends" and you will find the link that will take you to the appropriate page. Each congregation's report can be accessed by entering the congregation's PIN number where required. Your clerk of session can provide the PIN number.

This valuable resource can only be helpful if clerks have submitted the past year's statistical information - every year. Otherwise, the data represented in *Ten Year Trends* is skewed and does not accurately reflect current trends for your congregation. For example, if that information is five years old, this snapshot of your congregation's history is blurred by outdated information.

If your congregation is engaged in an assessment of your ministry and discernment of the future, take a look at *Ten Year Trends* - brought to you by Research Services - your per capita dollars at work.

the therapist asked, "When you look around you, what do you see?" I said, "I see lots of folks in pain." "And how does that make you feel," he queried. "I'm a little embarrassed that I'm making such a big deal out of my pain." "Good," he said. "Keep that in mind. When you are in pain, focus not on yourself but on the situation of others in pain." His advice didn't take my pain away, but it did put it in enough perspective that I could get a break from thinking about myself.

In retrospect, that is what we have done since 2011. We focused on the world and its needs more than on the needs of the organization or institution of the presbytery. Rather than predict where the trends were taking the church, we looked for God and joined the Lord wherever that was - in a house church, a multicultural center, an interfaith dialogue, an island that needed

clean water, a call to equip younger generations for service, or an openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit. As our churches were realizing that the "church" exists wherever the members are, not just at the address of the building, so our presbytery was tumbling to the fact that the presbytery is wherever our churches are.

God has been good and gracious to us as a presbytery in the last five years. We have made significant strides in "growing congregations that passionately engage their community to make disciples." We're still far from where God wants us to be. But we deserve to breathe in the Holy Spirit, hearing these words: "Well done good and faithful servant."

And tomorrow, cheer for our Houston Texans as they play for the NFL title in Super Bowl 50!



Mary's Musings

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

When the little woman-child on the stage spoke, I had a moment of crystal clear vision. It was during the closing worship service of the annual gathering of the Association of Presbyterian Church Educators. The gathering was significantly smaller this year, and not just because of the icy winter weather that had closed so many airports. Nationally, significant numbers of educators lost their jobs in budget-related personnel cuts in their congregations; many more were retiring and their positions were not replaced.

The young woman, her tiny frame dwarfed by the acoustic guitar slung over her shoulder as she prepared to sing was blushing a bit as she blurted out: I don't want you guys to take this the wrong way, but I really have to tell you something. You remind me of my grandmother. Quickly she added that we needed to understand that this was the greatest compliment she could offer because her grandmother was the wisest, most courageous, and faithful person she knew.

Uneasy, but good-natured laughter filled the hall, recognizing the young woman's comments were truly meant as a compliment – and that unfortunately, her words held a sad truth. Despite the interspersion of VERY young people attending the concurrent Association of Presbyterian Youth Workers conference, those gathered were indeed, well aging if not just plain old.

I guess it was a couple of years ago that I realized that I had somehow become part of the senior delegation – at least among those still serving congregations in paid positions. Here in New Covenant, I am aware of more retired professionals in educational ministry than I am of individuals working with full time calls in the church. I know times are tough with most congregational budgets. Yet the need for individuals passionate about teaching and intentional faith formation in our churches continues. Will there be a next generation of specialists in Christian Education? Will they be employed or will they simply be volunteers in whom we have invested training and have then empowered to do ministry?

The truth of the matter is that the story of the trained and empowered volunteer is MY story. I was a stay-at-home mom with two young children who decided to use my love of teaching in the church. I was encouraged by leaders in my congregation and given the opportunity to design programs and curriculum that reflected my holistic understanding of the role of Christian education in congregational life. And the day finally came when I walked into a stressed and stretched pastor's office and said "I think I can help here." And my journey as a professional educator began.

I'm proud to be a part of a cadre of wise, and faithful servants of Christ. But I'm saddened to imagine a future without new, younger people having the opportunity to grow in similar service and bringing their fresh enthusiasm to the table. I see my role increasingly as a mentor for that next generation, whether they are paid or volunteers.

So who is that super-volunteer in your congregation? Can you think of out-of-the box ways to support their growth, like providing scholarships for learning opportunities, a small stipend to invest in a tiny professional library, or even the simple acknowledgment that you see God given gifts for ministry in the way they are serving the church. **Please** make my day. Call me with a name. Let me connect them to a grand company of passionate disciples. Together we can partner to nurture the growth of not just educators but of education in our churches.

Community News

Church rises after being heavily damaged by Ike

By Imelda S. Carrillo, Commissioned Lay
Pastor at Emmanuel PC, Galveston

It finally has come to pass that Emmanuel Church of Galveston has returned to her roots. We moved into our beautiful, newly renovated building last October after a long struggle to rebuild after Hurricane Ike came our way. But good things come to those who wait upon the Lord!

We owe a lot of good folks our heartfelt appreciation and gratitude for their prayers, support, time, and donations. We could not have done it without the help of our brothers and sisters. We still have a few glitches that need to be taken care of, but for the most part, all is well.

A Service of Dedication



High water damaged most of the interior.

will be held Sunday, April 17, 3:00 p.m. Please make every effort to join us for this service of thanksgiving and celebration. You don't need to wait until then – when visiting the Island, stop by and visit! The church is located at 5602 P ½ Road in Galveston. We'd love to have you.

IKE Recovery continues in Rosharon

By Barbara Wilson, Ike Recovery Team
(Source: Laurie Hawley)

Volunteers from the Reformed Church of America, under the leadership of Laurie and Bruce Hawley, have reported that their work in Rosharon was amazing! They made their headquarters at the PDA Village at First PC, Texas City, while rebuilding the home belonging to Mahn, an American Vietnamese man and Cherung Nay, his American Cambodian wife.

After the storm, the priority for the family was to use their meager resources to rebuild their greenhouses to maintain their livelihood, which is growing water spinach and other vegetables for sale to the Oriental markets of Houston.

The volunteers said that it was hard to imagine how the family of six lived in the 800 sq. ft. home with only two bedrooms, a kitchen with a mattress on the floor at night for sleeping, and a living room.

Mahn was truly amazed as

he watched "demotion team" from Meredith Drive Reformed Church turn into a construction team, which jacked up the house so new wood could be placed on the concrete blocks. The amazement continued with the addition of new windows and insulation, a new electric panel with new breakers, and wiring strung in places where previously there was no electricity. Because of the ingenuity of the volunteers, the house will now have three bedrooms. No more sleeping on a mattress on the kitchen floor!

When repairs were completed, the volunteers and the family gathered in a circle, and prayed for God's blessing on the family and their home.

How can you help? Contact one of the following for information or to volunteer: Kendall Boyd at kboyd@pbyofnewcovenant.org, Marilyn Marble at txcity1@pcusa.org or call 409.370.7124, or Ashley Gill at PDA.CallCenter@pcusa.org.

E Highlights

Yarn necklaces earn money for mission project

By Penny Bell, First PC, Conroe

Four nimble-fingered, industrious members of the Mission Sewing Ministry at First Presbyterian, Conroe, are working for peace in the Middle East one necklace at a time. Since Fall 2010 they have made and sold over 800 yarn necklaces and raised \$5,000 from sales and donations. Their goal is to raise \$12,000 for Greg Mortenson's Central Asia Institute, which builds schools for girls in remote regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan (as told in *Three Cups of Tea*).

The idea for making the necklaces came from the Synod of Living Waters (Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.), where they were used to raise



Linda Harshbarger, Joan Lowery, Suzie Reese, and project organizer Sarah Gutekunst (l.to r.) display some of their yarn necklaces.

funds to support its mission project, Living Waters for the World. Mission teams to share the gift of clean, sustainable water with communities in need.

The popularity of the beautiful necklaces, which are very lightweight yet look like they are made with beads and jewels, has been a delight to the sewing ministry members. Each necklace takes about 15 minutes to assemble. They are made with multicolor and solid color ribbon, track, flag, and metallic yarns. The ability to make a simple crochet chain stitch using a large needle is the only skill required.

The necklaces will be sold at the Spring Conference of the Presbyterian Women of the Presbytery of New Covenant, which takes place April 9 at St. John's Presbyterian, Houston.

Interested in starting a similar project in your church? Email Conroe's project organizer, Sarah Gutekunst. Instructions and a list of sources for yarn will be mailed (for \$2) or emailed (for \$1) to anyone interested in starting a similar project in their own church (jfgsmg@consolidated.net).

Vision Initiative Grants to be awarded!

Priority in funding Vision Initiative Grants this year will be given to activities that have the goal of increasing the overall membership of our presbytery. This increase may be the result of new church development, redevelopment of established churches, general outreach to unchurched individuals, or to other approaches within the Mission of the Presbytery.

Priority in funding will be given to activities which reach out as the Presbyterian Church

to communities, groups, and organizations with the express purpose of increasing disciples. For more information, see Policy and Guidelines and Application posted on home page of presbytery website, www.pbyofnewcovenant.org.

Vision Initiative Grant applications are due to vigrant@pbyofnewcovenant.org no later than Thurs., March 31. Applicants will receive notification that their application was received.

Making History TODAY



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

Civil War Sesquicentennial

On April 12, 1861, Confederate forces fired on the federal garrison in the Charleston harbor. Thirty-four hours later the federal forces surrendered. This event signified the beginning of the American Civil War, a conflict that would last four years and would cost more American lives than any war, before or since. Abraham Lincoln, president throughout the conflict, was assassinated four years, almost to the day (April 15), after the outbreak of the war.

This year marks the sesquicentennial anniversary of the war's outbreak. On Sunday, April 10, at 5:00 p.m. the Presbyterian Historical Society and the Presbyterian Historical Society of the Southwest will host a lecture and a dinner at Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church in Houston to mark the occasion. The Rev. Dr. Ken Peters, pastor of the New Braunfels Presbyterian Church and a member of the board of the Presbyterian Historical Society of the Southwest, will deliver a paper on "Presbyterians and the Civil War." The cost is \$20 per person. Any persons interested in attending are welcome but need to RSVP to Samantha Piccolo at 215-928-3889 by March 23.

Presbyterians, in both the north and the south, were an important part of the religious, political, and cultural landscape of the day. For example, Lincoln's family worshiped at First Presbyterian Church in Springfield, Illinois, before he became president and at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. after he entered the White House. The pastor of the New York Avenue Church, Phineas D. Gurley, had a close relationship to Lincoln and his family, and delivered the funeral sermon at the White House on April 19.

In the south one thinks of Robert Lewis Dabney who was not only a professor of theology at Union Seminary and a pastor, but served as a chaplain in the Confederate army and Stonewall Jackson's chief of staff. In addition, such persons as James Henley Thornwell, pastor and professor in South Carolina, and Benjamin Morgan Palmer, pastor in South Carolina and in New Orleans, come to mind.

Did your church exist during the Civil War? What do you know about that part of its story? What do you know about how the Civil War affected your own personal family? Did members of your family participate? If you'd like to learn more about Presbyterians and the American Civil War, come to the lecture and dinner on Sunday, April 10. Registration is at 5:00 p.m. The lecture begins at 5:30 p.m.

Lord, when did we see you? I was sick, and you visited me.

Sensitivity. Openness. Acceptance. Compassion. These are the gifts that spiritual care visitors in the hospital bring to patients and their families. These are healing gifts from Christ who blesses the POP ministry.

If you feel called to minister in a hospital setting and gifted to serve, Presbyterian Outreach to Patients is looking for you. Due to POP's expansion we have opportunities for hospital ministry in Sugarland, Katy, Southeast Houston, and Webster/Clear Lake.

After you have thought and prayed and want to know more, call POP Director Steve Spidell at 281-704-0308.



Wendy's Bailey-wick

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

I confess... I am one who likes to be in control. Ask Mary or Mike who rents the car when we travel to denominational events? They'll tell you... it's me. Being "out of control" is my biggest fear. The thought of losing control of my mind, my body, my health, my career, my marriage, my kitchen, my... is often the subject of my most vivid nightmares.

For close to a quarter century I've been preaching that none of us have control over our lives, that trusting God to love us and care for us and provide for us is the basis of faith and the assurance of the Gospel. The truth is I never preach anything I don't believe, and I have always believed that God would take care of everyone and everything, except me. I trust God to work miracles in your life, but mine? Well, that's a different story. And, I'm being brutally honest here - I don't trust that God will have MY best interest at heart, or do things MY way, so I convince myself it's better for me if I keep control over myself and my life. But, my friends, we can't. Being in control of our lives... it's a myth.

On September 5, God revealed this truth to me, the painful way. Dwayne and I were riding our motorcycles through the hill country, just outside of Boerne. As we came to what we later realized the locals call "dead man's curve," I slowed down and leaned to the left. I leaned so far my bike was scraping loudly against the pavement, and sparks were flying. I was going too fast for my Yamaha cruiser to make the curve. I set the bike up a little, so the scraping would stop, but that spun the bike off the pavement. As soon as my front wheel hit the sandy gravel of the road's shoulder, the bike and I parted ways; I was tumbling, spinning, rolling towards the ground. For what was probably only a fraction of a second, but seemed to me like an eternity, I realized I couldn't stop what was coming. I had absolutely no control over where I would land, what I would hit.

It was a couple months later, as I was journaling with a group of pastors at Pat Clark's house, that I realized that eternal fraction of time was a pivotal moment of faith for me. What I thought would have been the scariest moment of my life, was, in fact, the time I was most at peace. It may have been the gracious gift of adrenaline running through my veins, but in the very moment I felt totally out of control, I experienced the all-consuming grace of God. I felt loved; I felt the providential arms of God enveloping me; I had faith.

The myth of control is really just that - myth. All of us are constantly tumbling through space like I was around dead man's curve. But God sends us what we need. The first man to stop and see how I was doing said, "Good thing we don't call it 'dead woman's curve'!" I laughed. The second couple to stop had gone to high school with the first man, and they were reconnected after close to two decades. I am amazed by what God does. That's what Christians do. We trust in and are amazed by the resurrection power of Jesus Christ. We trust that no matter what curves the road of life brings us, God is in charge and provides everything we need - even if it's not what we want.

The wipe out was fear confronted and overcome by the power of the Spirit. The resulting lack of movement in my shoulder is more than an inconvenient impediment in raising the elements of communion or pronouncing the benediction... it is a sign of my own mortality, and my utter reliance on God's graciousness. I confess I still like to be in control, but I also realize that relying on the power of the Spirit of Christ is so much more powerful and lovely and amazing than anything I could ever imagine on my own. Thanks be to God!

Mission &

Presbyterian Goats and Clean Water for Haiti and Cuba

By Elder John Freeman,
St. John's Presbyterian, Houston

August saw a solar-powered water treatment system installed at the JeLA school/orphanage in Limbé, Haiti by ChristChurch, Bellaire/St. John's, Houston - Living Waters for the World Houston area team. February saw two members of the team participate in another LWW water system installation at a school in Blanket, Haiti. Through these installations, hundreds of Haiti school children, many of them orphans of the 2010 earthquake, plus villagers of Limbé and Blanket, now have clean water to drink and have escaped cholera. Equally important, these children and adults have had training on basic health and sanitation - learning how to best use the clean water and how to avoid spreading disease. And, they have been trained to pass this health and basic sanitation training along to others. The water systems also provide a modest income for the schools as they are able to sell the water to the villagers - a form of Presbyterian microfinance.

As we have engaged with these small Haitian communities, we have developed a growing sense of the importance of sustainability. We have been trying to find ways to help them in day-to-day survival and at the same time provide a modest means of livelihood. To this end, on the last trip, we presented the two schools with young goats, four for the Blanket school and five for the JeLA school. Goats are a source of daily milk and cheese for the children. Milk can also be sold to the villagers. The children learn the care and feeding of the goats and the goats will multiply. Money for the goats was raised by the two churches.

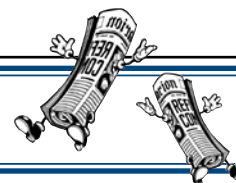


School children of Haiti learn to care for goats provided by New Covenant churches.

Recently our attention has been drawn to the need for clean water in Cuba and to the need to help the fledgling Presbyterian churches there. The poverty in Cuba in some rural areas approaches that of Haiti. Recent changes in the Cuban constitution, reported by Mike Cole following his recent visit, have opened the way for religious activity and for outsiders to support that activity. Living Waters for the World has already established a foothold in Cuba and we hope to capitalize on this as we prepare for a water system installation at a Presbyterian church and seminary there some time in November. We are being joined in this mission by Clear Lake Presbyterian, which will also send a trained team to Cuba for a water system installation and health education at a Presbyterian church.

We invite other churches to consider partnering with us or establishing their own teams in this amazing mission. For information, contact Karen Persely at ChristChurch 713-826-8763 orkrp111154@sbcglobal.net; or John Freeman at St. John's, Houston (713-776-3548, freeman@rice.edu).

NEXT CONNECTIONS DEADLINE:
Wednesday, April 13, for the May/June issue



Ministry

TRANSITIONS

Welcome, to New Covenant Presbytery!

Rev. Frederick (Fred) Seay is serving as Pastor of First Presbyterian, Sugar Land. Fred has transferred from South Louisiana Presbytery where he served First Presbyterian in Lake Charles. A native of Mississippi, Fred attended the University of Southern Mississippi and the Reformed Theological Seminary. He received his MDiv and DMin from Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. His first call to the ministry was as a mission volunteer with Puentes de Cristo and as a mission worker with Communities United for Health (CUPS). His work included Texas-Mexico ecumenical border ministry which consisted of translation, preaching, mission interpretation and coordination between Mexican communities, and visiting church work groups. Fred and his wife Ruth have three children. Fred is returning to New Covenant where he previously served First Presbyterian in Navasota.



Fred Seay

Honorably Retired!

Rev. Kenneth W. (Ken) Jack received Honorably Retired status last October and was recently elected Pastor Emeritus by the congregation of First Presbyterian, Huntsville. He was born, ordained, served in ministry, and retired all within Brazos Presbytery, now New Covenant Presbytery.



Ken Jack

At age 18 Ken served three months as a student missionary in South Korea, where he taught conversational English and gave slide show presentations of his life as a Christian American college student. At Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary he was one of the creators of "experiential" worship that used multi-media to structure the worship experience. During his early years of full time ministry, Ken became the "architect" in the development of Interface, which is now part of Samaritan-Interface.

Ken left full-time ministry to enter the business world, working in an executive/technical search firm. For 30 years he continued to serve in part-time ministry as pulpit supply and as a parish associate. It was in 2001 that Ken began part-time preaching at First Huntsville which led to his acceptance of a call from that congregation, where he served until his disability retirement last October.

Grants available for Social Justice work

Lynn Johnson Social Justice Grant funds are available to fund ministries of social justice, particularly regarding issues concerning equality and inclusion of all persons regardless of sexual orientation. Guidelines for the grant program and an application form can be downloaded from the Presbytery website, www.pbymofnewcovenant.org, or can be obtained by contacting Rev. Helen P. DeLeon at hdeleon@websterpresby.org.

[org](http://www.pbymofnewcovenant.org) or by calling 281-332-1251.

Please submit the grant applications by email to Rev. DeLeon, although applications may be mailed to her at Webster Presbyterian Church, 201 W. NASA Parkway, Webster, TX 77598. Deadline is March 31. Put on your thinking cap, and take a moment to give thanks to God for the generosity and forward thinking of Lynn Johnson, who made these grants possible.

Classifieds

Position available

St. Andrew's PC, Houston, is seeking a Director of Children's Ministry who will develop and oversee all aspects of St. Andrew's ministry to children, from birth through 5th grade. This includes provision of Sunday school, childcare, worship for children and experiences for children planned in cooperation with other areas of ministry such as music ministry, youth ministry, and missions. This position is full-time and benefits eligible. The person filling this position should possess a strong faith in Jesus Christ, passionate love for children, their parents, and children's ministry, experience working with children, and a college degree.

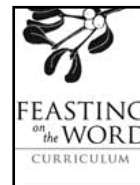
Interested persons should email resume to cdsc@sapch.org. Please enter name "RESUME" in the subject line.

Position available

Young Nak Presbyterian, Houston, is seeking a full-time Youth Director for a multicultural youth ministry. This position will require teaching, counseling, and planning creative activities for middle school and high school students. Those who have a passion to serve God's youth, contact the Rev. Paul Hoang at 713-464-1744 or paulkhoang@gmail.com. Young Nak Presbyterian Church is located at 10005 Neuens Rd., Houston, TX 77080

Sign up to take part in Sample Sunday for a taste of Feasting on the Word Curriculum

Are you looking for a Lectionary-based curriculum option for use with learners from kindergarten through adult? Sign up to take part in Sample Sunday, March 20, and try the new Feasting on the Word Curriculum for free! Growing out of the highly acclaimed lectionary preaching commentary of the same title, this affordable, downloadable curriculum option is something you will want to explore.



Visit www.feastingontheword.net/curriculum

to register, view the video, and receive your free downloads. Use the curriculum with any group in your congregation and send in feedback, and your church will qualify for an extension of the early discount price. One lucky congregation sending in feedback will receive a free one-year subscription! This curriculum offers both solid theology and exceptional, developmentally-appropriate teaching methods and can be used to build a synergy between worship and Sunday School or midweek study.

Free money!

The Evangelism and Renewal Committee would like to encourage churches to look at the ministries they are a part of or would like to be a part of and see if perhaps you might be eligible for some free money! The Presbytery of New Covenant has been given a gift of \$50,000 upon the dissolution of Westminster Presbyterian Church, Beaumont, to award to congregations intent on turning around their decline in

membership. The basic criteria to qualify for consideration is this: that your project should be focused outside your church, spiritual in nature, and intent on growth of the Kingdom not just growth in member of your own church.

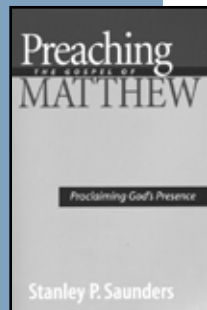
Information about these New Life Grants can be found on the presbytery's home page, www.pbymofnewcovenant.org. Deadline for application is April 18.



Moment for Evangelism

Be a person of blessing! Bless three people this week by asking them a simple question: "How can I ask God to bless you this week?" Then pray for them! You will be blessed as the smile grows across their faces and they will be blessed just by being asked!

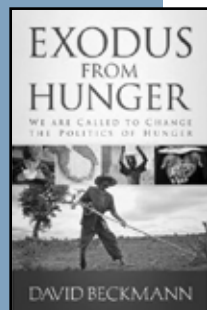
New Resources - Books



Preaching The Gospel of Matthew

By Stanley P. Saunders

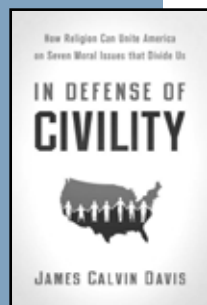
This preaching commentary combines exegesis and creative attention to preaching possibilities that honor scholarship in the text and take seriously the challenging demands on those who would follow Jesus today. Throughout, the author explores the power of God's presence alive in the world and contrasts Christ's kingdom to the powers of Caesar's empire in a way that speaks clearly to disciples today.



Exodus From Hunger

By David Beckman

Beckman is president of Bread for the World, a collective Christian voice urging our nation's leaders to end hunger in our nation and world. The text explores the dynamics of the problem as it exists today, examines the biblical testimony on the issue, and gives suggestions for ways grassroots organizations can become involved in the effort.



In Defense of Civility

By James Calvin Davis

What if religious leaders rose to the challenge of addressing seven tough moral issues of the day with civility? This book seeks to find common ground that could enrich public discourse on seven hot button, divisive issues of our times – abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia, stem cell research, war, poverty and the environment.



God is in the Manger. Reflections on Advent and Christmas

By Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Words of this beloved and influential 20th century theologian and martyr guide and inspire readers of this 41-day, thematic exploration of Advent and Christmas. Each day's readings include a brief excerpt from letters, sermons, or books by Bonhoeffer and from the scriptures that inspired his thinking. Themes explored include Waiting, Mystery, Redemption, and Incarnation, plus dated meditations for each of the twelve days of Christmas.



Numbers and Deuteronomy for Everyone

By John Goldingay

This fourth volume in the new Old Testament for Everyone series is based on both solid biblical scholarship and engaging contemporary insights. Designed for either group or individual study.



Right now:

The Mission of the Church Matters DVD

Six teaching segments include keynote presentations which explore different aspects of the importance of community engagement and mission, punctuated by short illustration film clips that could be used as stand-alone pieces. A theme running through all the presentations is a call to trade the pursuit of the American Dream for a world that desperately needs Christ. Some of the illustrations are of people and groups that embody the principles referred to in the teaching; others are short conversation starting films.



Living Hope:

The Future and Christian Faith

By David Jensen

Dr. Jensen presents an accessible and hope-filled study of eschatology (end times) that focuses on a time when Christians will see the full glory of the kingdom of God, the resurrection of the body, and Christ's promised return. Each of the twelve chapters includes questions for discussion. In addition to the anticipated chapters on the resurrection of the Body, the Second coming, Rapture, heaven and hell, and the Antichrist, there are chapters exploring the theology of hope that undergirds our sacraments.

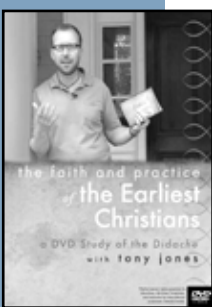


99 Ways to Raise Spiritually Healthy Children

By Kathleen Long Bostrom

Bostrom provides 99 fun, practical, simple ways to nurture a child's faith. Each suggestion is offered in a page and a half format, followed by a key scripture verse and one open-ended follow-up question. Would make a wonderful gift for new parents, a text used by a parent group that covenanted to work through practices together, or for grandparents eager to contribute to the spiritual formation of their grandkids.

New Study Resources



The Faith and Practices of the Earliest Church: the Didache

Emergent church Leader Tony Jones narrates this six-session study of one of the earliest documents describing the community practices of the first century church. Sessions introduce the Didache, and then speak to the Way of Jesus; Baptism, Fasting, Prayer and Communion; How to be Church; Looking to the Future and Back to the Roots of Faith. One copy of **The Teaching of the 12: Believing and Practicing the Primitive Christianity of the Ancient Didache Community** is included.

In the Resource Center

MORE New Study Resources



Infuse Bible Studies

– This is a new series from Faith Alive Resources (publishers for the Christian Reformed Church).

The aim of these studies is to help participants discover where faith and life meet. The series uses a discovery method of asking questions of the biblical text. Additional insights from history and other sources help fill in the details that connect the text to the larger story of God's love and care for us all. The resources are designed to be used for use in small groups or personal study. Free leader's guide can be downloaded. Titles include:

Jonah: fish, flaws and forgiveness – 4 sessions

Esther: courage in a complicated world – 6 sessions

Matthew: one king to rule them all – 8 sessions

Colossians: the new old perfectly imperfect you – 5 sessions



In the Works

A new Bible study series for small groups interested in missional living developed by the Christian Reformed Church.

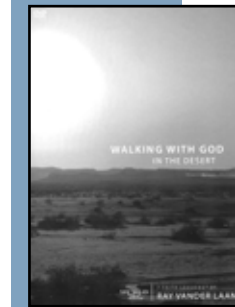
Each study is designed for five weeks and includes discussion guides with opening and closing activities, Bible study, stimulating questions and activities as well as follow up action options and daily reading throughout the week. Sessions are designed for 60 minute sessions and could be used for a Sunday school class. Titles in the series include: *What do I Owe? Managing the Gifts God Gives You*, *Where Do I Come In? Joining God's Mission*, *What Do I Do With My Life? Serving God Through Work*, *How Do I Make it Right? Doing Justice in a Broken World*



Don't Invite them to Church: Moving from a Come and See to a Go and Be Church

By Karen Wilk. Faith Alive Christian Resources. 2010.

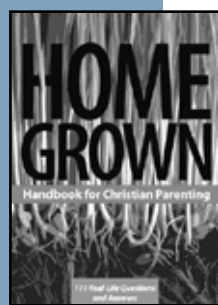
This is a guidebook for an 8-week process for small groups – or whole congregations – to explore a way of becoming a missional people whose daily walk matches their verbal commitment to God's kingdom, "sentness," and the experience of a community grounded in keeping the Great Commission and the two greatest commandments. Each session is introduced with a story for the journey into neighborhood living and offers four pursuits for the week that shape the small group experience – Sideward growth with members of your group, Upward growth in your relationship with God, Inward growth in your spiritual life and Outward growth in your love of neighbor. Additional scriptural reflections are provided for the six days between meetings that relate specifically to the themes of each week.



Walking with God in the Desert

Volume 12 of Faith Lessons by Ray Vander Laan. 7 week DVD study


13 minute video segments featuring popular teacher Vande Laan leading students on a thematic exploration of dry spaces and how the desert stories in scripture provide examples of both testing and promise, faithfulness, and faithlessness. It is tempting to think of God as absent in these dry times such as the loss of a loved one, unemployment, or a crisis of faith. Vander Laan helps us understand that when we recognize our total dependence on God we are blessed with an awareness of God's amazing grace and provision. Users will probably want to purchase the discovery guide, at least for the class facilitator, which is sold separately at Zondervan.com.



Home Grown: Handbook for Christian Parenting

By Karen DeBoer. Faith Alive Christian Resources. 2010.

Containing 111 real-life questions and answers grouped around seven thematic questions, this book can be used as a stand-alone resource for parents. It draws on the expertise of 13 leading voices on faith development and nurture who are solidly based in the Reformed tradition. Their answers are practical and thoughtful. An excellent topical index is particularly useful for those looking for guidance on particular questions as is the annotated bibliography for further study. The accompanying DVD, **Home Grown**, offers 4-5 minutes of responses of real parents to the key question that kicks off each session. Thoughtful and conversation generating questions help build a sense of community among participants as well as build confidence in parental roles in the nurture of the faith of children. Each lesson concludes with three *Live It* suggestions for ways to respond to the learning within the context of day to day family life.



Shake it Up Café

Cokesbury Vacation Bible School Curriculum Exam Kit

This is a non-circulating resource

Churches wishing to evaluate the Cokesbury (United Methodist) option for use in their congregation are welcome to review it in the Resource Center. Children are invited to shake up their lives to become better followers of Jesus. As they explore the Bible as a cookbook filled with God's recipes, children celebrate biblical festivals and discover ingredients for living Christ centered lives. Using two Old Testament and three New Testament stories are arranged chronologically to introduce Jesus, teach about his ministry, death, and resurrection, and reveal the new life he offers us.

March 4-6

Youth Conclave
Camp Cho-Yeh

March 14

Post Retirement Seminar
Presbytery Center

March 15-16

Growing Into Tomorrow
Seminar...Today
Presbytery Center

March 17

Render Unto Caesar Seminar
Presbytery Center

March 19

Session Records Review
First PC, Pasadena

April 9

PW Spring Gathering
St. John's Presbyterian,
Houston

April 22

Presbytery Office closed

May 3-5

Church Professional Retreat
Cho-Yeh Camp and
Conference Center
Livingston

May 30

Presbytery Office closed

June 11

Stated Meeting of the
Presbytery
and Session Records Review
Spring Branch Presbyterian,
Houston

June 18-25

CEDEPCA Partnership Trip
Guatemala

June 30-July 2

Big Tent Event
Indianapolis

July 4

Presbytery Office closed

July 30

Session Records Review
First PC, Livingston

MARCH 14 - 17

Register NOW for Board of Pensions seminars

All seminars will be held at the Presbytery Center in Houston.

- **Post-Retirement Seminar** - March 14, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Retirement planning doesn't end when you retire. This seminar is designed to help keep clergy, lay plan retirees, their spouses and surviving spouses to stay on track.
- **Growing into Tomorrow... Today Seminar** - March 15-16, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. both days. This holistic retirement planning seminar is designed to help mid- to late- career clergy and Benefits Plan members prepare for retirement.
- **Render Unto Caesar Seminar** - March 17, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. This seminar is designed to help clergy, church treasurers, business administrators, and session leaders to understand clergy taxes and terms of call issues.

These seminars are presented by the Board of Pensions. For more information and to register, contact Sharon Darden at the presbytery.



APRIL 9

2011 Spring Gathering of Presbyterian Women of New Covenant

Join in a day of fellowship, enlightenment, and seeking ways to further God's mission for Presbyterian Women on Saturday, April 9. "Spring Clean-Up For Heart and Soul" will be the theme of Presbyterian Women's Spring Gathering at St. John's Presbyterian, Houston.

Worship Leader will be the Rev. Diane Prevary, Stated Clerk of New Covenant.

9:00 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.	Registration and Continental Breakfast
9:30 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.	Welcome and Business Meeting
10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Worship Service and Officer Installation
11:15 a.m. - 1:15 p.m.	Workshops 1 and 2
1:15 p.m.	Lunch

All women in New Covenant churches are invited to participate in the annual PW of New Covenant Spring Gathering. Registration Packets are available from Cluster Coordinators. **Deadline for registration is April 1.**

A stellar group of workshop leaders will share their time and talents.

Here's just a brief look at what is being offered:

- **Ordinary Me... Extraordinary God... Trusting He will equip when I am called...** presented by Karen Anderson
- **The Reason Why We Sing: A History of Gospel Music** presented by Dr. Jacqueline Chambers
- **Reading the Bible with Presbyterian Eyes** presented by Mary Marcotte
- **The Beatitudes: Living in the Already But Not Yet** presented by Connie Nyquist
- **Living with Conflict in the Church** presented by Rev. Diane Prevary
- **Something SMORE for Single Moms** presented by Gail Showalter

(All workshops will be presented two times)

The Offering will benefit His Kids - The Nehemiah Center of Navasota, an after-school program for disadvantaged children; and the women's program of CEDEPCA, a charitable organization that operates educational and training programs throughout Central America. (www.cedepca.org).



APRIL 11-13

BEING REAL

The Convoluted Simplicity of Young Adult Ministry

Rev. Bruce Reyes-Chow is giving a Lifelong Learning workshop on youth ministry at Austin Presbyterian Seminary Monday through Wednesday, April 11-13. Focusing with a congregational lens, he will survey some of the cultural and social trends of young adults and how these impact how we do or do not engage in ministry today. Participants will be able to share and hear postures of ministry in specific areas of church life that may allow for congregations to better connect with young adults.



Bruce Reyes-Chow

Bruce is one of the leading voices of postmodern culture and its impact on the Christian church. He was the Moderator of the 218th General Assembly and is the founding pastor of Mission Bay Community Church in San Francisco, a young, urban and quirky church made up of mostly 20 and 30 year-olds. Bruce is particularly passionate about the intersections between faith, justice, culture, and politics as he continues to work with communities on everything from immigration, labor, racial reconciliation and poverty.

To learn more about this workshop and to register, visit www.austinseminary.edu, click on Continuing Education, and then Christian Leadership. This workshop is made possible by the generous support of First Presbyterian, Bryan. Thanks, friends!

MARCH 24 AND APRIL 28

Religious Leaders Institute

The Coalition for Mutual Respect sponsors its Religious Leaders Institute RLI (formerly known as Clergy Leadership Institute) for clergy and spiritual leaders interested in interfaith dialogue and action. RLI programs are designed to provide a relatively small group of clergy with the opportunity to meet and greet one another and explore cutting edge topics of importance to clergy and the religious community.

Thurs., March 24: 8:00-10:00 a.m. at Congregation Beth Yeshurun (4525 Beechnut). Mark DeMoss will explore the topic of civility in today's world. How can clergy and key community leaders help to bring civility back?

Thurs., April 28, 8:00 10:00 a.m. at Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church, 4930 West Bellfort. The Rev. Pete Steinke will explore the topic, "Living in a Mega-Church World."

Please RSVP to Jodi Bernstein, jodi.bernstein@adl.org.

MAY 3 - 5

It's that time again... The Presbytery of New Covenant's annual Church Professionals Retreat



Mark your calendars now to take a few days in May to revive your senses, relax, and enjoy time with other church professional at a retreat designed especially for you. The retreat will take place May 3-5 at Cho-Yeh Camp and Conference Center in Livingston. Walk the piney woods, lounge on the porch, and/or take a swing on the ropes course! You can even sign up for a 20-minute massage!

John C. Holbert, an ordained minister in the United Methodist Church, will open the door to "Persons You Know from the Book You Love: Great and Not So Great." Free time, cookout, prayer time, great food! Brochures with all the details are being mailed to all church professionals, and also posted on the presbytery website.

MAY 13

COME HEAR

Joseph Haydn's "Lord Nelson Mass"



One of the last masses of Haydn, "Lord Nelson Mass" has been considered perhaps his greatest work. Composed in 1798 during the Napoleonic wars when Haydn's world was in turmoil, he titled the work "Mass for Troubled Times," but soon afterward Admiral Nelson defeated Napoleon in battle and the work was renamed. Haydn's symphonic genius combined with his colorful vocal and choral writing make this mass one of the most often performed choral works of the classical period. It will be performed Friday, May 13 at 7:30 p.m. by the Sanctuary Choir of Memorial Drive Presbyterian, Houston, with soloists and orchestra, conducted by Dr. Charles Hausmann. All are invited to this free concert.

In Our Prayers

Rev. Eid Abdelmassih, Arabic Presbyterian Fellowship, Houston, and family – Eid's father-in-law died December 16, 2010, in Egypt.

Rev. Kyle Walker, chaplain at Texas A&M, and family – Kyle's father died January 10, 2011.

Elder Vicki McKay and family – Vicki's husband, Stuart McKay, died January 13, 2011. Vicki (St. Philip Presbyterian, Houston) has been active on presbytery committees.

Friends and family of the Rev. Cecil Lang, HR – Cecil died January 22, 2011.

Rev. Dave Peterson, Memorial Drive, Houston – recovering from surgery in late January.

Rev. Edward Triem (HR) and Barbara – Barbara's son, William, died January 26, 2011.

Memorial Presbyterian Church, San Augustine, and family of Elder Annie Mae McMillan – Annie, age 95, died January 14, 2011. Annie Mae served as one of the first female deacons and later elders in the church and played the organ there for 65 years.

Rev. Bob Bullock (West Isle Presbyterian, Galveston) – Bob's mother died recently.

Friends and family of Rev. James E. Simmons, HR. – James died January 31, 2011. His sister is Jo Rae Crofton, widow of the Rev. Walter Crofton.

CLP Debbie Battise Kleinman, Indian Presbyterian, Livingston- continuing problems with her eyes.

The people and nations of the Middle East and PC(USA) partners in the region.

**HR = Honorably Retired*



PRESBYTERY OF NEW COVENANT

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