

2015

“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.” Matthew 5: 7. KJV.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.” NRSV.

“Mercy, Misericordia, does not in the least mean forgiveness of sins, but pity of sorrows.”

J. Ruskin.

“The depths of our misery can never fall below the depths of mercy.” Sibbes

“When we sit beside a man’s death-bed we have no harsh judgements to pronounce. Can we not learn to look at men always as we shall at the close of the day? Then it will be easy to feel and exhibit toward all, that love never faileth, that ‘thinketh no evil,’ that ‘hopeth all things.’” J. R. Miller

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A THOUGHT

He who died on Calvary,
Died to ransom you and me.
On the cross He bowed His head,
In the grave He made His bed.
Ever since, the lilies bloom
round the portal of the tomb.
Ever since, o’er all our loss
Shines the glory of the cross.

Margaret E. Sangster

Staff: Rev. Dr. Robert F. Lohmeyer, Pastor; Rev. Susan Liljestrand, Associate Pastor; Sam Baublitz, Director of Children’s Ministries; Caitlin Donohue, Director of Youth Ministries; Gretchen Rye, Director of Congregational Care; Michael Kahl, Adult Choir Director; Tim Wilborn, organist; Mike Garcia, Director of Facilities; Sara Lohmeyer, Church Administrator; Rebecca Huchton, Administrative Assistant; Ruth Briley, Financial Secretary; Ann Reynolds, Y.E.S. Center Director; Scott Russell, CCP Director

New members in 2015: Jasiel Hernandez, Bettina Myers, Lois McHargue, Diane Smart, Bob Shipman, Jack DuRocher and Sam Zimmerli, Bryce and Monica Umfress, John Billingsley, John and Sandra Lang, Quincy Smith, Dennis Longnecker, Shawn Koger, Patricia Scanlan, Emily McAllister, Deanna Bodine, Dick and Margo Norat, Amanda Crow, Jacob Naron, Ken and Carolyn Bruner, April Thibodeaux, Stephani Shumaker, Hannah Martin, Mac and Shirley McKee, and Ross Newstead.

Presbyterian Women, moderated by Marilyn Vordenbaum, began on Thursday, January 8 with both morning and evening classes. Morning classes study was on the Ten Commandments. Nan Schiavo, January Bible study presenter posed the following questions to the PW women to consider:

Do you think the attitude about killing is different today than in the days of the 10 Commandments?

1. Is there a killing that is justified?
2. What are our views as a society about ‘justified’ killing?

Circle Seven continued the Horizon Study, "Reconciling Paul," led by Rev. Gini Norris-Lane

Winter 2015 Adult Sunday School Classes: Squashed: The Nation of Israel v. Greece and Persia, Judith Clough; Presbyterian 101, Sam Junkin; Fellowship 1, Rob Lohmeyer; Friendship Bible study, LeRoy Schlechte; Formative stories from Genesis, Richard Johnson.

The last Art Exhibit was staged in January with works by Carol Korman, Tim Huchton, Betty Byrd, and Julie Dunlap. Critiques by Diana M. Hurst. Once the office door was locked there would be no more exhibitions.

Presbyterian Women Spring Gathering on "Peace within the Storm," was held on March 20-22 at Mo-Ranch.

On March 1, Sara Hamilton began her Sunday School class, "Stained Glass for the Church: History, Techniques, and Iconography." The class met until end of May. Other classes were Beginning Steps to Contemplative Prayer, Fred Johnson; Friendship Bible Study, LeRoy Schlechte; Turning Points in History, Eric Rhoda; and The Wired Word, Sonny Payne.

Presbyterian Women's Circle on March 12 addressed Exodus 20:16 on 'False Witness', presented by Nan Schiavo. Her three questions to the circles were:

1. How does this commandment affect us?
2. Why is this commandment important?
3. How can you change your life by keeping this commandment?

"Glory to God, a hymnal for all generations" went on sale for \$20.00. Each hymnal could be purchased in the name of a loved one.

The Currie Enrichment Series, presented by Dr. Bill Leonard, was held over three days April 17-19. The study was entitled, "A Sense of the Heart: Christian Religious Experience in the U.S." Dr. Leonard is a professor of church history at Wake Forest University School of Divinity in Winston-Salem, N.C. has written over 15 books, and over 400 articles.

Presbyterian Women Circle Meeting and Bible study met on April 9. Diana Hurst was the Bible Study presenter. Topic: "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

Questions: "Think very hard about this Commandment. It is not as cut-and-dried as it might first appear."

1. Do you feel that this Commandment is a greater sin than most of the others? Say why or why not.
2. Is this Commandment, that goes against all of our God-given inclinations, the hardest one to keep?
3. Without the breaking of this Commandment by the rich and famous, what would the tabloids print?

Circle 7, the evening Circle to continue study of "Reconciling Paul: A Contemporary Study on 2 Corinthians led by Gini Norris-Lane.

The Rev. Dr. Tom Huser began serving as the Parish Associate to help Rob with hospital visitation, of the sick and the home-bound. Tom will serve until the Session calls an Associate Pastor.

Rev. Susan Liljestrand, a daughter of two Presbyterian ministers, was welcomed by the church mid-July to be the Temporary Associate Pastor. Susan was born in Liberty, TX and raised in Corpus Christi. She received a Master of Divinity from Austin Presbyterian Seminary. Susan was an associate pastor for three years at the Presbyterian Church in Walton Beach, FL and spent thirteen years as Pastor in Burnet, TX. She has a beloved, crazy old cat named Rocky.

“Come to the Waters” was the Presbyterian Women’s Bible study for the coming year, September through May; Moderator, Marilyn Vordenbaum; Moderator-Elect Sara Hamilton. In November, June Begeman led the Bible study in the morning, Gini Norris-Lane at the 7:00 p.m. class.

“Rehab’s Rope” exists to aid girls, the youngest of whom is 11, forced into India’s sex trade. The work provides education and vocational training so they can integrate into their communities in a positive manner. “Rehab’s Rope” is a faith-based non-profit organization following Jesus’ teaching, to transform lives by God’s love in action.

A Christmas tea, hosted by Presbyterian Women, was given Thursday, December 10 from 11 am to 1 pm.

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Let nothing
upset you;
Let nothing
frighten you.
Everything is changing,
changing;
God alone is
changeless.
Patience attains
the goal.
Who has God
lacks nothing:
God alone fills all
our needs.
Saint Teresa of Avila

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Articles/pieces written in 2015 that are of timeless interest.

On May 1, Caitlin Donohue was hired to be the new Director of Youth Ministries.

Caitlin received her Master of Divinity degree from Chandler School of Theology at Emory University. She spent four years as Director of Children and Youth Ministries at Hope Presbyterian Church in Austin where she planned and directed a diverse and meaningful youth ministry on the Presbytery level, working with the Mid-Winter Planning-Team students and helping lead and equip teams of high school student leaders in planning and carrying out Presbytery-wide youth events.

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John Knox Ranch received much damage from heavy rains on May 23. JKR hosts many children during the summer. The Youth of the church will do a Work Day there on June 3.

The Dining Hall was demolished, and much damage occurred at the pool and the Meeting House and some of the cabins.

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance offered much needed help. The congregation was asked to donate many items lost in the flood.

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Stephen Ministry Leader Training at St. Louis

I would like to thank everyone at FPC for making my trip to St. Louis possible. Being trained as a Stephen Minister is deeply rewarding. Now, as a Stephen Leader, I have the added privilege of introducing other members of our congregation to the Stephen Ministry program, to become Stephen Ministers, a service that fills the vital need of highly confidential one-on-one Christian caregiving within our congregation and community.

The ministry has been growing for 40 years. There are now over 12,000 congregations worldwide, representing 178 Christian denominations, from all 50 states, 10 Canadian provinces and 24 other countries. More than 65,000 pastors, church staff and lay persons have been trained as Stephen Leaders. They have trained over 600,000 Stephen Ministers.

I became more aware at each session of the precision with which our existing Leaders Bev and Fred Kapelle and Liz Murray, conduct trainings in our church. I was so proud to stand up as representative of FPC Kerrville when we were acknowledged as a 20-year+ Stephen Ministry congregation. Many ask “what do Stephen Ministers do?” Simply put, we show up; when the flowers and cards stop coming, when the loved ones have all gone home, or when there just isn’t anyone else you can talk to, Stephen Ministers are there to give loving, caring Christian support.

Jane Lehman

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Pastor's Note August 16, 2015

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb" Revelation 22:1

There is a river outside the window of the cabin where we stayed this past week. It is deep and vibrant and flows beyond the forty-four years that I have come to know it. It flows beyond where children come down to its banks to skip rocks. It flows for a fly-fisherman casting a line in the evening sun. It flows beneath a bed of white snow in winter and mayflies in spring. Whatever the season, whatever the weather, it flows.

I have communed with this river over time. I remember my grand-mother escorting me by the hand down to its waters. I have skipped a few stones of my own and taught my son to do the same. I have been immersed in its world that is always changing, the direction of which is never changing. In this way, the river has become, for me, a metaphor for faith and life. Season after season, year after year, it flows.

Even as I write the words, it is hard not to wonder, does our own love flow so freely? When news is not favorable, when our convictions are challenged or when we disagree with brothers and sisters around us, does our own love flow so freely? Or is ours a "fair weather" kind of love whose spiritual streams occasionally run dry?

I opened a book by C.S. Lewis the other day, one I had read a long time ago. The book is entitled "The Four Loves," an examination of divine and human love. In it, I came across that wonderful line that gets to the heart of the matter. After describing a variety of false loves, Lewis write, "...a man's spiritual health is exactly proportional to his love for God." Our spiritual wholeness and wellbeing, says Lewis is 'proportional' to our 'love of God.'

In such love, we learn what it is to truly love one another as Christ has loved us (even to the point of death). As I think about the things that divide us on a daily basis, pettiness and walls, polarization and stumbling blocks. I am reminded of a river that flows no matter what comes its way. That is what my grand-mother invited me to see.

As Keith Longnecker conveyed last Monday as we shared communion, I am amazed at how many people in the church sacrifice their time, effort and means "simply because they care." Whatever the season, whatever the weather, it flows. God's love is like that. I pray we may go and do likewise.

Rob Lohmeyer

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Youth Mission Trip

The first week of July, a few of our senior high youth group, Kristina Tuschak, Mason Schlechte, Bailey Havis, Parker Cowden, Gillian Stieren, experienced a fantastic mission trip to Ashville, North Carolina with Ashville Youth Mission. We had the chance to serve six different agencies or organizations in the Ashville area and met many memorable people. Our projects included packing supplemental food packs for kids at the food bank, cleaning and organizing furniture, clothes, and housewares to be given to newly housed people, playing with children, filling up sand boxes, pruning and weeding, playing bingo

with homeless veterans, and learning from adults with significant brain injuries. The afternoons spent with veterans and people living with brain injuries were especially impactful for the students. They enjoyed having conversations with these people and discovering that they have many things in common. Each evening, we gathered at First Presbyterian Church, Ashville with four other Presbyterian youth groups to reflect on our day's work. We also squeezed in some fun white-water rafting and ziplining. Thanks to our FPC family for all your prayers and support.

Caitlin Donohue

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Gretchen Rye was welcomed to the church staff as Director of Congregational Care in September, 2015.

In moving to a two-pastor church, it was prudent to utilize talents from our trained laity in our congregation. Since the days of Rev. Tom Currie there have been a number of people in similar positions.

Gretchen will work closely with pastors and staff, Deacons and Stephen Ministers. She will care for those who are ill, homebound, or residing in long-term facilities. Her training will help her connect members to community resources and offer comfort to those in need, those in isolation who struggle with mind, body or spirit.

Gretchen was born in Pflugerville, TX, was baptized, confirmed and married at Immanuel Lutheran Church where she served as the Day School Director among other duties.

She is a graduate of Southwest Texas State University (now Texas State University) with a degree in Recreational Administration in 1998. Gretchen worked in Geriatrics/Psychiatric programs in service to the older population. Later she transitioned into public education until her move in 2013 to Kerrville.

Gretchen's husband, Tim, (to whom she has been married for 16 years and has three daughters, Katy 12, Susanna 11, and June 6) is the Administrator of Peterson Medical Associates.

They joined FPC in 2014, Gretchen jumped right into service with Children's Ministry, VBS, All-Church Retreat Planning, Officer of the Nominating Committee, and Stephen Ministry.

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A Beautiful Song About Love

During the Reformation, John Calvin believed that the Song of Songs concerned physical love and should be in the Canon. It is fair to say that the literal/natural approach to interpretations of the Song of Songs has replaced the allegorical approach. The Song of Songs is an interesting study in terms of historical interpretation because no other biblical book witnesses to such a definite and universally recognized shift in genre identification. The Song of Songs is a literary, poetic exploration of human love that strongly affirms loyalty, beauty, and sexuality in all their variety. With metaphor and extravagant imagery, the Song writer spins a tale of human love into the cadence of verse, innocent of our quest for historical persons behind the text.

Come join us to explore the avenues of this beautiful collection of love poetry which more than anything stresses commitment between two people. Let's discuss what elements are necessary for a personal relationship and see how we can broaden our relationship with God one on one. (The class started on Tuesday, October 13.)

Nancy Mallory

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Pastor's Report on Session Retreat at Mo-Ranch

"With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Ephesians 4: 2-3.

A church member once said to me, "If one more person tells me 'to love others' or even mentions the word 'peace,' I think I am going to throw up!" When she said this, I could almost hear the voice of Sally from Charles Shultz' 'Peanuts: "IF ONE MORE PERSON TELLS ME TO 'LOVE OTHERS' OR EVEN MENTIONS THE WORD 'PEACE' I THINK I AM GOING TO THROW UP!" In retrospect, I think I know what that person meant.

She was describing those moments when we respectfully disagree with others, but are made to feel like (by not going along with the crowd), we are somehow "not loving others" or not interested in "peace." The fact is, some may indeed love others, but not subscribe to a particular point of view. Some may indeed work for peace, but do so by being honest about their view.

Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, "With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Here Paul was not suggesting, LOVE, LOVE, LOVE in a trite or superficial sort of way. As Paul's life can testify, genuine love is caring for others even when it's difficult. As Norman Maclean once put it, it is a call "to love completely without complete understanding."

Even as your session met at Mo-Ranch on Saturday, August 29th to plan for the coming year, Elders were invited to reflect on the letter to the Ephesians and the introduction to Eugene Peterson's book, "Practicing Resurrection: A conversation on Growing Up in Christ." This led to a conversation about how a church grows, how we can better care for others, and what practical things FPC can do to be more "faithful and effective in our daily practice of the Christian life (A Declaration of Faith)."

As such, we discussed the recent amendment to the 'Book of Order' with regard to the definition of marriage, affirming the amendment's allowance for freedom of conscience in such matters for sessions and for pastors. We spoke openly and honestly, representing a wide range of views. We did not vote to enact a policy, but allowed time for prayer and reflection on the role of marriage in scripture, new awareness about human experience, and what resources the Gospel brings to bear on human life and relationships.

Additionally, the session identified key areas of need in the congregation, affirming the work of Susan Liljestrang in her role as temporary pastor and Gretchen Rye, as director of congregational care. The session began discussion of the formation of an Associate Pastor Nominating Committee to identify and call a new associate pastor.

Lastly, I am sure we have all heard that annoying voice of LOVE, LOVE, LOVE, but what your session is commending for the coming year is the kind of love of which the apostle speaks, “humility, gentleness, patience, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” It is this kind of love that brings us together (mixed-bag though we are), and takes us on a journey – from manger to wilderness, from river to cross, from the depths of an empty tomb to the joyful songs of Easter Morning. In this is love, growth, faith and life.

Rob Lohmeyer

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“The quality of mercy is not strained;
It droppeth, as a gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blessed;
It blesses him that gives, and him that takes;
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown;
His scepter shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above the sceptered sway,
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute of God Himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's,
When mercy seasons justice. Therefore,
Though justice be thy plea, consider this –
That in the curse of justice, none of us
Should see salvation; we do pray for mercy;
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy.”
William Shakespeare

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An Historic Timeline for 2015

There are far too many killings, mass murders in the U.S. this year to mention all of them.

On January 1, President Vladimir Putin of Russia stated “We will never pursue the path of isolation.”

On January 5, the 144th Congress convened under Republican control for the first time since 2006.

In Paris on January 7, terrorists murder 12 at the office of a magazine that published cartoons of Muhammed deemed highly offensive to orthodox Muslims.

Croatia elected its first woman president, Kolanda G. Kitarovic, on January 12.

In January King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia died and was succeeded by King Salman.

Conflict between Ukrainian and Russian forces continues on and off for months.

Saudi Arabia attacks Yemen in March.

China is observed commandeering international waters in the South China Sea and building islands for military bases.

Most nations, convening in Paris, strike yet another deal on climate change.

Russia begins aerial intervention in the Syrian Civil War ostensibly to attack ISIS strongholds, in reality to protect the Assad regime.

The European Union rebuffs Greece's demand for austerity relief due to that nation's massive debt.

The US and other nations strike a deal limiting Iran's nuclear capability in return for loosening sanctions.

In November ISIS struck four locations in Paris killing and maiming many; killed 33 in Surus, Turkey, brought down a Russian passenger plane over the Sinai, and killed 14 in mass shootings in San Bernadino, California.

The continuing refugee crisis roils Europe as hundreds of thousands flee from terrorism and war in the Middle East and North Africa.

An earthquake devastated an area of Nepal, killing many.

Space X, owned by Elon Musk, successfully lands a space rocket.

A number of police shootings of black men initiate the rise of the "Black Lives Matter," movement.

Restrictions on Cuba lifted; Americans permitted to travel there.

The Pan American games were held in Toronto.

Five people were killed in a Boston shooting while other shootings and murders occur across the country.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud Party won re-election.

David Cameron won a second term as British Prime Minister.

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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN REFLECTIONS

We had been invited to worship at FPC by Liz and Pat Murray, and Wes and Rev. Gini Norris Lane. We visited on several occasions and really enjoyed it; but it was not until our children attended Vacation Bible Study in 2013 that we were really hooked. Sam Baublitz made us feel like our children were truly welcome and part of the church community, including the fall up-coming 2013 Koinonias. We felt we truly belonged; we had found a home.

On our first day of Sunday school class, Tim and I accidentally went into the 'wrong' class, "Fellowship One." We had planned on attending Presbyterian 101 so we could learn about the church on a more expansive level however, I believe Divine intervention stepped in and guided us to a class where acquaintances became friends and a void in our lives was fulfilled.

We understood we were so much a part of the community that we almost forgot we had not officially joined the church. We officially became members of the church in February, 2014 and, that day, hosted the Fellowship 1 Super Bowl party to celebrate.

We have loved how this beginning led to so many more cherished relationships and how God worked for us through so many of you. It's our challenge to continue with this motivation, to share the warm embrace we received from others, to keep it going, and pass it on.

Gretchen Rye, (Tim, Katy, Suz, and June)

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From "Tales of a Wayside Inn."
The dawn is not distant,
Nor is the night starless;
Love is eternal!
God is still God, and
His faith shall not fail us;
Christ is eternal!
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
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Five years ago at age 35 I became a Christian. What a very different world I entered. In the past everyone but family were strangers; today I am surrounded by loving, Christian people.

Now I live with a clear conscience, no longer burdened by the wrong choices I had made and would have continued to make had I not become a Christian.

While in my thirties my husband and I, while living in Austin, hired a babysitter for one or two days a week to care for our two children as I was working at my small bookkeeping business. What a surprise we had on her first day. She was in her 70's; I was not used to older people working yet, thankfully for me and my family, this gracious lady came into our lives.

What a treasure she was; she was wonderful with our children, cleaned the kitchen, even showed me how to clean as I had no idea how to, AND went to church every Sunday. A revelation for me! One day

we drove downtown and spotted her beautiful old stone church. It made a subconscious impression on me even then.

Luke 2:19: "But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."

Just like Mary I treasured up all these things and this loving and kind woman. She never left my heart and I wondered what it was that made her so content, and happy with her life. And then I became a Christian and found out!

At first I thought that all my mistakes and errors of judgement would weigh me down, that I would continue to repeat them over and over. But Jesus and baptism cleaned away the guilt of those bad memories. And the teachings of Jesus have led me down paths of forgiveness, kindness, service, and renewal. And the body of Christ, the people of God, surround me now with friendship and community and companionship.

Now I understand why I drove out of my way to see her church, and why, at 70, she was still helping others in her small, unglamorous ways.

Audrey Mitchell

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