The Mission Outreach Committee is hosting a Pajama and Book Drive on Sunday, September 23rd to benefit the Palm Beach County chapter of the Pajama Program. To learn more, please visit their website (pajamaprogram.org).

Please help by bringing either new pajamas and/or new books for children of all ages. There is a special need for adult size pajamas for teenagers. Drop-off collection boxes will be located in the Narthex before and after all worship services. Children are also invited to wear their favorite PJ’s to church!

Our donations will be distributed to various nonprofit organizations within Palm Beach County, including several that we already support as a church family: AVDA, Boys and Girls Club, Caridad Migrant Clinic, and Family Promise. In Matthew 25 we are told that we will be blessed when we give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, and clothing to the stranger. The Pajama Program provides us with the opportunity to bless and be blessed. It is exciting to give tangible gifts to bless the children of our community in this special way!
Occasionally I hear a song on the radio that is so raw, direct, and reflective that it grasps my heart and simply will not let go. Kacey Musgraves’ song Space Cowboy is the most recent addition to that canon of songs. Only two weeks ago did I hear this beautiful and haunting song on the radio and found that I was bound—heart, soul, and mind—by its lyrics. It simply would not let me go and I had not the slightest clue why. The basic narrative of the song is about finally letting go of a dying relationship and the deep sorrow that follows. Though heartbreak is deeply and powerfully infused in the lyrics, that narrative is not my narrative. In a few weeks I will celebrate thirty-one years of marriage, and I have never stopped adoring my wife and finding imaginative ways of expressing my love for her.

What was inevitable for me was the decision to download this song onto my iPhone and listen to it again and again, not understanding the inescapable hold it had on my imagination. This morning, during my morning run—and listening to this song again and again on repeat—the mist of confusion scattered and with piercing clarity I heard what my subconscious had heard all along: Musgraves’ words, “You look out the window while I look at you”, had become God’s word to me. Several weeks ago I turned fifty-eight, and that birthday gave me pause to ponder just how much of my life has been frittered away looking “out the window”, longing for something more.

It is difficult to appreciate and value a blessing you are standing right in the middle of when your gaze is out the window, wanting something else. And the whole time my focus is out that window, God’s focus is right on me—longing that I not let go of God’s deep love for me. It is true that in my baptism I attached myself to God’s redemptive work in the world. But fundamentally, God demands less of me than what God desires to give me. But God’s gifts are inextricably bound to “obeying his voice, and by clinging to him.” Yet, God will not “close the gate” to “fence you in”. God sets before each of us the choice either to “cling” to a deeply satisfying relationship with God or to pursue whatever it is we see out the window.

Rarely do I watch the music video for songs I enjoy. Nancy Fine, my colleague in ministry, suggested to me this morning that I watch this video. The final scene is the clincher for me: as the lyrics repeat, “You can have your space, cowboy. I ain’t gonna fence you in. Go on, ride away in your Silverado”, the young cowboy in question rides away. Musgraves is bathed in the soft light of the remaining light of dusk, while dark clouds appear and close in around the one who chooses to leave. The implication is clear: what is “out the window” lacks the beauty of what is left behind. Here, in these words from Deuteronomy, God already knows that and pleads with us to “Choose life, choose me, choose us.”
Our Nurture Faith column has a new look!
Contributors will be sharing short responses to questions
about their personal daily spiritual practices for nurturing faith.

When I was asked by Dr. Hood to contribute to his new column I immediately said, “Yes!” A daily nurturing of our faith is vitally important for a deeper walk with God and for living life with greater purpose and value. Yet, many of us have not established a consistent daily practice to accomplish this goal. Early in my faith walk I struggled to keep a regular routine. Through trial and error and often laughing at myself, I am today more comfortable with my daily practice.

What is your daily practice for spending time with God?

My current daily practice begins early each morning at 5:20 a.m. I get up, brush my teeth, and make the bed if it hasn’t already been made by my husband, often already awake ahead of me. By 5:40 a.m. we are sitting in the quiet of the living room and begin our daily devotions that include quiet, prayer, and reading from a daily devotional, a practice we started at the beginning of our marriage some 28 years ago. We allow the chosen biblical text and the accompanying reflection to individually speak to us, then share what the Spirit has placed on our hearts. I also keep a personal journal of insights gleaned from our time of reflection. We end by sharing a prayer out loud with each other. Through these daily encounters we have discovered that our love for God and for God’s word has strengthened, as well as our marriage.

Following this time of devotion, we continue nurturing our faith with a daily 30- to 45-minute walk in our community or along the shore and surrounding beach areas. As we walk, we sometimes extend the sacred connection with God in silent prayer or in worshipful response to the amazing beauty of creation on display in the glorious Delray Beach sunrises. I deeply enjoy these walks and daily contemplative times. They take me to deeper spiritual places with God, and God energizes me and lifts up my soul.

Throughout the day I will offer prayers of thanksgiving and praise. And more often than not at bedtime, I will either review my journal entry from the morning or enter into a contemplative/breath prayer where I invite God’s peace for the gift of blessed sleep that lies ahead.

What Bible passage is most meaningful to you and why?

I have two favorite Bible passages that continue to shape and nurture my walk in faith. Psalm 139 has special meaning for me. Several years ago, during a time of great loss and as I clung to God for answers and guidance, I believe that I was divinely led to this passage. This Psalm spoke then and still speaks to me about the promise of God’s eternal and abiding presence with me through his Spirit no matter what condition I find myself in. “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?” the Psalmist rhetorically asks in verse 7. God’s constant presence and his perfect and complete knowledge of me allow me and inspire me to draw closer to him as I seek to deepen my walk in faith.

The second passage of great spiritual significance to me is the Gospel of John 5: 1-15. This passage speaks about an infirmed man’s encounter with Jesus as he sought healing by the pool of Bethesda. Here was a man who was said to have been stricken with an illness for 38 years! Yet, Jesus confronts this sick man with a question: “Wilt thou be made whole?”. Nurturing my faith requires that I continually cultivate a life of wholeness. Am I really ready to give up that “thing”? I desire to live a life of balance and wellness through my daily commitment to a deeper connection and wholeness with God.
Our My wife Pat and I were born and raised in the same small town in Western Pennsylvania, and we’ve known each other since she was 5 years old and I was 8. Our town was only about five thousand people strong at that time, and the grapevine was efficient enough that if you lived on the west side of town and misbehaved on the east side, your mother would know it before you got home.

We were married when I was 26; our wedding service was the first time I attended her church, but I knew most of the people in the congregation before I walked into the Sanctuary. Those that I didn’t, Pat knew, because she and her parents and grandparents were members of that congregation. I effortlessly became a member of their active church community.

Moving to Florida in 1997 after 56 years in a small town was a bit of a shock. It was the first time in our lives we had to find new doctors, dentists, drugstores, cleaners, repairmen, places to shop and many more new connections and, oh yes, a new church. But this time, we didn’t walk in already knowing everyone. It was a church full of strangers. Luckily, we found a welcoming community here at First Delray.

The Fellowship Team would like to ensure that you have a similar experience. Start by joining us at Fellowship Hour in the Narthex after the service. Participation is easy—all you need to do is enjoy refreshments and greet your fellow worshippers. Then, if you’d like, you can sign up to host a Fellowship Hour, attend and/or volunteer at one of our Fellowship events, or volunteer for one of our Ministries here at First Presbyterian. Of course, we’d love to have you join our Fellowship Team to help us “connect” with one another and provide opportunities for involvement with our church community.

In Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, we read: “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.”

I also recently read this: “The idea of community comes from the sense of responsibility we have for each other. In the Bible, God encourages us to take care of our brethren while following the word of the Lord. We must remember the importance of maintaining the connection with our fellow man to ensure a thriving community.”

The Fellowship Team’s mission is to foster this connection. To learn more, please contact the church office (276-6338).
Session Report

During the months of May, June, and July, the Session examined and received new members as well as approved two baptisms.

CHURCH OPERATIONS SUMMARY THROUGH MARCH

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We Welcome to Our Membership

Alexis Aime
Philip Aime
Tony Ballantoni
Trish Ballantoni
Beth Braswell
Natalie Bruzzese
Kelye Cauldwell
Jordan Isner
Liz Landes
Marge Lanthier
Ann Shuman
Patricia Smith
John (Jack) Thomas
Michelle Whitco

Celebration of Eternal Life...

Our Deepest Sympathies as a congregation is extended to the families of the following members upon the death of their loved one:

Harrold Chaney – July 8, 2018
Tanya Anstedt – July 16, 2018
Carol Lewis – July 30, 2018
On June 5th, a few members of our church hosted an evening for Family Promise—a local non-profit that we support. The interfaith organization helps situationally homeless families get back on their feet again.

Mary Smith and Marchele Courtney provided the dinner for the 3 families, while Nancy Long and Linda Prior provided the reading and playing with the kids—as well as the overnight! Nancy has a new 4-year-old best friend, named TJ.

If you are interested in volunteering or learning more, contact Marchele Courtney (914-406-3216 or emcourtney0929@gmail.com).
This past June, ten youth and adults embarked on an eleven-hour car ride to serve our neighbors and see all the exciting ways God is at work in Mobile, Alabama. Among other activities, the group volunteered at a VBS program with a familiar theme (Shipwrecked), sorted food to be shipped out to food deserts, worked at a men’s shelter, cleaned a river of invasive Apple Snails (named so because they’re the size of an apple), and dined, worshiped, and played games with adults with developmental disabilities. And they had a lot of fun in the process.

On July 21st, nine more youth and adults flew out to Asheville, North Carolina to attend the annual Montreat conference. At Montreat, young people from around the country gather to study scripture, worship God, and have loads of fun. The theme this year was “Lift Every Voice”. The speakers encouraged the participants to use their voices to advance God’s kingdom, and challenged them to support and encourage those whose voices have been silenced for far too long.
Every morning, Fred McFeely Rogers—ordained Presbyterian minister, child development expert, lifelong Republican, and unlikely television icon—would swim a mile at an athletics club before weighing himself. And every day for decades the scale reportedly read 143 pounds, the news of which filled him with joy. As he explained to his friends, family, and colleagues on his groundbreaking public access show *Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood*, there are respectively one, four, and three letters in the words that make up the phrase “I love you.” For Fred Rogers, 143 was numerological shorthand for an idea that informed every aspect of his life and work—that of ceaseless love for all people. And just as 143 became a shorthand for him, the very idea of Fred Rogers has become a shorthand in American culture for a kind of empathetic compassion and caring that has become all too rare in this age of social media and a rabid 24-hour news cycle. When the first trailer was released for Morgan Neville’s *Won’t You Be My Neighbor?*, a documentary exploring not just the history of *Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood* but also the philosophies that motivated its star and creator, many of my fellow critics predicted it would be one of the most moving and emotional films of 2018. Having just seen the film, I feel their predictions were insufficient. *Won’t You Be My Neighbor?* is nothing short of an emotional crucible that left my theater, full of jaded New Yorkers of every race and age, weeping like the very children they were when they first visited the Neighborhood.

The documentary begins with the astounding revelation that Fred Rogers went into television specifically because he hated it. While visiting his parents one day after completing his studies at Rollins College, he encountered his first television set. What he discovered when he turned it on left him horrified: juvenile, immature programming for children featuring cruel, slapstick violence. Incensed, he delayed his enrollment at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary so he could go into the industry and create a show he felt would properly aid children in their emotional and psychological development. After working on a series of musical programs for NBC, he finally scored his first show on Pittsburgh's WQED—an unscripted live program entitled *The Children’s Corner* where he pioneered many of the characteristics that would define his career: puppetry, musical interludes, and a slower-paced contemplativeness that favored measured introspection and silence. Though successful, the show left him restless, and after completing his theological studies and ordination he began his run on the show that would make him a household name: *Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood*.

As producer Margy Whitmer explains: “You take all of the elements that make good television and do the exact opposite, you have *Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood*. Low production values, simple sets, unlikely star. Yet, it worked!” But why did it work? Perhaps due to its radical idea of treating children like human beings with deep feelings and emotions that need to be nurtured, not talked down to. In the decades after his death, many have forgotten how patently revolutionary the show’s approach was to child psychology, not just in
its adoption of a disarming and quiet earnestness but in its determination to directly address difficult subject matter. As the documentary recounts, the very first week of the show’s existence included an episode where puppet Daniel Striped Tiger—Mr. Rogers’ alter-ego—reacted to the news of Robert F. Kennedy’s killing by asking a human character, “What does ‘assassination’ mean?” As the show continued, it directly confronted issues like divorce, death, and tragedy. (Two of the most heartbreaking moments of the film see a visibly shaken Mr. Rogers do special segments addressing the Challenger explosion and the 9/11 attacks, both of which rocked him to the core and made him question his ability to reach and affect people in an increasingly dark and violent world.)

But these all seem to pale in comparison with his treatment of Officer Clemmons (François Clemmons), an African-American cop character, in the wake of the Civil Rights movement. Following a string of incidents where black families were splashed with bleach and other dangerous cleaning chemicals while swimming in “white pools,” Mr. Rogers filmed a segment where he shared a foot-bath with Clemmons, making a powerful statement on interracial harmony that harkened back to the biblical story of Jesus washing his disciples’ feet. But the story with Clemmons only gets more powerful from there. Later in the show’s run, news reached Mr. Rogers that Clemmons—a closeted homosexual—had been spotted frequenting a local gay bar. Aware that the news could lead to the loss of sponsors, Mr. Rogers ordered him to stop. But, as Clemmons admits in an interview where he breaks down into tears, Mr. Rogers eventually grew to love and accept him exactly as he was, even becoming his surrogate father.

One of the most surprising insights of Won’t You Be My Neighbor? was Mr. Rogers’ struggles with self-doubt. From his early childhood days, where a stern upbringing, near-constant illness, and incessant teasing for his weight made him introspective and shy, he grappled with the idea that he was failing both himself and his personal mission in life. Near the end, when he was dying of stomach cancer, he asked his wife Joanne if she thought he was a sheep, referring to the biblical prophecy that during the final judgment all mankind would be divided into sheep and goats. Amazed by the question, she answered that if anyone in history was a sheep, it was him. But it seems to have given him spare comfort. This is the great tragedy: that he was never able to truly appreciate the depth and breadth of his impact on millions of lives. But if Mr. Rogers was never able to, a new generation of children will, with the release of this new documentary. And hopefully it will remind a generation of embittered, angry, and exhausted adults that while feelings like anger and sadness are important, treating others with love is the most important thing of all. All it takes is a little effort, a little compassion, and just a touch of make-believe.

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Oswald Chambers said, “Prayer does not fit us for the greater work; prayer is the greater work.” Here at First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach we believe this is true. We intend every ministry of the church to flourish in the rich soil of prayer. And since a praying church is made up of praying people, we want to encourage and equip our membership in the vital ministry of prayer.

The Prayer Ministry Team is taking a summer break. However, prayer requests that come through our worship services or through the church office are still distributed by the church office to the prayer ministry team for individual prayer.

Each request is handled with respect, confidentiality, and care. If a request includes a name and address, a card will be sent to confirm that prayer was offered during the week the request was received. You are invited to join this prayer ministry team simply by calling Sharon Koch (414-9165). Sharon will be happy to provide additional information about this ministry and welcome you to participate.