

connections

Newsletter of the Presbytery of New Covenant

Growing congregations that passionately engage their community to make disciples.

Moderator of PC(USA) to be keynote speaker at November presbytery meeting



Heath Rada

Heath Rada, Moderator of the 221st General Assembly, will be with us at the November 21 stated meeting of the Presbytery of New Covenant at St. John's Presbyterian Church, 5020 W. Bellfort, Houston. The "Mod-a-Rada," as he is affectionately known, will preach the morning worship service.

As our keynote speaker, we will try to replicate sitting on his front porch at Montreat Conference Center in North Carolina where he has hosted people from around the world

to talk about the church and how we can respond to the crises that we see.

Heath Rada also brings with him his experience as the former president of the Presbyterian School of Christian Education (PSCE) and in leadership positions with the American Red Cross across the United States. He is passionate about the PC(USA) and has served in many capacities on both the local and national level.

To learn more about Heath Rada, visit <http://heathrada.org/>

Meeting Bonus Mission Fair for congregations to be featured



"Engaging Community" has been the theme for New Covenant's presbytery meetings this year. The November presbytery meeting will be no exception. Continuing that theme, a Church Mission Fair will showcase the mission work being done by New Covenant congregations. Does your congregation have something special to share with others in the presbytery?

Please request space at the Mission Fair by contacting Lynn Hargrove, lhargrove@pbyofnewcovenant.org or 713-526-2585.

Time to consider Overtures and Concurrences

In Presbyterian polity, business comes before General Assembly (GA) by way of overtures. In order for these to be considered by the whole Assembly, they must begin first in a local congregation and then be submitted to the presbytery for

approval.

The Presbytery of New Covenant will be considering overtures and concurrences for several topics at our November meeting. Information will be posted in the meeting packet which will be available

two weeks before the meeting.

Overtures that have already been submitted for GA consideration can be seen at www.pc-biz.org under the "Explorer" tab. To see the business listed, click on the "Search" button.

Meeting Bonus

Visit Presbyterian Single Family Homes



Attendees at the meeting will also have the opportunity to visit the Single Family Homes built by Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services (PCHAS). The complex, which is adjacent to St. John's PC, provides single parent families a

safe place to live, as well as offering counseling and other services designed to get them back on their feet. Don't miss the chance to see up close what it means to help enable people!

New Covenant Presbytery 2016 Dates

Saturday, March 19,
at First PC, Conroe
Saturday, July 16
at First PC, Orange
Saturday, November 19
at First PC, Pasadena

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NEW COVENANT CONNECTIONS

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From the Cole Mine

Rev. Mike Cole, General Presbyter
Presbytery of New Covenant

“Grounded or Flying”

In mid-October, I was on a flight to Portland that was late in leaving the gate. After about 25 minutes, the pilot came into the cabin and announced that, in fact, we were having some engine trouble. Not that unusual. The pilot’s explanation was unusual. He said, “The airplane computer thinks we are still in the air and won’t let us start the engine.” After the mechanics tinkered with things, the pilot confirmed that they would reboot the plane and hope that would fix the problem. It did and we took off.



While I sat there waiting further word, I mused that this is analogous to the state of the church - we think we are flying when we are still at the terminal (a strange thing to call the point where we leave and arrive). Jesus came to set us free to fly, but we are stuck on the ground. If this is a good analogy, it may be that we need to reboot the church in order to get off the ground.

How are we grounded even though we think we are flying? We are grounded when we get caught up in internal battles and strife. When we turn Jesus’ command to love inclusively into an exclusive claim, we are grounding ourselves. When we idolize dogma over mission; tradition over transformation; differences over similarities; divisive agendas over unity in the Spirit; inward focus over missional involvement – we consign ourselves to the ground.

So, have I offended you? If not, then I haven’t gone far enough because the Gospel is offensive. It

offends anyone who is self-concerned; anyone who thinks he/she has the truth; anyone who thinks the poor are no concern of ours; anyone who thinks immigrants have no legitimate place in our country; anyone who thinks those in prison are not our concern; anyone who thinks we have no responsibility for the environment; anyone who thinks the poor are simply not trying hard enough; anyone who thinks their version of theology allows them to separate themselves from others; anyone who thinks “those people” are less worthy of being called disciples than themselves; anyone who thinks that those who hold scripture as the infallible rule of faith to be hopelessly antiquated; anyone who believes allegiance to our nation surpasses allegiance to Jesus; anyone who thinks gun rights exceed human rights; anyone who thinks the church shouldn’t allow “those people” in; anyone who thinks the gospel has nothing to do with “politics.”

There, have I offended everyone by now? I’ve even offended myself. The point I’m making is that the gospel should offend ALL of us because we all fall short of Jesus’ call to love God and love our neighbor. That, after all, is our prime directive (sorry Star Trek fans). All our actions are supposed to fulfill those two criteria. When we do or say or post or tweet something we need to ask if it meets our prime directive - are we loving God and loving our neighbor. Clearly, I’m as guilty as anyone in not living out the gospel. But the good news (also gospel) is that Jesus knows that, anticipated it, and prepared for our failure from the beginning of time. We are forgiven for our shortsightedness, our bigotry, our prejudice, our

cowardice, our insensitivity, our lovelessness, our self-concern, our arrogance, our exclusiveness, our disregard, and our failures. But that forgiveness comes with an expectation that we will do our best to change our failures, not perpetuate them.

Almost all our disagreements within the church come about because we are failing to live up to Jesus’ standard of love of God and love of neighbor. Our failure to repent has grounded us.... And all our efforts to fly will be in vain until we shed the shackles of self-righteousness and self-concern that ground us.

Jesus came to help our faith soar. But we’ve got to do it on His terms – loving God and loving neighbor. Anything else keeps us grounded.

In Christ,

Certificado en Ministerio en Español Certificate in Ministry, Spanish (CEM)

Austin Seminary is expanding its horizons with a new certificate program, Certificado en Ministerio Español, in which all courses will be designed by Spanish-speaking, teachers/leaders in their field of study, and all will be taught in Spanish. The seminary has designed this series of courses to address the interests of adult students in Christian history, theology, and biblical studies. People who seek to be commissioned as Commissioned Ruling Elders in the PC(USA) may find that these courses meet the requirements of a presbytery. The Winter Term classes will be taught by Professors Gregory Cuéllar

and Philip Wingeier-Rayo.

A total of seven courses (six required and one elective) must be successfully completed to obtain the certificate. However, students may enroll for courses individually, even if they choose not to follow the certificate program. Registration for the Winter CEM term begins November 16, 2015 and ends December 2, 2015.

More information may be found at <https://www.austinseminary.edu/page.cfm?p=3327&selecttab=10907>

We are the Church

Church from page 4

But all this reflection reminds me that ...

The Church is not a building
The Church is not a steeple
The Church is not a resting place
The Church is a people

As you leave to continue your journey ...
May God Bless You!
Wait ...
He Already Has!

The congregation is now meeting in the building of Memorial Lutheran Church in Texas City.

Community Partners and Ministries working together to serve others



First Alvin Outreach

When the First Presbyterian Church of Alvin recently held a Gathering Place (a respite care option for those who have loved ones suffering from dementia and Alzheimer's), members of three different ministries came together to help others in their community. Participating were those who attend the Gathering Place, church members, veterans, and the Boyles Family Dentistry/Hope Dental Clinic that offers assistance to those who do not have dental insurance.

The folks who come to the Gathering Place enjoyed packing the 100 hygiene bags for the Veterans at the DeGeorge Center in Houston. The bags were delivered by veterans who attend First PC, Alvin. And the dentistry clinic provided toothbrushes and toothpaste.

If you would like more information about the Gathering Place, contact the office at First Presbyterian Church of Alvin at 281-585-3406.

Clerk's Corner

Rev. Lynn Hargrove, Stated Clerk
Presbytery of New Covenant



An integral part of Clinical Pastoral Education at St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital was the weekly session of I.P.R. – Inter Personal Relationships. Part of what I learned was to take ownership of my “stuff” in relationship with my colleagues and supervisors. It was always an interesting session as we tried to express our feelings in the midst of how the actions of others affected us. It was a lesson in not blaming others but in claiming our individuality in the group. Group dynamics are an interesting phenomenon, and the bigger the group, the more difficult it is to claim one's own space.

Sometimes I wonder if that is what is going on in the PC(USA). I may not have much input to the actions that are taken “on high,” but I am left to pick up the pieces and try to help others make sense of what has happened. Part of what I learned in IPR is that my emotional feelings were in the moment and that often I could not see the bigger picture and how all of the pieces would fit together.

Sometimes I wonder what were they thinking when I hear of a decision made on high. My knee-jerk reaction might be one of anger or bewilderment. One thing that I continually need to remind myself is that God's plan is bigger than my momentary discomfort. I need to trust that the thing that is uncomfortable now will work out in the realm of tomorrow.

I was pleased to see the recent call to the church from the Moderator of the 221st General Assembly, Heath Rada (affectionately called Mr. Moder-Rada). Part of his call had to do with re-establishing trust in the denomination. There have been some actions within the national agencies that have caused some of us to shake our heads and to wonder what is going on. It has been a difficult year, and the culmination of the decisions made has resulted in some anger that has been difficult to express.

At a national meeting over the summer I asked the question, “How do I explain this to congregations who are considering dismissal from the PC(USA)?” I expressed that the controversial actions weren't helping those of us in the middle governing bodies to try to hold things together. The leadership assured me that they were working to correct any problems and to help us to begin to trust them again.

My anger and frustration are the emotions of this moment in time. Once again, I need to remember that God's purpose is being worked out, even in the imperfections of our denomination. The whole is bigger than the individual parts. In the context of the denomination (and my life), I need to remember that it is not my will to be done, but God's will. I may not be able to see the bigger picture right now. I need to trust that things will get better in the near future.

We are in the midst of a major cultural shift, and the church as we know it is reactive. It is difficult to be out in front of the changes and to be proactive, when the changes are happening so rapidly. It seems that part of the frustration is not having a voice in the decisions that are made on high. And it is almost impossible to establish a relationship when one is not heard. Moderator Heath Rada has suggested these questions for us to answer:

- What might it mean for us to hit the reset button for a new church start?
- What might it mean for us to practice Sabbath, and engage in a spiritual discipline for the church in order to discern our way?
- Can we find a way to affirm a theological basis for who we are and who we are to be, one that embraces our uniqueness and our differences, and in that context establish the priorities for the church?
- And once we settle on priorities, can we implement an organizational network that can help us carry it out?

We are encouraged to talk about this, and to share our answers at the higher levels. Let's find a way to have this meaningful conversation, and be part of the solution in finding a way forward together. For together, WE ARE the Presbytery of New Covenant.



Mary's Musings

Mary Marcotte, Associate General Presbyterian
Presbytery of New Covenant

Why I love “Chuck Knows: The Committee”

Perhaps I was predisposed to enjoy Chuck because it was my father's name or because I so enjoyed the TV series about the klutzy nerd computer guy who was also a super undercover spy. But the truth is this web-based series of videos takes on issues of transformation and ministry with humor and smarts and can meaningfully engage Session teams as they wrestle with questions of congregational vitality. You can check them out at www.chuckknowschurch.com

The story behind this series, produced by the United Methodist Church, is that Chuck is a consultant who is meeting with the Compass team of Park Grove, a church that seems to have lost its way. The pulpit is vacant, the budget is waning, and there are significant questions about the future. This is a church that has lost touch with its community, and as we see in the first “meeting” is dwelling less and less on possibilities. They have developed a bunker mentality and have forgotten how to practice hospitality. They have lost the capacity to imagine a scenario in which they can thrive.

Chuck then begins to lead them through a series of conversations. We begin to see a transformation of the team. The agenda of moving to an inevitable close gradually shifts toward increased energy and new insights. Episodes thus far have included topics such as Hospitality, Reflecting our Community, Finding our Purpose, The E Word, Understanding the Who, Developing a Discipleship System, Innovation, Small Groups Children and Church, and Stewardship. Each of these segments are 12–15 minutes in length and show the interchanges of five very different people who all have the best interest of the church at heart but come at issues of critical importance in different ways. Shorter 3-5 minute videos called The Sub-Committee are just for fun extensions of these larger issues. A new episode appears each month, typically on the second Friday.

What I love about these videos is that they function in the way that parables do. They simultaneously provide a mirror in which we can see ourselves and others we serve with more clarity AND we can see into a window of God's good intentions for the church. Transformation happens in these episodes as committee members gain new self-awareness, deal with each other more honestly, and begin to find and embrace ways of health. There is humor and grace and intriguing character development arcs, although each episode could stand alone. There are also free, downloadable study guides for use with each of these lessons.

Friends, these lovely lessons deal with topics that ALL churches need to work with, to visit and revisit. Dealing with questions of mission, identity, nurture, and relationships bring all we do into sharper focus. As we discuss these, we move past assumptions and maintenance modes and can begin to embrace the excitement of joining God's movement in our midst. These episodes could form the backbone of a session retreat or be used in stand-alone topical sessions by study groups or leadership teams.

Chuck Knows Church is fun.

Chuck Knows Church offers insight.

Chuck Knows Church explores critical issues – not by telling you your answers but by raising the questions... That we need to answer.

community news

We are the Church

By Larry Edrozo, First PC, Texas City

Hello. Do you know me? I'm the church located at 1112 7th Street, Texas City. I've been here for over 70 years and I've seen a lot! I've seen hurricanes, storms, and even the Texas City Explosion.



I've seen the town move west and my membership decline. But I've also seen some miraculous things through this building.

I've seen a pastor show up immediately after Hurricane Carla with coffee and donuts, ready to get a fresh start. And a group called PDA that came in after Ike and helped energize my campus, my mission, and my congregation.

And speaking of mission, folks around here have been involved in things like Fall Bazaars, Arts and Music Camp, and a CUPS trips to Mexico to help build a hospital. Our Boy Scouts put on pancake breakfasts and even buried a time capsule (anybody know where, exactly?)

I've seen pastors, young and old, tall and short, male and female, with flowing robes, glowing stories (remember Pistol Pete), and one who even rode a motorcycle and wore combat boots. They've led us through the highs and lows - wedding, baptisms, funerals and memorials. They've even presided over a quinceañera or two. They've led our programs and outreach as well as many worship services.

And they got to interact with some mighty fine people. People who were born and baptized here and others who got here as quick as they could. Presbyterians do like to eat! I've seen Saints Alive, Frosted Flakes, Pairs and Spares - heck, I've even seen a softball team named the Brewers (not named for beer like that Milwaukee team but for our coffee makers and drinkers) and that team even featured

a catcher who wore Hush Puppies. When asked if he might want to use running shoes, he declined, fearing he might be expected to run.

The folks here gathered for fellowship and worship in many ways. We've done skits, plays, and cantatas. We've had great voices - adult choirs, robed and unrobed; youth choir with white robes; hand bell choir with the white gloves; Christmas carolers to the homebound and nursing homes and many fabulous musicians from organ and piano to oboe and flute to a bunch of pint-sized violinists!

And we've had Sunday school for the young and the young-at-heart. Folks meeting in the parlor or in the fellowship hall with a cup of coffee and a donut and spirit-led discussion. And the youth Sunday school - from meeting in the Noah's Ark room from where they wrote scriptures over the door frame...to the older kids who got to meet upstairs, plant trees, hang butterflies in the foyers, and even help form their own outreach to local teens with a venture called Interlude.

And we've had folks cheerfully volunteer from everything to being worship leader, usher, maintenance and garden/yard work and so many other tasks that helped keep my doors open. And the stories I've heard. From the three-year-old who wanted to be a shepherd rather than a sheep at the Christmas pageant. His argument: sheep were soft, girls were soft - let them be the sheep, he was going to be a shepherd. To the sixty plus-year-old who reminded the pastor that he needed to limit this show to 60 minutes because the Cowboys played at noon!

Yes, I've seen it all; people sharing God's love, following Christ, joining in fellowship and worship. I've seen it come full circle. We actually joined with Memorial Lutheran in a joint Vacation Bible School, and not just at their 29th St. location, but way back when there were on 9th and 4th!

Church continues on page 3

highlights



Tribute to Sharyl Davis on her retirement as Missions Director at Northwoods PC.

A Cultural Immersion Experience

By RE Trish Beach,
Westminster PC, Galveston

New Covenant Presbytery, in partnership with CEDEPCA (Protestant Center for Pastoral Studies in Central America), sponsored a cultural immersion experience in Guatemala last July. The group of thirteen people from seven churches was blessed with renewed spiritual energy by the wonderful companionship of CEDEPCA staff and words of hope from leaders and mission co-workers. Our experiences strengthened our faith and increased our respect and admiration for the Guatemalan people.

Some highlights:

- Distribution of water filters to Mayan families, part of the disaster prevention ministry of CEDEPCA. Imagine for the first time in your life, having clean water in your home which did not require you to carry the wood to build the fire to boil it!
- Visible strong faith exhibited by members of the church where we worshiped and the commitment of Mayan women who travel up to two hours by foot or bus (one way) to attend weekly Bible study classes.
- Hearing from committed leaders who risk censure or even death because they stand up to powerful international forces who will exploit the land and expel its inhabitants to destroy a mountain

for a few grams of gold.

- Listening to the joyous descriptions of the new, independent, degree-conferring CEDEPCA Seminary which educates future protestant pastors in Guatemala.
- Seeing the thousands of names of those martyred or “disappeared” during the 36-year civil war displayed on the pillars in front of the National Cathedral. The priest who published the names and stories of those 20,000 individuals was also martyred. The Guatemalan people remain committed to their slogan, “Never Again” when they speak of those dark days.
- Visiting a school where children are taught practical skills, a standard academic curriculum, and analytical skills. This school boasts an 85% graduation rate - triple that of the public school system.

We have learned that CEDEPCA is again reaching out - in El Cambray where on October 1 a mudslide buried 150 houses. Staff will continue to minister to the survivors with materials and, psychological and spiritual support for months to come.

It's not too early to make plans to participate in the presbytery's next CEDEPCA trip to Guatemala, June 10-17, 2016. For more information, contact Sharyl Davis at dsharyl@att.net or 713- 202-3548.

Making History Today

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



One Perspective on the Great War

One hundred years ago Europe was engaged in what became known as The Great War. While it lasted from August 1914 to November 1918, the United States only became directly involved in April 1917. Many of us have heard of such battle names as the Marne (September, 1914), Verdun (a battle that lasted for 303 days, from February to December 1916), and the Somme (a battle that lasted from July 1 to November 18, 1916, in which over one million men were wounded or killed).

In this centenary observance of World War I, books are being written and published that review the course of the war itself, examine strategies and tactics, and look at the long-term consequences of it.

However, Rev. Jerry R. Tompkins, retired Presbyterian pastor, seminary administrator, and president emeritus of the Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services in Texas, has uncovered, edited, and published the diary and letters of a Texas Presbyterian pastor who left his first pastorate to serve in that war. Rev. Eugene William McLaurin, a native of Mississippi whose family moved to Texas and eventually settled in Elysian Fields in northeast Texas, was 30 years old when he volunteered for service in the Army, hoping that he would be commissioned as a chaplain.

Tompkins' book, *The Crossed Hands of God: The World War I Diary and Letters of Eugene William McLaurin*, was published in August of this year and is complete with maps and photographs. According to Tompkins, the title of the book is taken from a sermon outline of McLaurin's that is based on a passage from Genesis 48.

Most helpful to the reader is Tompkins' 20-page biographical sketch of McLaurin's life before, during, and after the war. McLaurin's service in Europe was mostly in northern France during the War. He arrived in September 1918 and returned to the United States in June 1919, having served briefly in occupied Germany after the November 11, 1918 armistice. During the war itself, McLaurin served as a stretcher bearer, helping the wounded and burying the dead.

This perspective on World War I provides a personal and up-close glimpse at the horrors of war itself, even if at the tail-end of it. A Presbyterian pastor whose commander-in-chief, Woodrow Wilson, was also Presbyterian, McLaurin never did receive a commission as a chaplain, but he served with distinction as an assistant to a military chaplain. Upon returning from the War, McLaurin married Myrtle Arthur, the recipient of the letters in this volume, in March of 1922.

A graduate of Austin Seminary, eventually McLaurin went on to teach Systematic Theology at the Seminary, and later New Testament Greek, earning his Ph.D. in Greek from the University of Texas while on the Seminary faculty.

Tompkins' closing words in his biographical sketch remind us not only of a life well lived, but also of a supreme example of Christian discipleship: “a certain abiding humility, an empathy for the worthy student struggling with his courses, a relaxed common sense about what is really important in living a Christian life. In the end, a simpler, more comprehensive word comes to mind in remembering Eugene McLaurin: he was a man of immense grace.”

Next Connections deadline

The next *Connections* copy deadline is Wednesday, December 2, for the January/February 2016 issue. Please send articles and photos to Helen Wolf at hwolf@pbyofnewcovenant.org.

In Our Thoughts and Prayers

TE Kristi Click, Associate Pastor at Spring Branch PC, Houston, and West Blankman were married August 22, 2015. Congratulations!

Stacey and Justin Williams, First PC, Sugar Land – Addison Clare Williams was born August 28, 2015. Stacy serves as Director of Youth Ministries at the church.

TE Rachel Young and Candidate Josh Young, Clear Lake PC, Houston – Ezekiel Thomas Young was born October 4, 2015.

TE Kevin Boyd, St. Paul PC, Houston – health concerns for Kevin's brother, Kendall.

TE Patricia Clark, HR – Patricia is undergoing chemo treatment for a cancer diagnosis.

Family and friends of RE Sandra Cooper, St. Philip PC, Houston – Sandra died in September. She was instrumental in starting the Kids Against Hunger program at St. Philip PC.

TE Mark Plunkett, Heritage PC, Houston – the father of Mark's wife, Jeanne, died September 10, 2015.

Family and friends of RE Martha Jenkinson, Pines PC, Houston – Martha died September 20, 2015.

Family and friends of RE Clete Booher, Webster PC – Clete died September 24, 2015. He served on several presbytery committees.

RE Chuck Johnson, St. Philip PC, Houston – continuing health concerns.

TE Brian Wiggins and family, First PC, Lufkin – Brian's mother-in-law, Helen Bitters, died in October at age 98.

Family and friends of TE Sherman Wilson, HR – Sherman died October 8, 2015. He was the founder of Sagemont PC, Houston.

TE Alex Cornell (St. Stephen PC, Houston) and Kathy Lee were married October 10, 2015.

TE Robert Rush, First PC, Tomball – Robert's daughter Debra is receiving treatment for a cancer diagnosis.

TE Carroll Pickett, HR – Carroll broke his hip in October. He is a former chaplain at the Huntsville Prison.

HR = Honorably Retired | TE = Teaching Elder (Rev.) | RE = Ruling Elder

mission an



Construction crew

Peru 2015 Outreach by Webster PC

By RE Ed Tobia

With a great sense of anticipation and joy, Webster PC returned to Ayaviri, Peru, last summer. Seeds for this year's trip were planted during the church's first visit there in 2014. The Iglesia Evangelica Peruana (IEP) congregation in Ayaviri is growing to become a regional education and training center. Toward this goal, the 2014 team worked with local congregation members constructing tables and chairs for their classrooms.

Planning for 2015 began before the 2014 team even touched down in Houston. Working alongside Sara Armstrong, the Houston team developed a list of future projects we thought would benefit the Ayaviri congregation. Simultaneously, Ayaviri congregation members worked up their list. Before our 2014 team departed Ayaviri, we met to discuss our thoughts. All were amazed at how closely our lists matched. It had only been four days since all had met, but each group could see the benefit of the other.

Our teams decided on:

- Ayaviri congregation would construct a new kitchen designed to handle large groups. WPC's 2015 team would assist with the finish work.
- Sara and Urpi (Yolanda Luna) would develop a Nutrition and Health program specifically focused on women. WPC would support and assist.
- WPC would provide follow-up

training on Godly Play Bible Study

- WPC would conduct ESL classes for children and youth, mixed with art and other fun learning activities to round out our work.

Our 2015 team spent a week last August in Ayaviri, working on construction and education programs, but more importantly, worshiping, sharing meals, and enjoying one another's company. The group swelled to over 125 on some days, with participants attending from many congregations throughout the region. Urpi's Women's Nutrition program had over 80 participants for two days. The ESL classes were filled with children, youth, and adults, and had to be divided into groups to accommodate the large numbers. Godly Play instruction was offered as a two-day class, with leaders from five congregations having a blast building their own illustration kits to use in teaching their children. Finally, the kitchen was not as far along as anticipated, so we had an opportunity to trench water lines and pour concrete. You really haven't lived until you pick and shovel at 13,000 feet!

The real success of our trip however came from the day-to-day personal interaction of everyone involved. Many of us had spent time together in 2014, so it seemed the warmth and friendship between all came much faster this year. What a joy it was to watch everyone interacting: Sidney, our nine-year-old teammate,

Outreach continues on page 7

and ministry



Myanmar crew members

Spiritual Ministry for Seafarers in Houston

*By Chaplain Davis Wells,
Port of Houston Seafarers Centers*

Here in Houston we are blessed to have two Myanmar ship visitors who faithfully visit every ship with Myanmar crew members. Khin Maung Oo, a former ship Captain and Instructor training seafarers in Asia, and his wife, Tin Tin Win, help the crew to shop for whatever they need. They are also sensitive to the spiritual needs of the crew.

Khin Maung Oo and Tin Tin Win were asked by the Myanmar captain of the Atlantic Glory if they could arrange a Myanmar Monk to come to their ship in order to bless the crew and allow them to make merit, a religious and spiritual act in Buddhism. Normally they only have this opportunity in the very short

time which they spend at home in their own country, as they usually work on ships nine months out of the year. Khin Maung Oo and Tin Tin went out of their way to make this happen with the only Myanmar Buddhist Monk in Houston.

The captain and crew were so very pleased and grateful. They all love to come to the Port of Houston because of the wonderful social services they receive from our deeply spiritual ministry. Seafarers who come here know that we care about them.



Myanmar Monk with crew members

Peru Outreach from page 7

playing and learning along with the Ayaviri youth; Michael, a young adult, sharing games and music with a group of young adults on each others' phones; James working out his Portuguese to Spanish translation; enjoying traditional Peruvian meals together; and all sharing common worship in Spanish, English, and Quechua.

All of us experienced true appreciation and love expressed in word and deed. The Ayaviri congregation took the lead throughout our stay. Pastor Helen DeLeon puts it well saying, "Our

relationship with the people in Ayaviri is growing and deepening. They tell us that it is our presence with them that convinces them that God really does have a plan and a future for them. Why else would God bring us to them? This, to me, is why we go, and why we should continue going. God is calling us to walk alongside this faithful congregation."

We saw God at work in the special bond formed between people - no matter the language or cultural differences - that develops when people work, eat, and worship together. May God continue to bless our work in Peru.

youth news

SAVE THE DATES!

February 26-28 and March 4-6

Conclaves 2016

Each spring PYCC (Presbyterian Youth Connection Council) leads weekend retreats at Camp Cho-Yeh for senior high and middle school youth. These weekends enable youth groups to grow closer together, connect with other youth from our presbytery, engage in Bible Study and small groups, participate in mission project, experience dynamic worship, and of course have fun playing games and making new friends!

These fun-filled weekends, Conclaves 2016, will be held February 26-28 and March 4-6.

July 19-23



Triennium 2016

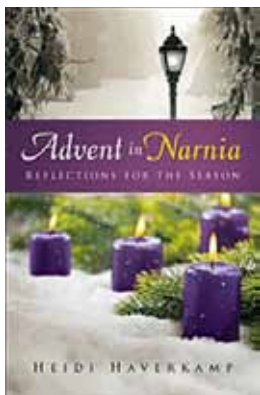
New Covenant Presbytery will be sending a delegation of youth and adults to Presbyterian Youth Triennium to be held July 19-23, 2016, at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana. This unique event for high school youth (entering freshmen through graduating seniors) is hosted by the Cumberland Presbyterian Churches and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) every three years. Adult Advisors (age 23+) are also needed.

Information and forms are available on the presbytery website at www.pbyofnewcovenant.org>Ministries>Youth.

Youth should complete forms and submit them to their home church for evaluation and selection. These forms are due to presbytery by Tuesday, December 1. Adults should apply directly to the presbytery.

This is powerful week of worship, small groups, recreation, and fellowship with thousands of Presbyterian youth from all over the world! A promotional video is available at: www.presbyterianyouthtriennium.org.

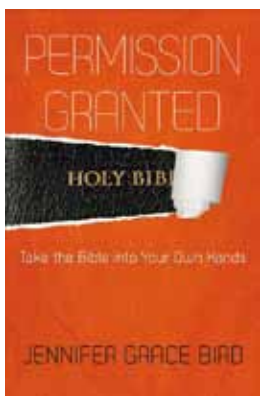
in the resource center new book resources



Advent in Narnia: Reflections on the Season

By Heidi Haverkamp

Much is packed into this slender volume, newly released by Westminster John Knox. Twenty-eight brief reflections connect scripture and segments drawn from the C.S. Lewis story, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Reflection questions for each day draw the reader into personal meditation on the yearning and blessings of the season. A four-session plan for adult learners offers guidance for a seasonal Sunday school or small group class. There are detailed suggestions for a Narnia Night for families that include decorations, arts and crafts, food, storytelling, and prayers.



Permission Granted: Take the Bible into Your Own Hands

By Jennifer Grace Bird

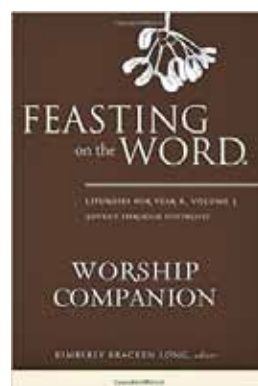
Designed to empower readers to pick up scripture and read it with fresh eyes, this study takes on twelve key issues and sorts out what the Bible says rather than what we may have been told in pat answers or popular misconceptions. Bring your questions to scripture – which is powerful enough to engage your questions with meaningful answers.

Feasting on the Word



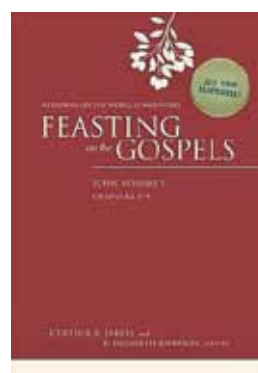
Feasting on the Word: Lenten Companion

From the editors of the Feasting on the Word series of lectionary commentaries and liturgies, this volume provides suggestions and resources for a thematic approach for the six Sundays of Lent plus Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday, as well as for midweek services that explore themes of food and fasting. Hymn suggestions and children's sermon suggestions are also included.



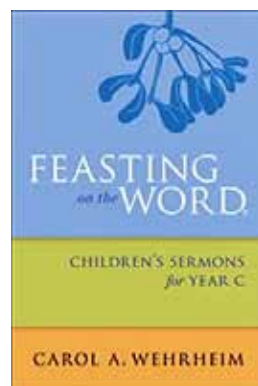
Feasting on the Word: Worship Companion, Year B, Volume 2

Containing rich liturgies suggested by the readings of the Revised Common Lectionary, year B cycle, this collection begins with Trinity Sunday and runs through Christ the King Sunday. In addition to calls to worship, prayers of confession, blessings and more, each Sunday also includes a question for reflection as well as household prayers for morning and evening each week.



Feasting on the Gospels. John, Volume 1 (chapters 1-9)

For those who appreciate the scholarship and insights of the "Feasting" commentary series but prefer to focus on gospels in their entirety, this volume provides both preachers and students of scripture a helpful tool for studying John's gospel. Each segment of scripture is explored through the lens of theological, pastoral, exegetical, and homiletical perspectives.

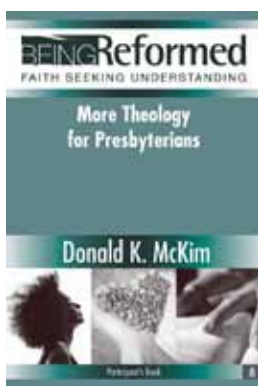


Feasting on the Word: Children's Sermons for Year C

By Carol Wehrheim

Instead of relying on object lessons that are beyond the concrete, literal thinking capacities of children, here are children's sermons that are deeply grounded in the sharing of God's word in simple, age-appropriate ways. One scripture is drawn from the lectionary reading of each Sunday and is retold in simple words and end with a prayer. Suggestions for this kind of storytelling are also shared so that based on these models, the reader can become more confident as a biblical storyteller.

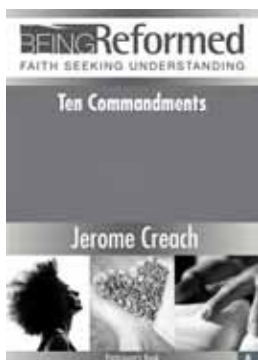
Being Reformed



Being Reformed: More Theology for Presbyterians

6 sessions

Explore the themes of Creation, Providence, Salvation, Church and Sacraments, Christian Life and Hope and how they are foundational to Presbyterian identity. Participant's guide has short essays; teacher's guide has many learning activities.



Being Reformed: Ten Commandments

6-session adult story

Like other titles in the series, this study of the Ten Commandments offers a participant's book which includes short essays and a leader's guide that offers additional background and includes head and heart questions to unpack the scripture and wrestle with its meaning and application today.

Transitions

Welcome to New Covenant! New Faces and Old Friends



Shelby Dies

TE Shelby Dies, Chaplain from Mission Presbytery, has transferred to New Covenant Presbytery and continues to serve as Chaplain. She received a BS in Nursing from UT Austin & UTMB, Galveston, and a BA in Psychology from UT-Austin. She earned her MDiv in 2004 from Austin Presbyterian Seminary and was ordained in the PC(USA) in 2010. Shelby and her husband David moved to the Houston-Galveston area to be close to their children and two grandsons.



Michael Sydnor

TE Michael Sydnor has returned to New Covenant Presbytery from Grace Presbytery where he was a member-at-large. He is now living in Cypress. Michael's MDiv is from Union Seminary/PSCE in Richmond, VA. He was ordained in the PC(USA) in 1992.

TE Lucia Oerter has transferred to New Covenant from Tampa Bay Presbytery and is serving as Transitional/Interim Pastor at Pines Presbyterian, Houston. Lucia is a trained Transitional Pastor and is working with Pines in preparing the church for its' next senior pastor. Lucia was born and raised in Indianapolis and received her MDiv from Christian Theological Seminary, also in Indianapolis. She received her MDIV from Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis and was ordained in the PC(USA) in 1997. Her husband, John, is also a transitional pastor. They have a blended family of six grown children and eight grandchildren. They enjoy spending most of their vacation time fly-fishing for trout in beautiful rivers and streams.



Lucia Oerter



Dan Walker

TE Dan Walker, HR, has transferred from the Presbytery of New England. He received his MDiv from Austin Presbyterian Seminary and was ordained in the Presbyterian Church in 1996. His first call was in New Covenant Presbytery!

TE Emily Owen, Member-at-Large, has transferred from Charlotte Presbytery in NC. She received her BA in Communication Arts/speech emphasis with a Major/Minor in Religion from Austin College. She earned her MDiv in 2008 from Austin Presbyterian Seminary. Emily's husband, Henry, is the Director of the Nature Discovery Center in Bellaire.



Emily Owen



Hector Rivera-Velez

TE Hector Rivera-Velez who has transferred from Mission Presbytery will serve in New Covenant as a Hospice Chaplain with Vantage Hospice Care. He earned a BA degree in Social Sciences/Psychology from the University of Puerto Rico in 1984. Hector received his MDiv from Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA, in 1989 and was ordained in the PC(USA) in 1992.

TE Tom Sharon and **TE Linda Sharon**, HR, have returned to New Covenant after a period in Grace Presbytery. Tom is serving as Chaplain at Texas Children's Hospital. He received his MDiv from Austin Presbyterian Seminary in 2006. Linda also received her MDiv from Austin Seminary and completed requirements for a clinical Pastoral Education Residency at the Methodist Hospital in Houston's Medical Center where she served for seven years. She was ordained in the PC(USA) in 2007.



Tom Sharon



Linda Sharon

New Candidate enrolled

Josh Young, now serving as Director of Music and Worship at Clear Lake PC, Houston, has been enrolled as Candidate for Ministry of Word and Sacrament. The candidacy phase provides individuals a time for full preparation to serve the church as a Teaching Elder.

Josh was raised in the faith by his family. He felt an inner call to ministry while in high school. "I want to point others to Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, just as others have pointed me throughout my life" says Josh. At the presbytery meeting where he was officially enrolled, Josh was surrounded by the many people who



Josh Young

have supported him during his time of inquiry. Josh is married to **TE Rachel Young**, Associate Pastor of Spiritual Formation at Clear Lake PC. Their first child, **Ezekiel Thomas Young**, was born October 4, 2014.

Godspeed, Harland!

The status of Honorably Retired (HR) has been granted to **TE Harland Merriam**. He and his wife Barbara (who first met in kindergarten!) have two sons and daughters-in-law, Joshua and Helen and Aaron and Jill, who all live in the Denver, Colorado, area. Their first grandchild Calvin was born in June 2013 to Aaron and Jill.



Harland Merriam

Harland served as pastor at St. Andrews PC, Beaumont, for 27 years. He received his MDiv degree from Princeton Seminary in 1975 and his DMin from Union Seminary in 1982. He served as a Chaplain in the Army Reserve for 34 years, and Chaplain for the Beaumont Police Department.

When Harland has any free time, he follows his passion for hybridizing daylilies and improving his golf swing! Two vans were needed just to move his plants to Florida where he and Barbara now live.

Presbytery Meeting

The next Stated Presbytery Meeting will be Saturday, November 21 at St. John's PC, Houston.



2015 calendar

November 10

Board of Pensions Luncheon for
Retirees
St. Philip PC
Houston

November 17

Healthy Boundaries Workshop
Presbytery Office

November 21

Presbytery Meeting
St. John's PC
Houston, TX

November 26-27

Presbytery Center closed
Thanksgiving

December 10

Christmas Open House – “Soulful
Christmas – Soul Food and Blues”
11:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.
Presbytery Center
Houston, TX



December 24-25

Presbytery Center closed
Christmas

2016
Happy New Year!



January 1, 2016

New Year's Day
Presbytery Center closed

February 26-27

Youth Conclaves
Cho-Yeh
Livingston, TX

March 4-6

Youth Conclaves
Cho-Yeh
Livingston, TX

April 5-7

Clergy Retreat
Camp Allen
Navasota, TX

July 19-23

2016 Triennium
Purdue University

what's happening ... upcoming events and gatherings

November 7



CALLING ALL YOUTH WORKERS, ADULT VOLUNTEERS, AND PARENTS!

Come to EQUIP, a day of workshops and worship to be held Saturday, November 7, 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. at Memorial Drive PC, Houston, for youth workers, adult volunteers, and parents of youth. Workshops will educate, equip, and empower you to minister and care for young people. Bring your youth ministry team of volunteers for training. Invite parents to learn about the “real world” of teenagers and how to help them navigate the complexities of faith and life. This is a free event and open to everyone.

Morning Workshops and Leaders

- What's Out There? Youth Curriculum & Resources
Led by Mary Marcotte
- Facilitating Small Group Discussion
Led by Chris Rush
- Unbound: The Transformative Power of Mission Trips
Led by Jann Treadwell
- It's Just a Phase. Don't Miss It!
Led by Andrew Keyes

Afternoon Workshops and Leaders

- Understanding Millennials
Led by Brandon Gaide
- Calendar Craze: the Rhythm & Balance of Youth Ministry
Led by Jessie Kuehner
- Sticky Gospel: Making the Gospel Relevant for Teenagers Today
Led by Laura Miller
- Technology: Uses, Dangers & Monitoring,
Led by Dan Aikins

Registration begins at 8:30 a.m. This is a free event, open to everyone. Lunch tickets may be purchased at the door. Register online at Eventbrite.
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/equip-tickets-19051335056>

November 11



CONCERT AGAINST HATE

Join the Anti-Defamation League, Southwest Region, in celebrating the power of voices in harmony working together to fight hate in our communities. “Voices in Harmony” will be presented Wednesday, November 11, by the world renowned voices and talent of the Houston Grand Opera, 8:00 p.m. at the Wortham Theater.

Honoring:

CIVIL RIGHTS HEROES

- Frank Meeink, a former neo-Nazi skinhead whose violent childhood primed him to hate and who now travels the country telling his story of hate to harmony
- Jeannie Opdyke Smith, daughter of Irene Opdyke, who continues to tell her mother's story of how she saved the lives of twelve Jews during the Holocaust by hiding them in the basement of a German soldier
- Lizzie Velasquez, a 26-year-old woman who went from being a bullying victim to a worldwide anti bullying activist and whose story is being premiered in the film “A Brave Heart: The Lizzie Velasquez Story.”

AMERICA'S VETERANS - a special presentation

CORPORATE HEROES

- Sysco, for fostering diversity and inclusion within their company and the community and for supporting ADL's ongoing efforts to provide its educational resources to thousands of educators, parents and students in Houston
- Julie and Ben Rogers Ecumenism Award
- Father Donald S. Nesti, C.S.Sp., Director and Founder of the Center for Faith and Culture at the University of St. Thomas, for his thirty years of outstanding work in furthering positive interfaith dialogue and cooperation in Houston

For more information and to reserve your seats, contact aatlas@adl.org.

what's happening... upcoming events and gatherings

December 6



Music for the Christmas Season

All are invited to attend MDPC's Christmas program, "Glad Tidings," presented by the Sanctuary Choir, organist Kathryn White, conductor Charles Hausmann, and a professional orchestra, on Sunday, December 6, at 6:00 p.m. in the sanctuary of Memorial Drive PC, Houston.

Two composers have become synonymous with the festive music of the Christmas season – British composer John Rutter and American composer Randol Bass. Featured on this concert will be two of their most cherished masterworks - *Magnificat* and *Glad Tidings*. These works interpret the story of Christmas through songs, carols, choruses, and narration. The music is colorfully orchestrated and dynamic. The concert is free and open to the public.

December 10

YOU ARE INVITED TO THE PRESBYTERY OF NEW COVENANT
ANNUAL CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE

Soulful CHRISTMAS

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2015

"Soulful Christmas - Soul Food and Blues" is the theme for this year's Open House. Come and let your soul be fed with great soul food and music. Bring a dish or dessert if you'd like. There will be ham and turkey along with beans, cornbread and other delights. The party will be from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the Presbytery Center, 1110 Lovett Blvd., Houston, TX. Everyone is invited to attend.

February 6

Annual Church Officer Enrichment Event takes on expanded identity as Presbyterian Leadership Enrichment



PRESBYTERIAN LEADERSHIP ENRICHMENT

Mark your calendars! Save the date! Presbyterian Leadership Enrichment, training for new leaders – session members, deacons, ministry teams, and others – will take place Saturday, February 6, 2016, at Pines PC, Houston, 9:00 a.m.–2:30 p.m. This is the new name for what was formerly known as the Church Officer Enrichment.

Hear featured keynote speaker, Rev. Karl Travis, speak to the issue of welcoming and honoring leadership gifts across the generation, and take part in two workshops to build knowledge and skills.

Watch *Tuesday Connect* in mid-November for full details and registration information. Invite your friends to join you!



Karl Travis

February 29-March 2



**Stewardship
Kaleidoscope**
for elders, pastors, presbytery staff and volunteers

Stewardship Kaleidoscope: Real Tools for Real Ministry

Pastors, lay leaders, and anyone looking to learn more about stewardship in today's church context are invited to attend "Giving is the Way Conference" to be held February 29-March 2, 2016 at the Hilton San Antonio Airport. Four plenary sessions, four worship services, and 35 workshops covering topics such as annual stewardship, planned giving, theology of giving, current trends in stewardship, capital campaigns, and generosity will be offered. TE Karl Travis and Grace Duddy Pomroy, Financial Education Specialist, will be the keynote speakers. TE Cynthia M. Campbell will be the worship leader.

More information and registration may be found at www.stewardshipkaleidoscope.org

A few minutes of your time, please...

This survey asks you to be part of the discussion concerning the future of the presbytery’s bimonthly, 12-page newsletter, Connections. Your input is very important. Please take a few moments to answer to the 3 questions below. Respond to this survey **only once** either online or by mail. Send your response to Helen Wolf or answer the questions online, <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/readconnections>

1.

How often do you read Connections?

Always

Often (Frequently)

Sometimes

Seldom (Rarely)

Never

2.

If you read Connections, how do you get it?

As a printed, mailed newsletter

Through a link in Tuesday Connect

Through a link on the presbytery website

3.

What parts of Connections are you most likely to read?

You may check more than one of the below.

Columns (Cole, Marcotte, Hargrove, etc.)

Events: Presbytery and Churches

Front Page

News from Presbytery Partners (Interfaith Ministries, Seafarers, Mo-Ranch, etc.)

PC(USA) News

Prayers

Reports from or about our congregations

Resources (books, websites, DVDs, etc.)

Transitions of New Covenant pastors

Youth News

Your name: *(optional)* _____

Please return this survey by November 15 to
Presbytery of New Covenant, Attn. Helen Wolf,
1110 Lovett Blvd.
Houston, TX 77006

If you wish to make additional comments, please contact Helen Wolf at
hwolf@pbyofnewcovenant.org, or 713-526-2585, ext. 203.
Thank you for participating!



**PRESBYTERY OF
NEW COVENANT**
1110 Lovett Boulevard
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