

Covenant Chronicle

August 2010



A WORD FROM ERNIE

CHANGES - Some are welcome. Some are feared. But life teaches us that change is inevitable. Life does not stand still, even when we wish it would. So what are we to do? A pragmatic approach counsels us to make the best of the inevitable changes in our personal lives, our communities, and our world. I heartily agree with this. Why waste time and energy bemoaning things that are beyond our control? Better to just get to work making the best of things, to finding the most life affirming way forward. This is good common sense, but a faith approach adds an important additional element, for it sees the divine Spirit at work in the stirring of the waters. From this perspective change is not just inevitable, but can bring unexpected blessings.

At Covenant we are in the midst of two staff changes. Our music director John Coble has left us to become the Cantor at the Augsburg Lutheran Church in Winston-Salem. We are grateful for the gifts and graces he shared with us over the past eight years, and wish him well. But Covenant's commitment to a vibrant music program does not leave with John. Committed to

maintaining the quality of our music program, the Session has appointed a search committee of Brad Boyd (chair), Sue Colussy, Beth Price, Joslyn McGuire, Alison Caughman and myself (*ex officio*) to quickly find an interim music director/organist to take us through the year, as we look for an excellent 'permanent' music director. If you have any promising leads, please contact any member of the search committee.

The second change is with our youth director. Terra McVoy is resigning because her writing career has taken off. Her third novel for teens is being published and the publisher wants her to produce two more books in the coming year! The youth committee made up of John O'Callaghan, Charlotte and Dick Cook, Brian Short, Delicia Grimmesey, Kelly Day, Kellyann Ford, and myself (*ex officio*) will begin interviewing candidates to be our youth director beginning August 3rd. Again, if you know of any promising candidates, please pass them on to the committee.

I am confident that we will fill both these positions with excellent people.

Peace and blessings, *Ernie*

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CHANGE BACK IN TIME OF WORSHIP TO 11:00 AM

Beginning on Rally Day the 15th (third Sunday) in August our worship service will return to its normal time of 11:00 am. Be sure and reset your clocks, otherwise you will have to wait for the rest of us to get here.



UPCOMING EVENTS (for more details see August Calendar)

- ◆ August 1 CYG: Report from Camp Calvin and luncheon
- ◆ August 4 FAMA Meeting @ Ahavath Achim Synagogue
- ◆ August 12 SWTG Planning Meeting
- ◆ August 13 Parents' Night Out #1
- ◆ August 15 Rally Day / Teacher Presentation / **CHURCH TIME CHANGE**
- ◆ August 17 Presbytery Executive Staff Meeting 9 am to 3 pm
- ◆ August 24 Session Meeting
- ◆ August 27 Parents' Night Out #2



August editorial: You good folk may not know this about me (yet) but I collect sayings, quotes, epigrams, or just about any catchy phrase like a philatelist collects first day covers or a numismatist collects specie. I am especially fond of non sequiturs. Recently in the AJC's column the Vent they updated the old American Indian saying "You cannot really understand someone until you walk a mile in their shoes . . . And then you're a mile away from them and you have their shoes. Wow, what a month!

3 church services attended; 3 extended trips (we never travel except within books); 3 first class movies. Perhaps Jimmy Buffett best summed up the month when he played his Gulf Shores Benefit Concert and sang the song "Changes In Attitude". The specific lyric I'm reminded of goes

*"It's these changes in latitudes, changes in attitudes
Nothing remains quite the same
With all of our running and all of our cunning
If we couldn't laugh we would all go insane"*

This issue seems to resonate with reflections on the importance of point of view. Ernie and our church body are seeing two beloved figures depart following their individual career paths. They're looking back on their memories and experiences here. Julie Johnson is starting a series about the glass art that surrounds us in church, what we see when we look at it and through it. Dave Linnen is having us consider the differences in perspective from giving and receiving. Jill is telling us about her recent experience in continuing to learn new ways to look at and disengage from the world in order to create the quiet peaceful state of mind that helps the heart to become more open and loving. We all have our own ways of looking at the world. Perhaps our growth occurs best as we learn to see through each others' eyes. Such are my musings for this month.

My apologies to Peggy Fillio for omitting her birthday last month. I've been told it is July 22. Next year I'll be sure and get it right. Please send any corrections, conceptions, nostrums, and notions in my direction. Until September. Oscar Jones



Music Notes

By John Coble

As I believe you all know by now, this will be my last newsletter column. I have accepted a position at Augsburg Lutheran Church in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, as Cantor. I'm often asked what "cantor" means.

Will I be singing chant, like a cantor in a Catholic church or Jewish synagogue? No. (If I could sing I'd be rich and famous!)

Cantor, in the Lutheran tradition, means "leader of the people's song." It's really not any different than Director of Music, which was my title here. It means doing many things, but all with the common goal of leading worship with music. J.S. Bach held positions as a Cantor.

While I am very excited at this new, ambitious opportunity to grow in my vocation, I am also profoundly sad. I've asked myself about why I would choose to make such a change. It is a good, logical move, in terms of career and vocation, an opportunity to be challenged and continue to grow. But to accept this opportunity, I must also give up something, a church I love very much and friends that are so dear to me. I don't see those friendships as ending just because of a change of location. Still, it hurts.

In my last newsletter column, I wrote about a friend who had died. My conversations with him, especially the last one, his death, and even his memorial service, despite being some distance away, all had significant meaning for me. I also attended another funeral around the same time. My piano teacher from college, Vola Jacobs, passed away in Augusta and I took my mother to the funeral. Mrs. Jacobs was not necessarily my favorite teacher, but I felt the need to pay tribute to her, and at the same time symbolically to pay tribute to several other teachers from that same small college who have passed away, whose funerals I was not able to attend over the years. She, like my friend here in Atlanta,

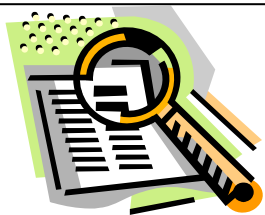


was symbolic of something bigger. God seemed to have a lesson to teach me in these deaths and funerals, and I was eager to learn. Among many other things, I noticed in the bulletin Mrs. Jacobs' birthday – her funeral on her birthday! The priest pointed this out in his sermon, and emphasized that she had been born into a new life with God. A great lesson learned there.

John O'Donohue writes about the concept of birth and death. He asks us to imagine a baby in the womb, comfortable, safe, warm, protected, fed, literally connected to its mother by the umbilical cord. Imagine if you could tell that baby it would be forced out of that safe place, dropped out into the vacant, open light, literally cut off from that life-giving cord. The baby would probably assume and fear it was going to die. For the baby in the womb, birth would seem like death. From our perspective, we know differently. The problem is perspective.

Leaving everything that's familiar and moving to something new with just the faith that it will be better, can be hard. On the other hand, as I've said to people who say they're going to miss me so much (I'm going to miss them too), I haven't died. There are still phone calls, e-mails, Facebook, and the possibility of visits. There's still a big wedding in Atlanta in October! Life will go on. Yes, separation and beginning a new phase will be difficult, but our bonds of friendship will always continue.


I want to thank all of you very much for all you've done for me over these last eight years at Covenant. They have been very eventful years for me, but they have been good. Thank you for supporting the ministry of music in our church. Thank you for welcoming my parents on their visits here. Thank you for comforting me in my father's illness and death. Thank you for cheering me on as I completed my doctorate. Thank you for supporting Kate and me, and helping us celebrate our upcoming marriage. Thank you for supporting me personally, and for being my good friends. Thank you for loving me. The feeling is mutual. God bless, John



Did you know?

Introducing: The Covenant Quiz #3 or do you know this session member?

The best part of my work is presiding over the finalization of adoptions and telling a couple, "Congratulations, you have a daughter."



Report from the
Field:
CYG's Summer
Mission Trip to the
Calvin Center

By faith we have been made acceptable to God. And now, because of our Lord Jesus Christ, we live at peace with God. Christ has also introduced us to God's undeserved kindness on which we take our stand. So we are happy, as we look forward to sharing in the glory of God. But that's not all! We gladly suffer, because we know that suffering helps us to endure. And endurance builds character, which gives us a hop that will never disappoint us. All of this happens because God has given us the Holy Spirit, who fills our hearts with his love. --Romans 5: 1-6



Strengthening. Unexpected. Beneficial. Uplifting. Caring. Progressive. Eye-opening. Wholesome. Inspiring. Spiritual. Faithful. Connecting. Changed my look at life. Bug bites. Homesickness. Team-building. Productive. Tiring. Heart-warming. Awareness. Endurance. Well-spent.

These are just a few of the words that Brooke, Jordan, Anna, Justin, Kellyann and I came up with during our mission trip at the Calvin Center July 11-16th. It was certainly a week full of many challenges (trying to figure out the right consistency for the clay mix we were making in order to make bricks, way too many bugs and not enough -read, any- electrical light for two nights, having to eat mooshed-up dinner out of a trash bag, walking 1600 steps and back for our water for two days), but also one

brimming with immeasurable rewards.

During our two-night experience at Global Village, while living in a brick enclosure with no electricity and no running water, having to sleep in the heat under mosquito nets, and then work a long hard day weeding, constructing part of a new African Sub-Sahara building, plus making bricks (with no shower afterward), we all overcame frustrations, fears, and physical challenges we never thought we could. (The fragrant outhouse being a particularly big hurdle, plus eating dinner out of a garbage bag..)

When we hiked the 20 minute trail back to the main camp on Tuesday morning, we were shaking with tiredness and hunger, coated with layers of dirt, sweat, and bug spray. We went straight to break-



fast in the camp's Dining Hall, and were overwhelmed by all the choices there: fruit, oatmeal, milk *and* juice, eggs, bacon, grits, biscuits . . . we piled too much on our plates, and were made even more aware of the food imbalances in the world.

Our next three and a half days were spent in a combination of work and play. Though our work days were



tough (lots of painting and scraping and scrubbing, which meant being hot, facing more bugs), we did also get to enjoy the camp's pool, play some fun Team Challenge games, enjoy s'mores at a bonfire and dance around together to some really silly songs. Our meals were always excellent, and our beds (in air-conditioned rooms!) were luxuries we never forgot we were enjoying.



Mrs. Alexander, the elderly woman whose home we were working to spruce up a bit Wednesday and Thursday, made a major impact on all of us. She told us that we should always look up, to God, and never look down no matter what we were going through—unless we were looking down in order to help someone else up. Her words (shaky-voiced as they may have been) will long echo in all of our ears, as will the lessons of Robin Humphreys, who led us during our Global Village experience, and Daniel Ross, who was our fantastic Mission Work Camp Leader.



Though we came home a slightly smaller group than when we set out (Jordan had to return home early due to an *extremely* yucky reaction to some bug bites—something we all hated even though it was necessary), we were definitely a stronger one, bonded together by good times, hard work, and shared experiences, both good and bad.



We will be sharing more photos and stories on Sunday, August 1st after church during a special meal and presentation for all of you. In the meantime, here are a few glimpses of what our adventure was like!



Adult class coming this fall: A NEW KIND OF CHRISTIANITY

Ten Questions that are Transforming the Faith

“We are in the midst of a paradigm shift in the church. Not since the Reformation five centuries ago have so many Christians come together to ask whether the church is in sync with their deepest beliefs and commitments. These believers range from evangelicals to mainline Protestants to Catholics, and the person who best represents them is author and pastor Brian McClaren.

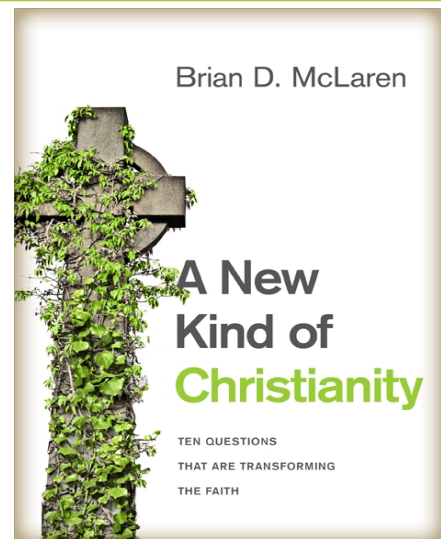
In this much anticipated book, McClaren examines ten questions facing today’s church—questions about how to articulate the faith itself, the nature of its authority, who God is, whether we have to understand Jesus through only an ancient Greco-Roman lens, what exactly is the good news that the gospel proclaims, how we understand the church and all its varieties, why we are so preoccupied with sex, how we should think of the future and people from other faiths, and the most intimidating question of all: what do we do next? Here you will find a provocative and enticing introduction to the Christian faith of tomorrow.”

BRIAN D. MCLAREN is an author, speaker, pastor, and networker among innovative Christian leaders, thinkers, and activists. His groundbreaking books include *A New Kind of Christian*, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, *The Secret Message of Jesus*, and *Everything Must Change*. Visit the author online at www.brianmclaren.net.

This class, led by Ernie Hess, will meet on Sunday mornings at 9:30 a.m. in the Dennison Room. While reading McClaren’s book is certainly recommended, the essential ideas will be presented for discussion each week, so reading the book is not necessary to participate in the class.

SCHEDULE OF SESSIONS

- 8-22 – INTRO - The Quest and the Questions – ch 1-3, pp. 1-30
- 8-29 – *What Is the Overarching Story Line of the Bible?* ch 4, pp. 33-45
- 9-5 – NO CLASS – Labor Day Weekend
- 9-12 – The Biblical Narrative In Three Dimensions ch 5-6, pp. 46-66
- 9-19 – *How Should The Bible Be Understood?* ch 7-9, pp. 67-97.
- 9-26 – *Is God Violent?* ch 10-11, pp. 98-118.
- 10-3 – *Who Is Jesus and Why Is He Important?* ch 12-13, pp. 119-136
- 10-10 – *What Is the Gospel?* Ch 14-15, pp. 137-160
- 10-17 – *What Do We Do About the Church?* Ch 16, pp. 161-172
- 10-23 – *Can We Find A Way To Address Human Sexuality Without Fighting About It?* ch 17, 173-190.
- 10-31 – *Can We Find A Better Way Of Viewing the Future?* Ch 18, pp. 191-206
- 11-7 – *How Should Followers of Jesus Relate to People of Other Religions?* Ch 19, pp. 207-224.
- 11-14 – *How Can We Translate Our Quest into Action?* Ch 20, pp. 225-241
- 11-21 – Living the Questions in Community ch 21-22, pp. 242 – 260.



Dear Covenant Community:

I came to you by accident. Back in April of 2009, Justin Colussy-Estes asked me to do a Lunch & Learn around my first novel, PURE, and --excited by the opportunity to discuss my work with a group of the intelligently faithful-- I agreed.

I then presented the history of my book, which included my own journey of faith and my experience in youth group at First Presbyterian Church in Tallahassee, FL. It was an exciting presentation for me, and your interest in it was strongly felt. As a surprising result of that afternoon, I found myself being offered --and accepting-- the position of Youth Director at Covenant Presbyterian Church.

I had never done such a thing before. I wasn't sure I could do a good job. But my faith in Jesus, and my belief in the enthusiasm of the human spirit carried me forward. Facing my own doubts (and yours as well), I (and we) rose to the level of the excitement in the air about my accepting this position.

Working with the youth in this congregation is an experience that has been otherwise unparalleled in my life. Knowing every CYG member, and the parents attached to each, has been a blessing more than I could have imagined. I have learned about God, myself, my faith, the faith of others, and the integrity of individual spirits in a way that I never would have, had I not intersected with this group and this congregation. The joy and challenge of being Youth Director for your church has been something I will never forget, and will never fully be able to articulate the benefits of.

However, I am being called elsewhere.

My enthusiasm for this congregation, for this particular group of youth, is without question. But my passion for writing has been with me since I was five years old. Thanks to my publisher, I am now being offered the opportunity to write two more books, in the next two years, and to concentrate my energies on the other books I've already written. My heart, consequently, is divided. I feel I must choose between two things I feel strongly about, and love.

Ultimately, I have decided to follow my art. This has been a hard decision, and not one without regret. But as of August 1st, I will, I am sad to say, no longer be Youth Director of Covenant Presbyterian Church.

I thank you, individually and collectively, for your support in the last year. Thank you for your friendliness, for your interest, and for your participation in all things CYG. This is an awesome bunch of kids, without a doubt, but they are made all the more awesome by your enthusiasm for what they are doing. It is my sincere hope that both their excitement and yours will continue, no matter who is assigned the role of Director.

Though I am changing my role here, I am certain I am not leaving this congregation forever. There may be some transition time between my departure and the new Youth Director's coming on, but I assure you that the connections we have made are not broken. This group of people is important to me, and I am not eager to separate myself from it completely.

What I want to say now is thank you, mainly, for welcoming me and for supporting me in this position, which was new to me and new to you. I wish you the best of all things in finding a new leader for your young people. Thank you for allowing (and embracing) me in this position for as long as I was able to hold it, and for keeping me (and the youth) in mind as I am moving away from it.

I leave your ranks thankfully, but regretfully.

In the love of God, who loves all things,

Terra McVoy



A Picture is worth a Thousand Words *By Julie A. Johnson*

One of the many treasures of Covenant Presbyterian Church is its beautiful stained glass windows. I'm sure you've seen them, but have you really spent time *studying* them? Over this coming year, I hope to offer a series of newsletter articles on the stained glass windows around the church. After asking several of you, their origin or the story of who designed them or when they were installed in the chapel and around the church is yet a mystery to be solved. If you know the history, drop me a line at holycreek@aol.com

Throughout the history of Christianity, art has played an important role. From the very beginning, drawings were found in tombs and in the catacombs. Interestingly, two of the earliest Christian symbols were not the cross, but Jesus as the Good Shepherd (depicted as a young boy with a lamb around his neck) and the symbol of the loaves and fishes. More than painting, mosaics made from pieces of glass or pottery were set into the floor of houses, places of worship and even in public places. Some of them have been preserved by careful archeology unto this day.

The earliest origin of staining glass for windows is lost. Most church art scholars believe it was a new development around the 10th century modeled after ancient mosaics. These windows were small and simple since glass was hard to come by and easily broken.

As churches and cathedrals grew in stature and architecture so did the creating of stained glass windows. It became one of the artisan guilds where young people (usually boys) were apprenticed several years to a master craftsman. While at first simple designs with multi-stained glass were evident, soon the art grew into the making of "story windows" incorporating figures from scriptures and stories from the Bible. Symbols also became popular as a way to represent the powerful mystery to believers that would be lost on those who were not as friendly with the Church.

The process of making of stained glass windows continued with the use of beveling and lead. The making of glass predates history and the coloring of glass was well known by the 1100's. Many times the abbot or a trained theologian and artist would design the windows and then commission workers to create the design. In the height of the Gothic period, with the building of grand cathedral, stained glass windows reached its pinnacle.

Stained glass windows were not simply for decoration, but were used for teaching. Many people could not read, but they could see the scenes of the patriarchs and matriarchs in the Old Testament and look upon the life of Christ illustrated like a book. These story windows were in many ways were some of the original forms of Christian Education. While it is true that manors and private chapels had their own decorative windows, many were still used to communicate the story of God and God's people.

During the Reformation, stained glass windows began to be seen as one of the abuses of the Catholic Church. Reformers protested the egregious use of money for images. Stained glass windows were seen as idolatry—the making of images. Since the Reformers wanted to bring believers back to scripture...the Ten Commandments with its prohibition of making graven images was used to destroy many stained glass windows. When protestant churches were built, the structure was very plain so as not to distract worshippers from the Word of God. Thus, clear windows replaced stained glass, the communion table replaced the altar and all candles, paraments and even crosses were removed from the sanctuary.

In the past twenty years, protestant worship has seen a revival in church art: stained glass windows, banners, dancing and drama. Liturgical scholars have helped us regain "the baby thrown out with the bath water" by reviving the ancient liturgy of the early church, encour-



Stewardship Message by Dave Linnen

Receiving Gifts - Part 1 — Anticipating Stress – Fa La La La La

The saying goes: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

I don’t buy it..... I mean, not completely anyway. If the saying were structured “It is more blessed to give than to take” or “It is more blessed to receive than to take,” who could argue with the truth of those two statements? But there’s something that goes on in the exchanging of gifts that, I deeply believe, involves a mutual blessedness.

One thing is for sure though. People, especially Americans, can have a lot of trouble when being on either side of this exchange of giving and receiving. The positive proof of this resides in one particular day of the year – the day after Christmas! The stores are flooded with people who are zealously returning the unneeded, unwanted, unused (unappreciated?) gifts that were “given” the day before. “How could Ozzie really believe that I could actually let people look at me in this piece of cloth he calls a dress!?” or “Doesn’t Harriet know that I’ve been retired for fifteen years? How many more ties does she really think I need!?”

And this doesn’t even compare to the anxiety that goes into the thinking process of what and how to give and how to receive. The minds of the givers and/or receivers begin to spin out of control with thoughts such as: “Did I spend enough? ... not enough? What’s he/she going to get me?...How many gifts will she/he be giving me?...What does he/she really need? ... What really does she/he want?” or“What’s the use? It’ll all be over in a few weeks, and we can just get back to normal.”

So, how has our modern-day society responded to this conflict? We’ve turned to the product identified in one of the greatest statements in movie history -- *plastics!!* (from “The Graduate,” 1968). Tiny little gift cards have become the saviors of the Holiday Season and have taken much of the worry out of gift exchange in general. Aren’t they great? – so practical! So easy to wrap!!

But on a more serious and less cynical note, there really is a lot of tension present in the actual process of exchanging gifts. The giver is in the position of power, having the power to bestow or not to bestow supposed generosity upon the receiver. The giver can also worry about the pressure that the receiver will feel regarding the need to reciprocate and even about the extent to which the receiver may reciprocate. The receiver of “beneficence” is put in the weaker, subservient position. The receiver may worry about how to react to the giver, how and when to reciprocate, how not to feel obliged to “pay back” the giver while, at the same time, maintaining a balance of power with the giver.

So, how can we work our way through this dilemma that permeates the exchanging of gifts? Which act is truly more blessed - the giving, or the receiving? Does it matter? What does Jesus say about this? To be continued next month.

Praise Be to God and Peace to All of Us,
Dave Linnen, Chair, 2011 Stewardship Committee



Faith Alliance of Metro Atlanta

Presents

SANCTUARY?--MAKING YOUR SACRED COMMUNITY A SAFER

PLACE: A look at domestic violence and the response of the faith communities.

Wednesday, August 4

12Noon -1:30 PM

AHAVATH ACHIM SYNAGOGUE,

600 Peachtree Battle Avenue / (Corner of Northside Dr. and Peachtree Battle Ave) / Atlanta 30327

Kosher lunch will be available for \$15. Please RSVP to 404-622-3399 or worldpilgrims@bellsouth.net

Over the last 7 years, more than 800 Georgians have lost their lives to domestic violence. Victims of domestic violence are more likely to be connected to a sacred community than to a domestic violence organization. How can we stop this tragic loss of life? Join us to explore resources and roadblocks to safety within our sacred communities. Participants will leave with resources in hand that may help them save lives.

Presenters:

Rabbi Elena Zelony, Assistant Rabbi at Congregation Shearith Israel in Atlanta

Greg Loughlin, M.S.S.W., coordinator of the Georgia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Project, a joint initiative of the Georgia Commission on Family Violence and Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence.



Buckhead THRIFTique needs your help to restock its shelves!

Without your donations, we will be unable to give vouchers for free clothing to people in need – more than 400 people every month.

Buckhead THRIFTique, Buckhead Christian Ministry’s thrift store, provides free clothing to people in crisis and sells affordable clothing to the Atlanta community.

Clean, gently used clothing, small electronics and household items can be donated Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m., at the store’s new location: 800 Miami Circle, Suite 160, Atlanta, GA 30324.

Volunteer opportunities are also available for as little as three hours per month. For more information, contact Volunteer Manager Lacy Kerkhof, at (404) 239-0058, ext. 111 or lacykerkhof@bcmatlanta.org.

Directions from Piedmont Road: Turn onto Miami Circle (between Mercedes Benz of Buckhead and Buckhead Crossing Shopping Center) from Piedmont Road. Drive .3 miles. Turn left at the driveway immediately after Ashore Ironworks and pass under the metal archway. The THRIFTique is on the right at the back of the parking lot.

!?! Answer to Do you know this session member?

Brad Boyd

A View from the Cushion.....Part 2 of my adventures at the Meditation Retreat at Joshua Tree

The meditation cushion is an important aspect of a silent retreat, in that it is where one spends a good deal of time. The written materials I received prior to the retreat instructed me to bring one and so I brought a thin flat cushion that could fit in my suitcase. Not a good idea. When I walked into the large meditation room for our first session, I saw that those in the know about these things were well-prepared. We had been told to bring our cushions into the meeting hall and select a place on the floor which we would keep for the entire time. Not only were there elaborately embroidered cushions of various sizes and heights, but many people had stools, benches, pillows, blankets, religious artifacts and sacred objects set up in cozy nests. They had all been created with considerable care. I quickly learned to follow suit and collected some blankets and pillows to augment my slender cushion.



During the meditation sessions, all of the participants (or *yogis*, as we were called) sat facing a stage where our teachers sat facing us. Sometimes they would guide us in a meditation and sometimes it was just silent. We were always encouraged to focus on our breathing in order to still our minds. Buddhist philosophy says that thinking is like one of our five senses (seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and feeling). It is useful for us to get along in the world but our thoughts are not what give us our identity. In the western world especially we seem to be controlled by our thoughts rather than the other way around. Our thoughts usually make us focus on the past or the future or getting out of the present moment. One of the goals of meditation is to stay in the present moment and experience *being* without *thinking*.

One teacher gave us the following illustration: Imagine that you are sitting on the bank of a river and it is a beautiful day. You are at peace and you see a small boat sailing by in front of you full of people laughing and having fun. They beckon you to come with them but you wave them on by and wish them well. Another boat comes along with a group of people involved in an intense conversation about the meaning of life. It is appealing to you to join in but you let them go by as well. Another boat comes by with a group of people traveling to some exciting places all over the world. They have a ticket for you but while you are tempted you decide to stay where you are in the moment, sitting peacefully on the grass. I am sure you are getting the drift by now. The boats represent our thoughts that try to lure us away from the present moment during meditation. There is nothing wrong with the boats or the people on them; at times in our lives it is appropriate to ride along with them. However, during meditation we attempt to release our thoughts as soon as they come.

Of course, it is almost impossible to do that, at least for more than a few moments. And that is why one has to practice and practice and practice. To have control over one's thoughts is one of the hardest disciplines to master. The Buddhists believe that getting to this state of consciousness enables one to see the truth about life more clearly. It helps us be observers or watchers of life unfolding without rushing to judge or categorize what we see or experience. For example, while sitting and meditating in one position it is easy to get uncomfortable. A foot falls asleep. A nose itches. Our immediate response to discomfort is to end it as soon as we can. Move that foot. Scratch that nose. Of course, why not?

But our teachers suggested that we "sit with what is". Rather than instinctively judging an experience as negative and resisting it we were encouraged to neutrally observe the discomfort and see what happened. In the few times that I was able to do that (for a while at least) I did observe that an itch does change. Try it yourself. It will get worse, go away or move to another part of the body. But it will always change. That is one of life's lessons one can learn from reflective observation: everything is impermanent. And we can learn a lot about the truth of how life works if we are not constantly resisting what is unpleasant and grasping what is pleasant but just "sitting with what is".

While our morning meditations were focused on stilling the mind, the afternoon meditations were focused on opening the heart. The Buddhists believe that a quiet peaceful mind helps the heart to be more open and loving. So we practiced loving-kindness meditations first for ourselves and then for others. We were given a mantra or prayer to say to ourselves over and over again such as “May I be at peace, May I be healthy and strong, May I be safe from harm, May I be happy and fulfilled, May I be full of loving-kindness”. Then we would say “May you (or someone’s name) be at peace, etc., etc. Then “May all creatures....” etc., etc. All creatures included animals as well as humans as they believe that all is one. As we care for ourselves we care for others and as we care for others we care for ourselves. Hence, they are vegetarians and tend to be pacifists. (However, there are a variety of kinds of Buddhism with some variation on their beliefs).

The Buddhists really believe that meditation and mindful living can help a person be more at peace and, in a word, happier. They believe that if you are willing to look honestly at pain and suffering and embrace it as part of life then it will lose its power over you. The more you can “be with what is” without resistance or grasping, the more you can know true joy and peace. So meditation becomes the training ground for life’s experiences. The quiet and observant mind and open and loving heart that meditation engenders go out into the world to deal with life’s experiences.

Obviously, I could go on and on about my experience there and all of the things that were taught. Every night we had a dharma talk on an aspect of Buddhism, all of which I can download from their web-site so it could make an interesting class at some point. I am certainly no expert in the practice of meditation but I do feel that it can be a very helpful spiritual practice. From what I can tell, there is nothing about the practice that is contrary to Christianity. In fact, Buddhists welcome people of all faiths and do not suggest that one has to give up what they believe in order to meditate. I hope to continue the discipline. If anyone has any questions or would like to continue a dialogue about my experience at the retreat I am more than open to that...

Jill



UPDATE FROM Bette Green and the Robertsons:

My mother, Bette Green, decided to move to Quebec to live with her son and daughter-in-law and 15 year old grandson. She says she misses all her friends at Covenant and was sorry she didn't get to say goodbye. She went for a 3 week visit and decided not to come back. We hope she will be content in her new home.

Her address there is Elizabeth H. Green
435 Maple Street
Sutton QC J0E2K0 Canada

Postage to Canada by the way is 75 cents.

We are missing seeing friends at Covenant, but are enjoying sailing/motoring on Wind Spirit. This trip is a dream we have talked about for a long long time. We are in Southport NC and going north in the ICW and sometimes outside in the Atlantic heading to Baltimore by the end of July on a shakedown cruise. We have been writing a blog as we go at www.svwindspirit.blogspot.com If you are anywhere close by while we are enroute would enjoy having you visit. We are also keeping in touch by email. Bill and Ann Robertson

Upcoming in September

- ⇒ Report from Presbytery Haiti Meeting
- ⇒ Pictures from Vacation Bible School 2010: God's Superheroes
- ⇒ How we spent our summer vacation
- ⇒ All Church Retreat at Camp Mikkel March 18-20, 2011



FALL 2010 FELLOWSHIP DINNER GROUPS

Fellowship dinners are a great way for adults of all ages, single or married, to meet people in the church and develop closer friendships within the church community by eating together monthly from September to May. These informal dinners meet once a month, rotating among members' homes and include 14-18 participants. The host/hostess supplies the main dish and drinks; members bring the rest. We also have a group for families with young children which will meet at the church. This group may have a potluck at the church and take advantage of the Parents' Night Out Fridays or use the service and occasionally go to a restaurant. The planning will be decided within the group. Jill will still host the Christmas Party for all groups and a final May meeting (at a restaurant to be decided) for all groups has been suggested. If you have any questions, please contact Linda (Ehlers) Jones at 404-250-9148. If you have pre-registered with Linda in the last two months you do not need to turn in a card. (If you have preregistered and find out you cannot participate please let her know by the 2nd week in August.)

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Which night do you prefer? _____ Fri. _____ Sat. _____ Either

Families with young children _____

Please cut and mail this to the church office or place it in the offering plate on Sunday.

AUGUST 2010

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 CYG Global Village Presentation & Lunch	2	3 Interviews for Youth Director	4 FAMA Mtg @ Ahavath Achim Synagogue 12 noon	5	6	7
8 Teacher Planning Workshop, Teacher Luncheon & Cong Life Comm Mtg	9	10	11	12 STWG Planning Meeting 6:30 pm	13 Parents' Night Out #1	14
[Club Covenant After school care starts]						
15 11:00 AM Worship SERVICE Rally Day Breakfast 9:30am Teacher Presentation Mission Comm	16	17 Presbytery Executive Staff Meeting 9 am to 3 pm	18 Admin Comm Meeting 2pm	19	20	21
22 11:00 AM Worship SERVICE All Sunday School Classes Begin	23	24 Session Meeting	25	26	27 Parents' Night Out #2	28
29 11:00 AM Worship SERVICE	30	31	<h2 style="margin: 0;">Worship Time Changes on Rally Day August 15th</h2>			

On-going Classes
Held in the Sanctuary Parlor

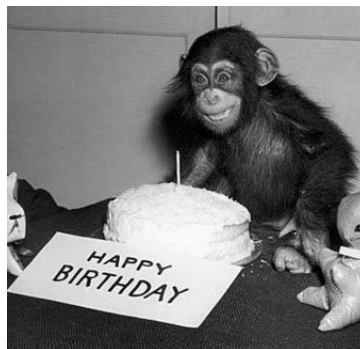
Bible Study
 Men's—Wednesdays 7am
 Women's — Wednesdays 10am

Women's Spiritual Circle
 WSG 3 - Monday - 10:00 am
 WSG 1& 4 - Monday 6:30 pm
 WSG 2 - Thursday 6:15 pm

Visit us on the web at www.covenantpresbyterian.us

August Birthdays

2 Jean Bender
2 Kelly Douglas
3 Andrew O’Callaghan
5 Judy Windham
5 Sue Colussy
13 Andrew Niesen
14 Oz Nelson
15 Casey Hood
16 Andrea Howells
17 Linda Jones
19 Liz Chezmar



21 Sandy Philp
22 Mary Lou Andretti
23 Aaron Jones
24 Collin Lines
28 Dave Linnen
28 Susan Conger
29 Rachel Niesen

**NOTE: These are corrections;
Crosscheck with directory.**