Ash Wednesday, February 26th, is the beginning of Lent when we ready ourselves for Easter. At 6 p.m., we will have our Pancake Supper in Fellowship Hall. The cost is $5 for children, $7 per adults, and $20 maximum per family. Reservations for dinner are requested so that the cooks know how much food to prepare. They may be made on Sunday mornings in the Narthex, on the church website under Upcoming Events, or by calling the church office (561-276-6338).

Then, join us at 7 p.m. in the Sanctuary for our Ash Wednesday Worship Service. We will read scripture, raise our voices in song, and consider the gift of God’s grace.

You do not have to attend the dinner to attend the worship service and no reservations are required to worship.
The Gift of Encouragement

“So continue encouraging each other and building each other up, just like you are doing already.”

Thessalonians 5:11 (Common English Bible)

In the January 2020 issue of Runner’s World magazine, a woman shares her struggle to complete the New York City Marathon. Halfway through the twenty-six mile run, personal resources ran out. Physical and emotional resources depleted, she would walk to the sidelines and drop out. Except, there were people on the sidelines. Strangers to her. Moreover, not one of them would let her stand with them on the side of the street. They were not rude. Rather, they shouted, and cheered, and pushed her forward with words of encouragement. Strangers would not allow her to quit. She finished the marathon in last place. However, she finished the race!

That is the business of the church! We encourage people not to give up on the race. We shout words of encouragement. We urge them to continue, particularly when it is difficult. We do so in the certain confidence of God’s strength that never falters. Showing up for worship is a shout from the sidelines. Serving in some ministry, alongside others, is a shout from the sidelines. Financial giving to ensure that the church continues to move forward is a shout from the sidelines. Paying attention to others, listening deeply, caring with an expansive heart, is a shout-out from the sidelines. Each is a real and meaningful means of urging people forward when they face every kind of struggle, difficulty, and challenge.

Some years ago, the distinguished Christian thinker and teacher Lesslie Newbigin taught that the primary task of the Christian is engagement. Preaching is important. Teaching is important. However, the primary task of the Christian is deep and meaningful engagement in the lives of those we encounter every day. What the church preaches and what the church teaches is not the primary concern of most people. What is most urgent in the lives of the common person is the question “Is there someone who cares?” Authentic engagement in the life of another, championing them through difficulty, creates a ripple effect that changes multitudes of lives.

The single greatest mistake that Christians make is the assumption that their faith is a private matter. Such an assumption directs the believer down the path of selfishness. Comments such as, “I can be a good Christian without going to church” reveals that selfishness. As Newbigin argues – and as the apostle Paul asserts here in his letter to the Thessalonian Church – Christians are to gather so that they may mutually encourage one another. Demonstrations of care, support, and encouragement are shouts from the sidelines to those discouraged and defeated by life. These “shout-outs” become enough for those whose own resources have become depleted to finish the race.
Equipping Bible Study

Complete this study privately, writing answers in the space provided beneath each question. Invite one or two others to complete and then come together and share with one another your responses. Write any insights from others that are helpful directly onto your study sheet.

Jesus provides instruction here about prayer with an emphasis on the contrast between genuine and hypocritical approaches. Jesus rails against ornamental prayers. Such prayers have more to do with drawing the favor of people than building a relationship with God. Authentic prayer is to be done simply and in the privacy of one’s one room.

Read Matthew 6:5-8 (Write your answers below each question.)

“When you pray, don’t be like hypocrites. They love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners so that people will see them. I assure you, that’s the only reward they’ll get. But when you pray, go to your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father, who is present in that secret place. Your Father who sees what you do in secret will reward you. When you pray, don’t pour out a flood of empty words, as the Gentiles do. They think that by saying many words they’ll be heard. Don’t be like them, because your Father knows what you need before you ask.”

1. What does Jesus say about the prayers of the hypocrites?

2. Summarize Jesus’ instruction on prayer.

3. Jesus cautions, “do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do (Matt. 6:7).” Thomas G. Long suggests that “the target is not lengthy prayers per se, but what could be called ‘safecracker’ prayers; that is, windy and fawning prayers that attempt to use flowery charm to pick the lock on the favor of the gods, to manipulate the gods into action by uttering the right combination of words.”¹ How does Long’s comment alter, if at all, your understanding of the character of God?

4. Jesus tells us that the Father already knows what we need before we ask. What difference, if any, does this make on your prayer life?

5. Someone once said that this model of prayer is really asking God to participate in your life. How would you ask God to specifically participate in your life this week?

Closing Prayer

Grant this week your certain presence in moments of prayer. Help me enter each day in the joy of the Lord and retire in the evening certain of your protective embrace. Amen.

So often when I make a visit or a phone call to someone in distress, I receive at the end of that conversation a sincere and deeply felt thank you. People are often incredibly touched and moved by the experience, and I say that not to build myself up, but rather to highlight what is an important, if somewhat embarrassing truth: I don’t say all that much.

No, seriously. And I’m not being modest either, so you can get on and remove that thought from your head right now. When I’m on a visit or a phone call, often I don’t say all that much. Really. When someone is sick and suffering, when someone is hospitalized or dying, or when someone’s loved one has just passed away, what is there to say? Sometimes words are not enough. Sometimes there’s nothing to say. Sometimes words escape and language fails.

I think about Jesus Christ, who came not only to save the world, but to live in it. I think about how Christ not only taught but spent his life together with his disciples, how he entered the homes of strangers, and how at every turn he chose people first. I think about how, in Matthew 15, Jesus sat down on a mountaintop and made himself available to whoever needed him. And I think about how, in the book of John, Jesus wept alongside the sisters of Lazarus.

Make no mistake – Jesus used his words, and to great effect. But so much of Jesus’ ministry was bodily. It involved him physically going places and showing up for whoever was in need.

Jesus Christ has since died and resurrected, and he left us as Christians (a word which translates to “little Christs”) to serve in his stead. So we are called then, all of us, to follow in Jesus’ footsteps. We are called not only to speak, but also to simply be. To be still. To be present. And sometimes, to weep.

Often the greatest ministry we can give is our time, because when we give others our time, we give them ourselves, and when we give them ourselves, we’re giving them a little Jesus Christ as well. And as the body of the church, that is exactly what we are called to do.

***
During the month of December, the Session received new members and called the Annual Congregational Meeting for February 2, 2020 immediately following the second worship service.

CHURCH OPERATIONS SUMMARY THROUGH DECEMBER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Members' Pledge Payments</td>
<td>$793,027</td>
<td>$825,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Operating Receipts</td>
<td>246,346</td>
<td>265,790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investments Used</td>
<td>310,307</td>
<td>288,159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating Reserves</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding Sources</td>
<td>$1,349,680</td>
<td>$1,379,650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating Disbursements</td>
<td>$1,349,680</td>
<td>$1,379,650</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

– Estella Killian – December 24, 2019
– Hume Rennick – December 24, 2019

We Welcome to Our Membership

Chris Dirato
Tara Dirato
Amanda Lage
Brenda Lage
Claudia Lage
Handrey Lage
Kelli Lago
Allen Weaver
Jennifer Weaver

Annual Meeting

The Annual Congregational Meeting will be held in the Sanctuary on Sunday, February 2nd immediately following the 11 a.m. worship service.
Great Deals at First Presbyterian’s Step-Above Rummage Sale

You’ll want to get to the Step-Above Rummage Sale early to shop for all the deals on new and gently used items that look like they’ve just been taken off a department store’s shelves. The Step-Above Rummage Sale will be held from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on February 6th, 7th, and 8th at First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach. Church members and friends are invited to do their pre-sale shopping on Wednesday, February 5th from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Items for sale include clothes and accessories for women, men, and children sorted in departments and on racks just like at a department store. Shoes will be arranged by size and can be tried on in a comfortable sitting area.

The jewelry department will include unique items at bargain prices. The linen department will include bedding, towels, and tablecloths. The housewares department will have kitchen supplies including glassware, flatware, sets of dishes, and small appliances. There is also art, books, toys, sports equipment, bicycles, luggage and tools.

Sales specialists will be available to help with selections or to answer questions, and a dressing room is available on-site. Some items are new with tags still attached. For more details, call the church office (561-276-6338) or check the church website under “Upcoming Events”.

Last year, DoAnn Falk found a pretty black dress. Paul Rennie found a leather jacket to take back up north.
Nursery News

After a number of years, Serenity Cole and Amanda Tidwell will be leaving the nursery to pursue further activities. We want to thank them for the care and love they have given to the children of the church. We now welcome two new helpers:

Liz Landes has been involved with the children of the church for many years. She brings an excitement and love for caring for babies and toddlers. She is currently working full-time as a preschool teacher.

Abby Eccles has experience working with children in an after-school program and her love for children is evident. She is a college student currently working on a degree in environmental studies.

Welcome to the FPC team, Liz and Abby!

Sunday School News

During the Christmas Season, the children’s Sunday School class (1st through 5th grade) talked about the meaning of names and what their own names meant. We read The Name Jar by Yangsook Choi, which is a delightful book that explores the relationship between names and self-worth. Be sure to give it a read!

Sunday School is continuing our “Awesome Adventures”! Each week we talk about one of God’s Amazing Kids from the Bible and add them to our Adventure Wall, and the children take home a comic starring the Awesome Kid we learned about that day. Be sure to come by the Sunday School room to look at our Adventure Wall and see who we have discovered!

Attention: Be on the lookout for an upcoming Sunday School class for ages 11 and up. This is a wonderful opportunity for our older children to be in a group together. More information to follow!!

♦ ♦ ♦
February is one of two months a year that our church family collects food for those in our community who don’t have enough to eat. We are asking once again for your help in meeting the very real, very basic needs of those who are the hungriest in our larger community. You can do this by picking up a simple brown bag with a “shopping list” stapled to it in the Narthex following the Sunday worship service. You may choose to “shop for” the listed items, however any canned products or boxes of non-perishable, unopened products you can provide will be greatly appreciated.

Food may be left in the Narthex during the week or on Sunday mornings throughout the month of February. Not a shopper? Donations are also appreciated, with your check made payable to “CROS Ministries” and placed in the collection plate on Sunday mornings throughout the month.
The Discreet Wonder and Triumphant Majesty of Terrence Malick’s A Hidden Life

A Movie Review by Nathanael Hood, MA, New York University

In a small Austrian church hidden in the mountains, a wizened painter lifts brush to marble, restoring life and color to the frescos adorning the walls. He pauses and gazes upwards towards the gold-framed murals on the roof, designed to capture the eyes of laypeople and raise their heads and hearts towards the heavenly and eternal. He sighs and thinks of the peasants in the nearby village who for generations have lived and worshipped, been baptized and eulogized beneath them. “They imagine that if they lived in Christ’s time,” he mutters aloud, “they wouldn’t have done what the others did.” Nearby another man, not a painter but one of these chastised villagers, stands and listens silently. The painter regards his work and continues bitterly: “We create admirers. We do not create followers. Christ’s life is a demand. We don’t want to be reminded of it.” Now the two stand outside the church, the one fussing with the plaster walls, the other silent still. “I paint their comfortable Christ, with a halo on his head,” the painter says, fighting back a lifetime of tears, “someday I’ll paint the true Christ.”

Terrence Malick’s new film A Hidden Life follows the life not of the painter, but of this second man, the one who stands and listens and turns the former’s words over in his mind. His name is Franz Jägerstätter (August Diehl) and in a few years he will be dead, murdered by the Nazi regime that steamrolled through Europe and possessed his countrymen with rapacious hatred and cruelty. His was a simple life of honest toil before these Nazis arrived, working the fields with his wife Franziska (Valerie Pachner), doting on his three daughters, singing and dancing in the pub in the village center. But then strange uniformed men arrived and ordered him to serve in the army of Adolf Hitler. And maybe he would have, not as a soldier, but as a member of the hospital corps. Or maybe he could’ve served as a postman, like the teenager who zips through their town on a bicycle delivering letters, bills, summons, and draft cards. Or maybe he could’ve gotten a desk job, pushing papers far from combat where he’d never run the risk of holding a weapon or killing. All these he refused for the simple reason that to serve in the army as commanded, he had to swear personal loyalty to the Führer. And that he could not do. Arrested, tried, sentenced, and executed for his refusal to swear allegiance to Hitler, he has since been declared a martyr and beatified by the Catholic Church.

Yet it is this painter, who appears for only a few moments in the film’s nearly three-hour runtime, who casts one of the largest shadows, for he represents none other than Malick himself—an artist of deep and passionate faith who toils at his work full of the knowledge that it will probably never change or save the world. Since his 1973 directorial debut Badlands he has created one of the most doggedly idiosyncratic filmographies of the art form, achieving an international notoriety rare for directors from a country known more for big-budget blockbusters and brain-dead spectacle than introspective experimentation. Known for punishing production cycles where films can take decades to finance and shoot and further years to assemble in the editing room, he rejects traditional plotting and characterization to emphasize existential angst and philosophical turmoil. Roger Ebert once commented that the overarching theme of his movies is how “human lives diminish beneath the overarching majesty of the world.” But this is only partly true, for it ignores the religious element churning beneath his frames. The prototypical Malick character finds themselves in indescribable awe before a world they cannot understand while trapped in lives they cannot control, seeking intangible meaning and purpose whether they find themselves on battlefields (The Thin Red Line [1998]), within Pax Americana suburbia (The Tree of Life [2011]), or without the vapid entertainment industry (Knight of Cups [2015]). Many have likened his work to the Wisdom literature and poetry of the Bible, his characters alternatively embodying the resigned fatalism of Ecclesiastes, the sacred sexual longings of Song of Songs, and the ruminative reflections of Proverbs.

Here in A Hidden Life we see him drawing primarily from Biblical narratives. At first we see parallels with Job as Jägerstätter’s idyllic life is ripped away from him piece by piece.

continued on page 10
He’s torn from his family for compulsory basic training and then returns to find them ostracized from the community for their refusal to embrace Nazism. Former friends and neighbors steal from their fields, reject them from the markets, and spit in their path. And like Job, who was challenged in his pious grief by his three friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, some come to Jägerstätter and tell him to bend his knee to Hitler. There’s the village mayor who calls him a traitor, the nearby bishop who tells him service to the Fatherland is his duty, and an assortment of elders who chastise him for not donating to a Nazi “veteran’s fund.” Only the church painter and his wife serve as twin whirlwinds from the desert, strengthening his resolve.

Once Jägerstätter is arrested, the film alternates between sequences of his imprisonment and trial and Franziska’s struggles as a single mother in a community that’s rejected her. Once in jail, Jägerstätter becomes like Paul in the last chapters of Acts as he’s transferred from prison to prison, baffling and enraged his guards who wish him dead but cannot kill him. Finally he arrives in the capital of Berlin where he’s tried by the Reichskriegsgericht, the highest Nazi military court, and his story becomes that of Jesus in the Gospels, not just in the commonly known details of him being beaten by his guards and executed, but in subtler ways too. During his final trial he’s pulled aside by one of the senior judges, and they have a conversation that echoes Jesus’ confrontation with Pontius Pilate which ended with the procurator finding himself sympathetic to his prisoner but helpless to save him. Then watch how in Jägerstätter’s final moments, as he awaits his death by guillotine, he comforts and kisses a fellow condemned prisoner while a third looks on in confused contempt, all in understated reenactment of Jesus’s relationship with the two thieves crucified beside him.

But mention must also be made of the Franziska sequences, which can be seen to echo the tribulations of Mary during her son’s imprisonment, torture, and execution. Mary, whom Christian tradition believes to have been widowed by the time of Jesus’ adult ministry, must have labored as Franziska did, without her eldest son or husband to help keep their family together. Many viewers might find these sequences tedious or irrelevant, but they serve as a foundation that keeps the film from floating away into a torpor of breathless reverence for Jägerstätter.

Hidden Life is a supreme artwork, but many viewers might find Malick’s methods frustrating if not enraging. Despite this being his tightest narrative focus in years, the film is still captured with Malick’s trademark God’s-eye camera which swoops and pans, dips and travels over the wilderness surrounding his characters. There are lovingly indulgent shots of babbling brooks, foggy mountains, and towering forests. Likewise, there are several sequences that seem to exist purely to populate the edges of the film with local color, such as a lonely Franziska and her daughters watching a church procession file past their fields or several scenes of Jägerstätter’s wandering the prison yard during exercise hours in enforced silence. Do these add to the story? Do we need a scene of Franziska scolding her daughters for knocking over a pail of water in their living room? Of Jägerstätter’s friend in basic training balancing his rifle on his chin like a trained seal? Of Jägerstätter carefully setting aright a knocked over umbrella in a shop, or dropping an extra crust of bread during mealtime into the plate of one of his fellow prisoners? Narratively speaking, no. But they orient the audience within a larger cosmic awareness where all things are part of a greater whole. This is not the manicured reality of a Hollywood film where characters and sets cease to exist when they’re offscreen. This film is three hours of an entire universe vivisected into celluloid, where the insignificant games played by children in a wheat field are given equal weight to a man suffering in prison. This is a world seen omnipresently, considered omnipotently, loved omnisciently.

Yet still the painter in Jägerstätter’s village paints his portraits, knowing that his work cannot stop the Nazi hordes, and neither will it convert people from casual obedience to a faith borne of sacrifice and resistance. It’s hard to
The Deacons had a very productive end to the year. At the beginning of December, they sent Christmas greetings to every member of the Congregation and also delivered a Christmas remembrance to every shut-in.

Simultaneously, a hard working cadre of Deacons, led by Holly Anderson and Jen Buce, set up the Christmas Tree. It was decorated with gift wishes from children at five local charities – the Milagro Center, the Boys and Girls Club, Adopt a Family, Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse, and the Achievement Center for Children & Families. Thanks to the congregation, 325 beautifully wrapped presents were delivered.

On Christmas Eve, working on behalf of the Mission Outreach Committee, the Deacons collected a very generous offering to be used for Bahamian relief through the Presbyterian Church in devastated Marsh Harbour. Once again, the congregation’s spirit of sharing was on full display.

As we reflect on the past year, the Deacons would also like to salute the administrative staff – Nancy, Mindi, Christine, and Aaron – whose tireless support makes all of these activities possible.

vvvv

The Deacons’ Corner
by Richard Falk

Busy Year-End

believe Malick thinks any differently now. Art has famously proved little use in the realm of averting global crisis—songs didn’t stop the Transatlantic Slave Trade, poetry didn’t still the guns at Verdun or Leningrad, and movies didn’t end the Cold War. Kurt Vonnegut once famously quipped that the combined power of protest art during the Vietnam era had the collected force of a custard pie, and this is perhaps true. And in this current political climate of resurgent global fascism and right-wing nativism, it’s difficult to think that movies like A Hidden Life will have any more effect. Or will they? The film’s title puts that into question. “A Hidden Life” is borrowed from a line in George Eliot’s novel Middlemarch:

“The growing good of the world is partly dependent on un historic acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.”

Art may not stop the aforementioned evils of the world, but still the Slave Trade ceased, still the World Wars ended, and still the USSR collapsed. Evil was confronted and countenanced, and who can be credited for their defeat? Ordinary human beings, ones living simple, unacknowledged lives, who in their own way rejected the cruelty and monstrosity of the world. One by one. Piece by piece. Maybe A Hidden Life can’t save the world. But perhaps, one imagines, it can help sanctify it. And maybe those who see it can be sanctified too, and inspired in their own way to fight and resist the evils that surround us.

vvvv

continued from page 10

The Discreet Wonder and Triumphant Majesty of Terrence Malick’s A Hidden Life

"The growing good of the world is partly dependent on un historic acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.”

Art may not stop the aforementioned evils of the world, but still the Slave Trade ceased, still the World Wars ended, and still the USSR collapsed. Evil was confronted and countenanced, and who can be credited for their defeat? Ordinary human beings, ones living simple, unacknowledged lives, who in their own way rejected the cruelty and monstrosity of the world. One by one. Piece by piece. Maybe A Hidden Life can’t save the world. But perhaps, one imagines, it can help sanctify it. And maybe those who see it can be sanctified too, and inspired in their own way to fight and resist the evils that surround us.

vvvv
Sunday Morning Worship Service

9 a.m. & 11 a.m.

Please join us on Sunday mornings as we worship the Living God together.

Church School

Sunday School for Adults 10 a.m.
Sunday School for Children 11 a.m.

Refuge Youth Group

Friday evenings

Prayer Ministry Team

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 meets on Sundays at 10 a.m. in the Coastal Room in the Center for Christian Studies.

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.