



Per Capita

(about that blue envelope in your box of weekly offering envelopes)



In case you are wondering what the blue envelope near the beginning of your 2013 offering envelope box is for, you are not the only one. "Per Capita" is the assessment each congregation pays for each church member recorded on their membership rolls. It is assessed by our denomination (Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.) to cover the required administrative expenses to operate the Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly offices of each judicatory. These expenses are rounded out to \$35 per member for 2013.

Since the Per Capita is included in calculating our operating budget, not everyone contributes extra to this source. Others prefer to do so in order to help ease a little of the financial burden that this places upon the church budget. A little extra giving does make a difference when our congregation's total Per Capita assessment is \$21,731. Thank you to those who choose to help. ❖

SMALL GROUPS: Nuts & Bolts

by Dr. W. Douglas Hood, Jr.

Senior Pastor

How Small Is A "Small" Group?

It is generally agreed that small groups do not exceed twelve participants and that the optimal size is six to eight members. Much research over many years has provided this knowledge and it isn't our purpose here to examine this research. One leading thinker in small groups suggests that the optimal size of a small group is one where everyone may be known well and everyone is comfortable speaking. This simply isn't true in larger gatherings.

What Is Optimal Frequency of Meeting and Length of Meetings?

Weekly meetings are best, though once every other week also works well. The goal of small groups is to build intimacy among group members, provide support and encouragement in Christian spiritual formation, and hold one another accountable for growth in Christian character. This simply isn't possible with meeting less frequently than twice a month.

Ninety minutes has been found to be an optimal length for meeting. The value of small groups has been found to decrease considerably if meetings run longer than two hours or are less than one hour.

Where Should Small Groups Meet?

The ideal place for small groups is anywhere other than in a church facility. This is because church facilities, even church parlors, tend to be very formal. Intimacy develops best in more informal and comfortable places such as diners, coffee houses or group members' homes. This is particularly important if the small group includes persons who are not regular church goers.

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From My Heart to Yours

by **Dr. W. Douglas Hood, Jr.**

Senior Pastor



“No one who is baptized can say that learning and growing in Christian faith and practice is an optional extra.” Michael Horton

Discipleship is claimed by many and understood by few. Those who attempt to define discipleship often think, erroneously, that it is a matter of mental consent to a set of beliefs such as “I believe in Jesus Christ.” Of course, Christian discipleship begins there. Yet, if left there, it is incomplete. Authentic discipleship as understood and taught by Jesus is more than mental consent. It is intentionally learning from Jesus, obeying all that He taught and actively participating in the expansion of God’s Kingdom. Anything less reduces church to entertainment or a place of encouragement and inspiration for one’s own life goals.

Participation in a small group is the optimal means by which any person takes seriously God’s call to grow in discipleship. It is through a small group that Jesus nurtured discipleship with twelve men and prepared them to take the world for God. It is nothing less than human foolishness to believe that there is any better method by which we may honor God’s intention for personal spiritual growth. To paraphrase Michael Horton, participation in a small faith-forming group is not an “optional extra” for Christians. Simply, participation in a small group for spiritual growth is obedience to Jesus. It is nothing less.

Let’s be crystal clear here, the point of small groups is not to receive more information about faith. That is certainly a piece of an effective small group, but not the point. The point is life change. Jesus used a small group to mold twelve men into His likeness and character that they may be more useful to God for God’s purposes here on earth. That remains the point of small groups today, to experience transformation from our old, self-centered self to someone who is daily being conformed to the image of Jesus. As each member of First Presbyterian Church commits to a small group experience, our church will realize its mission to create authentic disciples for Jesus Christ.

As you consider New Year resolutions, I ask you to ponder this, that there is nothing greater, more noble or worthy than to recommit to God’s purposes here in Palm Beach County and throughout the world. If that commitment is to present your best self to that purpose, it will be through participation in a small group. On another page of this newsletter, you will find helpful instructions for organizing or participating in a small group. There is a difference between churches that have small groups and churches of small groups. The latter understand that small groups are not an optional extra for impacting the world positively for Christ. ❖

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If you or a family member are hospitalized, please notify the church office. Even if you give the name of the church upon admission, the hospital will NOT notify us.

DISCIPLESHIP MATTERS

Five Minutes for Spiritual Formation

by Dr. W. Douglas Hood, Jr.
Senior Pastor

Jesus' own pattern of intentional spiritual formation included becoming intimately involved with a few others so that His life and theirs would develop such traction that transformation would occur organically. The disciples comprised the first Christian small group, and their close contact with Jesus provided not only learning experiences but the opportunity to view appropriate application in daily cultural settings. Observing Jesus not only as a teacher but as a fellow sojourner in life offered the disciples the insight required to make incremental changes in their own lives to conform to His. Jesus taught the crowds, but He disciplined a few in a small group.

Alexander B. Bruce, in his book, The Training of the Twelve, provides considerable clarity as to the methods Jesus used to develop His disciples and deploy them in the ministry. Bruce observes, "From the evangelic records it appears that Jesus began at a very early period of His ministry to gather round Him a

company of disciples, with a view to the preparation of an agency for carrying on the work of the divine Kingdom." What becomes apparent is that Jesus desired not only to have disciples, but to have about Him those whom He might train to reproduce their discipleship in others. By limiting His discipling efforts to a few, who would then reproduce themselves in others, Jesus was capable of reaching men and women on an extensive scale.

Effective spiritual formation today must imitate the model of Jesus: gathering together in a small group, studying the teachings of Jesus and holding one another accountable for a life lived in the manner of Jesus. This approach provides intimacy and the opportunity to sharpen one another in the formation of Christian character. Additionally, the small group can be a center for shared missional activity that further promotes maturity in Christlikeness.



A Basic Approach to Spiritual Formation & Discipleship



Formative Practices

Formative practices, intentional disciplines or habits, are how we make our home in Christ rather than in the world. They are lifestyle routines that help us keep on track in living into the life and character of Jesus. Five formative practices that are generally considered fundamental are, worship regularly, pray daily, learn and apply God's Word, participate in a ministry and give financially to the work of the church.



Time in Solitude with God

Spiritual formation and growth require a growing attentiveness to God, to where God is active in our lives, and to where we are being led. This attentiveness requires that we regularly make a place in our lives to sense God's presence and to hear God speak. This is a time for reading the Bible, prayer and sitting before God in silence.



Time in Community of a Small Group

The Kingdom of God is relational. A decision to follow Jesus and grow in His likeness cannot be accomplished alone. The Apostle Paul teaches in his letter of Romans that, though Christian discipleship is intensely personal, it is corporate in character (Romans 12: 3-5). Regularly meet with a small group and commit to the study of the Bible using this basic structure: Read, Reflect and Respond. Additionally, small group members hold one another accountable for spiritual growth and offer encouragement.



Time Sharing Your Faith with Another

Our daily conversations do more than provide a running narrative of our lives; such conversations shape our experiences, practices and life with one another. Ultimately, spiritual formation is the quality of life we live. That life develops positively in the manner of Jesus as we regularly make time to share with another our personal growth in faith.

© W. Douglas Hood, Jr.

Deacons' Corner

by Siena Del Mastro

This month I am focusing on someone that I think needs to be recognized for his hard work. This is someone that you can always count on to do something with a caring and humble heart. He never has a negative attitude and is always willing to help you out, no matter the circumstance.

Ever since I was little, Aaron Strippel has always been one of those people that I can look up to. Whenever I see him, he's always doing something to better the church environment. He can be in the Nursery holding a baby, or setting up tables for an event in Fellowship Hall. Aaron does absolutely

anything with a positive attitude (except let me drive the golf cart around, which isn't necessarily a bad thing since I would probably crash into something important). He also makes sure both the nine and the

eleven o'clock worship services run and flow together well.

He also helps out with many Deacon events and ensures that they are a success. He's like the man you never see in a show, because he's doing all the backstage stuff. We ultimately wouldn't have such success if it weren't for Aaron



doing the "behind the scenes" work.

Aaron is also just a genuinely cool guy. The other day, I was kidding around with him and I told him I could beat him in a race. So when he finished cleaning up after

the Blessing of the Pets, he and I went over to the grassy area by the parking lot and sprinted to the finish line. He claims that we tied, but I definitely beat him by a mile. Another ritual of mine is that after church I like to wait until everyone leaves the Sanctuary so I can play the piano. Aaron always sneaks up behind me and tries to scare me but

what he doesn't realize is that I have eyes in the back of my head, a.k.a. the reflection on the piano, but don't tell him I said that. He always asks me to learn how to play the Piano Man by Elton John, which I still have yet to do; bugs me about how I'm 16 and don't have my driver's license, let alone my permit, and my relationships with guys.

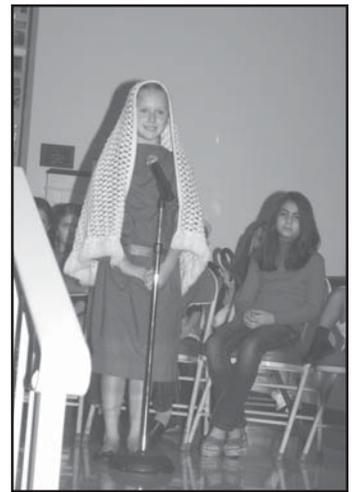
Sometimes when my friends and I hang out on Atlantic Avenue we park our car in the church parking lot and I always see Aaron working and getting things done. We wouldn't have the church running as smoothly as it is today without the constant aid of our Head Custodian, Aaron Strippel. ❖

Are You Looking for a Church Home?

Our next New Member Class will be held on Sunday, January 20th, in the Christian Learning Center, the two story beige building immediately south of the church driveway. This opportunity to explore membership will begin at 12:30 p.m. and will last approximately 90 minutes. Signs on Gleason Street that morning will direct you to the class. Lunch for adults and children will be provided, along with childcare in Fellowship Hall. Complete the registration form on our website www.firstdelray.com under Upcoming Events or notify Nancy Fine (276-6338, ext. 10) so that we can plan accordingly. ❖

Christmas Pageant Was a Success!

Once again, the Children's Christmas Pageant held on Sunday, December 9th at both the 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. worship services brought smiles to the faces of the congregation. Coordinated by Jim Poch and Rev. Jo Garnett, this year's pageant, "Radio J.O.Y. – Where the best songs are songs about Christmas", featured both the children and youth of our congregation. They told the familiar Nativity story from the perspective of a radio news team, a church Children's Choir, and the traditional characters. This annual event was one of the highlights of the Advent season. ❖



SMALL GROUPS: Nuts & Bolts

Continued from Cover

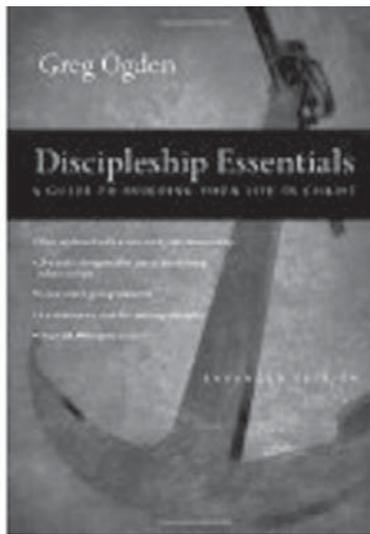
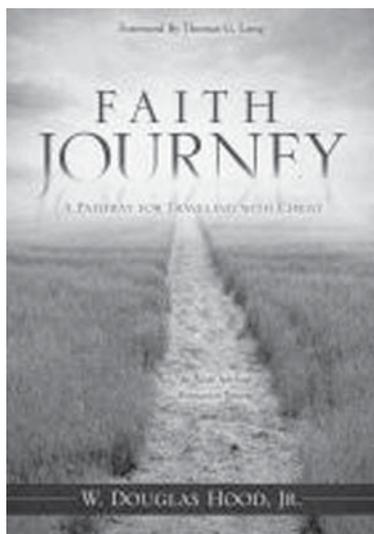
What Does A Small Group Do?

For those new to a small group experience, I recommend using a printed resource that provides a clear pathway or instruction for each meeting. I believe that the best resource available today for ease of use, clarity of direction and proven value in spiritual growth and formation is Greg Ogden's, Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ, available at most electronic retailers. Another resource is one I published last year, Faith Journey: A Pathway for Traveling with Christ. I studied under Greg Ogden at Fuller Theological Seminary and this resource was prepared under his guidance and is similar in format. It is also available through most online booksellers. Search engines for electronic booksellers usually require that you search by my name "W. Douglas Hood, Jr." rather than by the title of my book.

Here is one review of my book made following its publication:

"For anyone wanting to embark on a journey of faith transformation, Doug Hood provides an outstanding hand guide to provide the practices, insight and encouragement needed to move Christians to a deeper place. Penetrating questions, applicable biblical references, and poignant stories give thoughtful travelers a companion that enlivens the imagination, enlarges the heart, and stirs the soul."

Bruce Main, President, UrbanPromise Ministries, Camden, New Jersey.



Understanding Islam and the Muslims

by Ron Price

The Men's Thursday Morning Fellowship invite you to attend a presentation by Ayshea Jamil on "Understanding Islam and the Muslims" in the Christian Learning Center on Thursday, January 24th at 9:30 a.m. This approximately one hour presentation will be followed by a question and answer session. Everyone is invited, men and women alike. Coffee, tea and cookies will be served. We invite you to come and bring friends or neighbors with you.

Ayshea is a resident of Boca Raton. She is married with two young children. Born in Pakistan, she was educated in England and Canada, before moving to the United States with her husband.



Annual Meeting

The Annual Congregational Meeting will be held in the Sanctuary on Sunday, January 27th immediately following the 11 a.m. worship service.

Caroling by Trolley

On Sunday, December 9th, carolers of all ages loaded two trolleys and took Christmas cheer to members of our church who are homebound. With full stomachs from a pizza dinner, the multi-generational chorus raised their voices in song. ❖



Pennies from Heaven

Help First Presbyterian Church support the battle against hunger and poverty by participating in *“Pennies from Heaven”*. This is a simple act of thanksgiving for what we have received and a commitment to share with others. Collect 5 cents per family member per meal each day. Then on Sunday, January 27th, bring your *“Pennies from Heaven”* to church and we will collect it during the worship service. Monies collected will be donated on a quarterly basis to local food programs as well as regional and national hunger programs.

We collected \$578.67 from the November Offering.



We can make a difference!

Presbyterian Women's Christmas Luncheon



The Presbyterian Women had their annual Christmas Luncheon on Friday, December 7th at the Delray Beach Club. Mei Mei Luo, one of Florida's finest violinists and her piano accompanist entertained the ladies. *A wonderful time of fellowship was had by all!*



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:

– Mary Marshall –
December 8, 2012

– Margaret Sheffler –
December 17, 2012



Remember the Church When Estate Planning

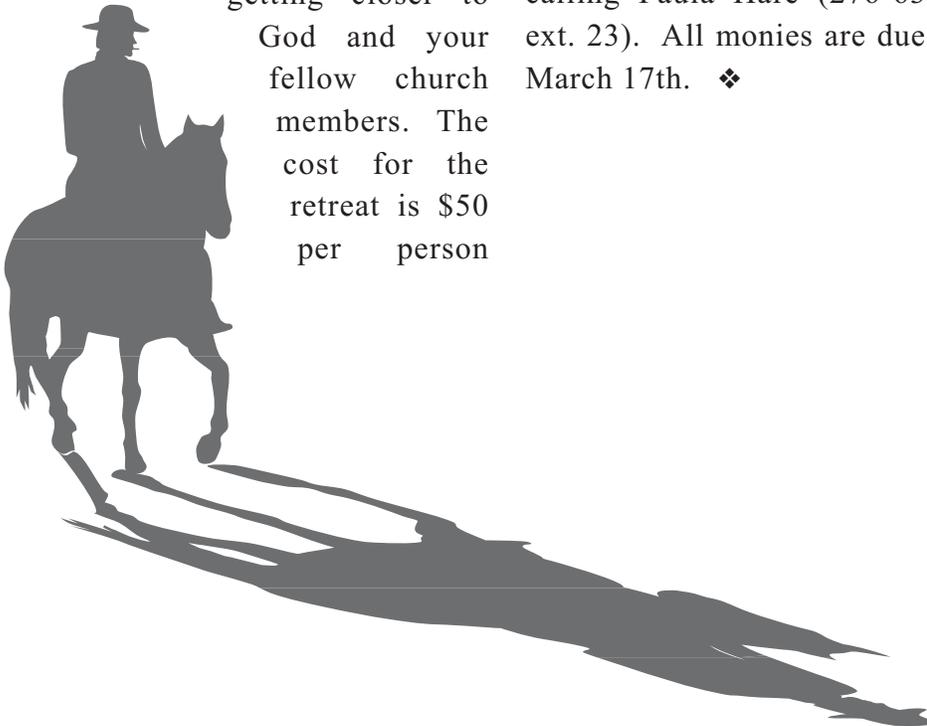
Our Endowment and Remembrance Funds are two excellent opportunities for your giving consideration, be it your will, stocks, or as a named beneficiary of an insurance policy. This financially wise method of stewardship helps ensure the long-term financial stability of the church and provides a planned means for the church to continue its role in the lives of our members and those to whom we reach out, in our community and beyond. For more information on long-term giving, call the church office (276-6338). ❖

Annual Church Retreat 2013

by Chris Del Mastro

The 2013 Annual Church Retreat has been rescheduled to April 12 to April 14, 2013. Held at the Circle F Dude Ranch in Lake Wales, this is a wonderful way to spend time getting closer to God and your fellow church members. The cost for the retreat is \$50 per person

with children under five free. If you would like to go horseback riding, there is an additional \$25 fee. You may register by visiting our website www.firstdelray.com under Upcoming Events or by calling Paula Hare (276-6338, ext. 23). All monies are due by March 17th. ❖



Sacrament of Communion

For 2013, Communion will be celebrated on the following dates: January 6th (Epiphany); February 17th (the first Sunday of Lent); March 3rd; March 28th (Maundy Thursday); May 5th; June 2nd; July 7th; August 4th; September 1st; October 6th (World Communion Sunday); November 3rd; and December 1st.



Church Improvement

by Barbara Vanderkay

The 2012 Holly Days Bazaar took place in November, with help from a goodly number of our members. The Christmas Crafts Boutique followed in our wonderful new Holly House building for the convenience to those unable to make the bazaar, or who thought of some gift they really did need to buy after all. It was a great pleasure to show off the new building. It is hoped that there will be more eager minds and hands working there for years to come, now so many women have had a peek at our much needed headquarters.

We have deposited \$12,615 so far, somewhat less than last year, but we attribute that directly to the closing of Atlantic Avenue on Saturday, when we did not have the walk-in customers as we did on Friday. There are just not enough weekends for all the things that go on in downtown Delray Beach.

Let us again praise the church members who worked behind the scenes for so long to make our Holly House dream come to fruition, such as Bob Teninga, who supported us from the beginning, taking care of so many different things. We appreciate all you did.

Regie Moorcroft not only organized the women who came in faithfully all summer to work on

craft items; she was also involved in every step of the building process while she has been recovering from her seriously debilitating illness of last Christmas. We thank God for hearing all our prayers for Regie, our indomitable leader.

After the holiday we have three weeks to do some weeding out in our closets, setting aside things for the Step-Above-Rummage Sale. We urgently request that you not bring in anything but jewelry until Tuesday, January 22nd, when Fellowship Hall will be open from 9 a.m. till noon for your donations, and also weekdays and Saturdays through February 2nd. Thank you for keeping to these days and hours.

We will be grateful for CLEAN clothes and linens, small WORKING appliances, housewares, sports equipment, anything for children, and furniture small enough to be brought in your own

car or van. No cribs or mattresses can be accepted. Costume jewelry is always a good seller. It is sold in the Covered Patio with antiques and collectibles, which come in amazing variety. Remember that we have a reputation for high end merchandise. This is really a Step-Above-Rummage Sale, so please give us your better discards. Questions? Call Regie at 495-5376.

Our sale will be the second weekend in February, as usual, beginning on Wednesday, February 6th from 1 to 3 p.m. for members and regular church attendees only. The general public will be welcome from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Thursday, the 7th, Friday, the 8th, and Saturday, the 9th.

Sign up sheets will be enclosed in the Bulletin so please make sure to fill one out, indicating where you prefer to work. There are plenty of jobs for less active women and men, as well as for the more athletic among us, before, during, and after the sale.

On Tuesday, the 13th, we will pack up what is left, to be given away to one or more of the local charities supported by the First Presbyterian Church. Nothing goes to waste. ❖



STEPHEN MINISTERS:

by David Fellows

Happy New Year!

Isn't it wonderful that every 365 days we can all take a deep breath, gently exhale, let burdens of the last year fall away and experience the sensation that we have a fresh start at life? New Year's resolutions can be filled with such promise and hope. If you are personally engaged in this annual ritual, here are three things for you to consider that may potentially undermine your efforts.

Some people choose a particular goal that they want to achieve. They may put a picture of their goal on the refrigerator, pray for its manifestation in their life and mentally picture having received it. While all of these steps are part of the process, we must not forget that somewhere along the line, whether consciously or unconsciously, a realistic plan must be created to achieve the goal and someone (probably we ourselves) must follow the plan. Remember that we can't manage the outcome; we can only manage the process.

Another thing that can sabotage our resolutions is "all or nothing" thinking. One slip, and that's it! We make one goof and declare ourselves a failure. Considering how a ship gets to its destination might be helpful with this erroneous thinking. A ship gets to its destination by constantly determining how far off course it is. This is the only way it can make the corrections necessary to get it back on the course to its intended destination. The actual course the ship travels is NEVER the straight line plotted on the chart.

Perhaps the single biggest cause of not realizing many New Year's resolutions is our desire to be perfect. After all, aren't most resolutions focused on getting rid of what is wrong with us? One theory is that we develop the belief at an early age that we must become perfect in order to be fully loved and accepted by our parents. As we grow older, we develop an idealized concept of the person we think



we SHOULD be. This concept, in turn, creates a self-pride which carries with it a punishment system (guilt, shame and self-hatred) that activates whenever we are less than the perfect person our idealized self demands. For many of us the concept of a punishing God reinforces this perceived necessity to be perfect.

The solution to the problems created by our perceived need to be perfect is twofold. First, we need to accept and embrace our humanity. While we are spiritual beings, we are going through a physical experience and our humanity is part of that experience. Our humanity has not been, nor will it ever be, perfect. If this were not true, we would not need God's assurance that we are a forgiven people.

Finally, when we acquired our childhood need to be perfect, we viewed our parents as our "God," the source for our love, affection and feelings of self-worth. In order to make us "good" children, or out of their own sense of imperfection, our parents focused on pointing out our imperfections. Many of us did not get to experience the all-embracing sense that we were loved simply for the children we were with all of our imperfections.

While we may strive to become perfect, we need to recognize that it is a state we will never attain. Now that we are adults, perhaps we can recognize that we are all "children of God," and that God loves us just as we are, with all of our imperfections. Herein lies the antidote for the guilt, shame and self-hatred our prideful self has heaped on us. Only by embracing our humanity and accepting God's love and forgiveness can we experience spiritual peace. *Peace be with you.*

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN

CHURCH OF DELRAY BEACH

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The Community Church by the Sea

33 Gleason Street, Delray Beach, Florida 33483

This newsletter is available online at www.firstdelray.com. If you are interested in receiving an electronic copy of this newsletter, please email Nancy Fine at nancyfine@covad.net.

Sunday Morning Worship Services

9 a.m. & 11 a.m.

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

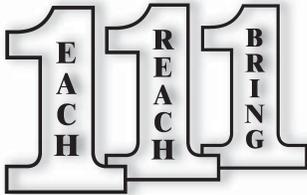
Church School

Adult Church School 10 a.m.

Education Hour Sunday School 10 a.m.

Worship Hour Sunday School 11 a.m.

Youth Fellowship 5 p.m.



This is our ministry of connecting people with Jesus Christ and the church. Jesus' priority for the church is to share the Christian faith in such a way that people place their trust in Jesus and participate with Jesus in His ongoing work through the local church.



We were never intended to remain the same. Through this ministry, we engage people in intentional processes for growing in the character of Jesus.



Implanted deep within the nature of men and women is the hunger to serve others. Through this ministry, we engage people in a process that helps them discover, develop and deploy their God given gifts for service to Jesus in the local church and community.



One of the distinctive teachings of the Christian faith is that we are called to live in community. In community, we support, encourage, hold accountable and care for one another so that no one has to make the journey of life alone.