



• ***Mary Oliver: A Bride Married to Amazement***

On January 17, Mary Oliver died. She was a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet who spoke the language of wonder with a splendid simplicity. One of my colleagues wrote, “Thanks to Mary Oliver, I know what a prayer is.” Here is one of her poems, “When Death Comes.”

When death comes
like the hungry bear in autumn;
when death comes and takes all the bright coins from his purse

to buy me, and snaps the purse shut;
when death comes
like the measles-pox;

when death comes
like an iceberg between the shoulder blades,

I want to step through the door full of curiosity, wondering:
what is it going to be like, that cottage of darkness?

And therefore I look upon everything
as a brotherhood and a sisterhood,
and I look upon time as no more than an idea,
and I consider eternity as another possibility,

and I think of each life as a flower, as common
as a field daisy, and as singular,

and each name a comfortable music in the mouth,
tending, as all music does, toward silence,

and each body a lion of courage, and something
precious to the earth.

When it's over, I want to say: all my life
I was a bride married to amazement.
I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.

When it's over, I don't want to wonder
if I have made of my life something particular, and real.
I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened,
or full of argument.

I don't want to end up simply having visited this world.¹

May God give us eyes to see and ears to hear the incredible beauty and grace that surrounds us.

Peace,

¹ *New and Selected Poems* by Mary Oliver (New York, Beacon Press, 1992), pages 10-11

• **Love Notes**

Dear First Presbyterian Members,



Brentwood Elementary families and staff are grateful to you for all of your kindness through this holiday season. Your holiday dinner event honoring our families was such a wonderful experience. The planning and organization that went into the dinner, the program, the supervised games and activities and gifts were noticed and appreciated more than you know.

Our students and their families had such a great time. They felt secure and comfortable in the beautiful environment you created for them that evening. It was an evening of togetherness, not just for our families, but for the Brentwood community at large of which we consider you a part.

Thank you for giving our families a holiday to remember. The generosity of those in your congregation that supported our families with gifts and your intentional discretion in giving the gifts to those families was so kind and selfless. The parents of our students will rest easy in knowing they can give their children a better holiday than they could if they were alone in the task.

We value our partnership not only because of your extension of kindness through the holidays, but also because of the thoughtful connection our volunteers have made with our students and teachers at Brentwood. The time and energy they devote to helping our students succeed and feel supported is priceless.

Thank you for your generosity, support and love.

Sincerely,
Holly Brody
Assistant Principal

• **Souper Bowl of Caring**

Sunday, February 3, is Super Bowl Sunday, and after each service our children and youth will be stationed at the exits of the chapel and sanctuary to receive your donations toward the “Souper Bowl of Caring” effort. Last year, our “Souper Bowl” contributions totaled over \$2,200. **The money raised this year will help us sponsor another meal-packing event at First Presbyterian Church on Sunday, April 7.**

• **A Splendid Repeat Performance**

by Mary Elle Hunter



On **Sunday, February 17** the second annual Brentwood Elementary School Art Show welcomes viewers to the forum from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

The first art show sponsored by the church grew out of a vision of Pastor Glen Bell when the *Invest In Children* initiative first began in 2017. Diane Bittner, a volunteer in the classroom of Lana Boardman, and the husband and wife team of the Bittners worked with the art teacher to bring the idea to successful fruition. It has become an annual event.

“This is a delightful opportunity for students from kindergarten through 5th grade to share their talents with family and the community,” says Diane Bittner. Lana Boardman, Brentwood teacher, adds, “Art shows are very exciting, especially when the art of young children is on view. A variety of art is being displayed to showcase the exploration and enthusiasm of our students.”

Included in the show is a classroom project based on their study of Monarch butterflies. Another classroom study of famous artists like Van Gogh resulted in the painting of sunflowers by students in tribute to his work.

Lana Boardman comments, “Other students enjoyed weaving with very colorful backgrounds and yarn while others practiced drawing and painting skills with sailboats as their inspiration. We also love celebrating “Dot Day” and created many different dots inspired by the book *The Dot* by Peter Reynolds. Examples of these dots created by every grade level in Brentwood Elementary are part of the display.”

In presenting the second annual Art Show, the partnership of First Presbyterian and Brentwood Elementary School has once again been of assistance to the school. With more than three dozen classroom volunteers, as well as in many other ways, this union has been a blessing by the congregation in providing much needed community support.



February 2019

The final phase of the *Imagine the Future* capital campaign has begun! The remodeling of the fellowship hall bathrooms and preparations for the build-out of the permanent stage are well underway.



Wall coming down for the stage.



Framing for the stage.



Bathrooms are ready to be put back together again!

• **Two New Adult Education Classes Starting Sunday, February 3**

Spiritual and Moral Issues in Modern Fiction

Sundays, February 3 (except February 10) - March 31 at 10:00 a.m. in room 203

Our course leader, Dr. John G. Parks, always has an interesting class. As serious literature, good stories offer what Mathew Arnold called a “criticism of life.” As such, stories invite readers to a reflection upon our condition in the world. This often entails grappling with spiritual and moral issues such as innocence and guilt, loyalty and betrayal, choice and fate, meaning and emptiness, hope and despair. Our exploration will be prompted by reading stories by Nathaniel Hawthorne, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Albert Camus, ZZ Packer, Ottessa Moshfegh, T.C. Boyle, Elizabeth Tallent. We may find that these stories offer a diagnosis of our condition and a challenge to our beliefs. Copies of stories to be studied will be available as class hand-outs or available to students via email.

Parenting Class

Sundays in February (except February 10) 10:00 a.m. in room 225

Parents of teens and parents who are eager to learn more about parenting a teen are welcome to this class. Children and youth should sit this one out.

We will watch clips from the movie *8th Grade* discussing the struggles of the lead character and how we can faithfully parent through many of the same issues our teens will encounter. This film has been nominated for many awards and will provide much for us to discuss.

There will be no preparation required for attending class each week. We’ll start each class with a brief introduction of the day’s topics before watching designated clips and diving into the parenting issue.



• ***Aging Well and Thriving: Turn On Your “Happy Gene”***

by Rod Rhoades

Yes, you can! Be happy as you get older! Being happy is a key to your well-being and quality of life. Happiness is one of the things that brings joy and contentment into our lives. These precious commodities are just as important as we get older as they were when we were younger. The new science of aging shows that as we get older, happiness becomes more important in terms of our self-care and emotional health.

So, what is happiness anyway? Happiness relates to how we feel, but it is more than a pleasurable feeling or a passing mood. It's a deep sense of flourishing emotionally and spiritually. Individuals who have a happy life don't deny negative emotions or pretend to feel joyful all the time. We all encounter adversity, disappointment, illnesses, tragedy, and loss of loved ones. It's completely natural to feel anger, sadness, frustration, and despair. To suggest otherwise would be to deny our emotional responses. Happiness is about being able to make the most of the good times, and being able to cope effectively with the inevitable bad times.

Research shows that circumstances account for only about 10 percent of our happiness. The things that we think make us happy (having more money, moving to a new city, a new partner, or job) don't bring happiness. Happiness is not ready-made, but comes from our attitude and our own actions. Although genetics and circumstances matter, a huge proportion of the variations in happiness between us come from the choices we make, our activities and the friends we choose. So being happy is within our conscious control. Below is a brief summary of what the latest studies have identified as the major focus areas that make a significant difference in people's happiness.

•**Connect with Others:** Express your heart. Your relationship with others is one of the most important factors for happiness. People who have strong relationships with family and friends are happier, healthier, and live longer. It's important to choose friends that bring out the best in you and not the stress in you. Studies also show that being part of a church, support

group, club, or other group provides you with a sense of community.

•**Discover your Mojo:** Find your purpose. When we are deeply involved in challenging and rewarding activities they give us a purpose. We experience a sense of satisfaction, self-worth and a sense of belonging. Finding your purpose gives your life direction and meaning.

•**Treasure Gratitude and Generosity:** Learn to be thankful and to share. Most of us associate gratitude with saying “thank-you” to someone who has helped us or given us a gift. Gratitude is not just an action word, but is a deeper positive emotion that acknowledges the goodness in our lives and helps us to connect to something larger than ourselves. Gratitude leads to generosity. Generosity is the virtue of giving back good things to others freely and abundantly. Studies show that grateful people have a more positive attitude, and a greater sense of belonging. By giving ourselves away, we flourish.

•**Stay on the Learning Curve:** Be creative. Creativity isn't only for artists, writers, musicians, or scientists. We all have the ability within us to be creative. Being creative means breaking away from routine and doing something different. It means taking risks and solving problems in a new way.

•**Embrace the transforming power of the mind-body-spirit connection.** There is a close connection between the mind-body-spirit that requires nurturing and care. A recent landmark study concluded that a positive lifestyle not only improves the body but also lifts our spirits, makes us happier, and significantly lowers the risks for anxiety/depression.

We have been given the gift of life. It's up to us to give our self the gift of living. So— happiness *does* matter. The pursuit of happiness is not some fluffy, nice-to-have or middle-class luxury. It's not about privilege, money, or constant pleasure. It's about thriving emotionally and spiritually. It's about helping people to live better lives and creating a society that is more productive, healthy, and cohesive. That's one of the secrets for aging well and thriving.

The article on happiness is based on my recent book *Aging well: Staying Younger, Smarter and Fit*, which can be purchased at Amazon.com or checked out in the Cowden-Smith Library.

• **First Presbyterian Church and iTNSunCoast Renew Contract for 2019**

For many, getting a ride to church and around town is a challenge! That is why First Presbyterian has renewed their partnership with iTNSunCoast to help you get to church and the other important places you need to go.

iTNSunCoast is a dependable, local non-profit that provides rides using volunteer and paid drivers who use their own cars. They have been providing rides since 2010 and will provide over 30,000 rides this year! All drivers are screened and trained.

When Rides Are Available

Rides must be requested by noon the previous day.

Any time of the day or night for any reason
Any day of the week including weekends
Anywhere within Sarasota & Manatee counties

Cost: If coming to church, you pay just one way! First Presbyterian will pay the other way and the \$50 annual membership fee for First Presbyterian Church Members for 2019.

Charges

Pick-up Charge: \$3

Mileage Charge: \$1.90 per mile

Each Additional Person: \$2.50

** If using iTN for non-church related rides, you will be responsible to pay the cost both ways. Rides to eye appointments may be discounted. Check with iTNSunCoast when booking.

Ask about "Let's Go Places!" calendar of events to keep you connected in the community. Bring a friend to church or to an event for only \$2.50! They do not need to be a member.

iTNSunCoast is happy to help people with canes or on walkers - whatever support you need - to get from your residence to the car and from the car to your destination.

For more information or to become an iTNSunCoast member, call (941) 364-7530 and tell them you are a member of First Presbyterian Church, or register online at <https://www.itnsuncoast.org>. If you have any questions, contact Cheryl Track, (941) 320-3828.



• **CPR Class**

On **Monday, February 11**, from either 9:00-11:00 a.m. in room 203 or 6:00-8:00 p.m. in the forum, learn how to save a life. The cost is \$25 or \$35 for healthcare providers. You will learn how to use our AED (automated external defibrillator). We have two on the campus, one in the fellowship hall outside the kitchen and the second one by the elevator inside the church office. To register, call the church office (941) 955-8119 by Wednesday, February 6.

• **Cowden-Smith Library News**

Glen's Three Picks

The Forgotten Books of the Bible: Recovering the Forgotten Scrolls for Today by Robert Williamson Jr. is one of three picks of our pastor, Rev. Glen Bell, for our church library. The Song of Songs, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations and Esther are books largely forgotten in the Christian tradition. But the author, with wit and wisdom, presents the case that they deserve attention as they address pressing relevant issues such as sexuality, grief, existential despair, ethnic identity, women's issues and power.

Doing Good...Says Who? by Connie Newton and Fran Early is Glen's second pick. It is part of the focus of our keynote speaker Hunter Farrell February 9 and 10 for Faith Focus Weekend. He is the director of the World Mission Initiative at Pittsburgh Seminary. Through storytelling, humor, analysis and advice, the authors guide do-gooders into positive results.

A Guide to Bible Basics is Glen's third pick. The author, Tyler Mayfield, will be the Faith Focus Weekend keynote speaker in October 2019. Tyler is an Old Testament scholar at Louisville Seminary. Elaine Barnett previewed this book last April and recommended it for our library. In the publisher's words "*Bible Basics* discusses important people, places, and terms for each biblical book so the reader can quickly see its primary purpose."

Pastoral Development Seminar Faith Focus Weekend February 6-10

• **Faith Focus Weekend**

This year's Faith Focus Weekend will be **Friday - Sunday, February 8-10**. Our speaker will be Rev. Dr. Hunter Farrell, Director of World Mission Initiative, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Atlanta. Rev. Farrell will be addressing the College of Elders and Deacons Friday, February 8, at 5:30 p.m., giving a presentation to the church and community on Saturday, February 9, at 9:30 a.m., and preaching Sunday, February 10, in all worship services. Everyone is encouraged to attend the Saturday presentation, **February 9, 9:30-11:00 a.m.** Please make plans to join us on both Saturday and Sunday!

• **Pastoral Development Seminar**

We look forward to our six returning guest pastors with resource leader Rev. Dr. Sally Campbell-Evans, a Presbyterian/Methodist pastor. She is ordained in the Presbyterian Church and currently serves as an associate pastor of congregational care in Tampa. *In the chapel on **Thursday, February 7, at 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m., and on Friday, February 8, at 9:00 a.m., show your support of these young leaders in the church by listening to their sermons and giving feedback.** Come and hear more about their faith journeys in the adult education presentation in the forum on **Sunday, February 10, at 10:00 a.m.***



**Rev. Dr. Hunter Farrell,
February 6-10, 2019
Faith Focus Weekend
Keynote Speaker**

Rev. Dr. Hunter Farrell became the director of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary's World Mission Initiative in 2017. WMI hosts many conferences and workshops and welcomes many global mission guests. It also provides seminary students with faith-stretching and ministry-shaping global mission experiences.

Prior to coming to the seminary, Hunter was the director of World Mission for the PC (USA), overseeing strategic direction and partnerships.

He has served as a Presbyterian mission co-worker in Congo and Peru, organizing an international network of churches, non-profit organizations, and universities to address issues of poverty and justice, health, development, evangelism, education, and theological education.

Hunter attended Pontificia Universidad Católica (doctor of anthropology), École Pratique des Hautes (post-graduate diploma), Fuller Theological Seminary (M.Div.), and University of Texas, Austin (BA).



**Rev. Dr. Sally Campbell-Evans
2018-2019 Pastoral
Development Seminar Leader**

Rev. Dr. Sally Campbell-Evans is a Presbyterian/Methodist pastor in Tampa. She is ordained in the Presbyterian Church and currently serves as associate pastor of congregational care at Hyde Park United Methodist Church.

Rev. Campbell-Evans has previously served other congregations in nurturing ministries. She shares her church's vision of "transforming lives, creating Christian community, and healing our city and the world." It is her desire to help people become Christians and grow as disciples of Christ. She looks forward to deepening relationships with our PDS pastors during their returning seminar.

Sally attended Florida Center for Theological Studies (D.Min), Union Theological Seminary (M.Div), and Presbyterian College (BS). She is married to Rev. Clarke Campbell-Evans, also a pastor. The couple has a daughter and twin sons.



**Rev. Alex Becker,
Associate Pastor
Covenant Presbyterian,
Malvern, PA**

Alex Becker grew up in Wooster, OH where he lived next door to and attended Wayne Presbyterian Church

during his entire childhood. He graduated from Messiah College in Mechanicsburg, PA with a degree in Biblical Studies and earned an M.Div. at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary.

Alex is currently serving as the associate pastor of Covenant Presbyterian, Malvern, PA. He has previously served at Langcliffe Presbyterian Church, Avoca, PA, the Henryville Community and Mount Lebanon Presbyterian Churches in Henryville, IN. He has also served as support for the Sweaty Sheep New Church Development and on staff at Churches Uniting in Christ.

Alex and his wife, Corinna, have been married nine years. They live with their two dogs, three cats, and one rabbit. They take a lot of joy in their little zoo of a house, and if they are not there they are likely to be out playing board games with friends, reading books at a park, or taking a hike. They have two fun-loving nephews and are expecting three new nephews or nieces to join their extended family early this year.



**Rev. British Hyrms,
Associate Pastor
Central Steele Creek
Presbyterian Church
Charlotte, NC**

British Hyrms is from Chicago, IL and the surrounding suburbs. She is a graduate of Purdue University with a B.S. in Industrial Engineering and holds two master's degrees from Union Presbyterian Seminary - a Master of Divinity (M.Div.) and a Master of Arts in Christian Education (M.A.C.E.).

In her early career, British worked with Andersen Consulting and later as an IT project manager for various healthcare organizations. After deciding to leave the corporate world to raise her three children with her husband, she accepted a position as an adjunct college math instructor. During her seminary education, British was appointed as the seminary's student representative to the Trustee Board and completed several internships. British has served at Central Steele Creek Presbyterian church for four years - originally as the Director of Christian Ministries and currently as Associate Pastor. She is a cancer survivor with a zest for new experiences and a passion for lifelong learning. She seeks opportunities to build bridges with people of varying perspectives as an integral part of her Christian service and witness.

British is married to her college sweetheart, Kevin. Jamal, Akilah, and Aman are their young adult children who continue to bring them blessings.



**Rev. Patrick McElwaine,
Associate Pastor
Clemmons Presbyterian
Church, Clemmons, NC**

Patrick McElwaine grew up outside of Roanoke, VA. He earned his M.Div. from Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, VA, a B.A. in English from Roanoke College, and received Clinical Pastoral Education training at Virginia Commonwealth University.



**Rev. Ashley Cheek, Family
Pastor
First Presbyterian Church,
Sumter, SC**

Ashley Cheek serves as Pastor of Family Life at First Presbyterian Church, Sumter.

Her husband, Nick, is the senior pastor at the same church. He participated in our Pastoral Development Seminar last year. Ashley and Nick have three children, Lydia, Nicholas and Ada.

She describes her husband and children as her first call and the reason she feels so blessed to serve as Pastor of Family Life. Ashley believes that family ministry is essential to a healthy church. "It is the church that empowers the family to radically love the world, serve the community and proclaim the gospel in real and tangible ways."

As a family, Ashley and Nick and their children enjoy any adventure, especially hiking, impromptu dance parties, bikes, and traveling wherever their beloved minivan takes them.

Patrick is the Associate Pastor of Clemmons Presbyterian Church in Clemmons, NC. He is a “generalist” associate with ministry focus in the areas of congregational care, fellowship, worship, and youth. Patrick and his family joined CPC to journey together as Jesus’ disciples in July 2016. Patrick was selected to participate in the 2018 Kittye Susan Trent Symposium for Newly Ordained Ministers at Second Presbyterian Church of Roanoke, VA as well as the Vital Church Institute’s two-year Barnabas Leadership Group.

Patrick met his wife and best friend, Allyson, while studying together at Roanoke College. They have two children: Malachi (2 1/2) and Bridget (1). In addition to serving Christ’s Church, Patrick enjoys being with his family, reading, getting outside, and trying new things – new food, new places, and new adventures!



**Rev. Allysen Schaaf,
Associate Pastor
Decatur Presbyterian
Church, Decatur, GA**

Allyson Schaaf was born and raised in Lincoln, NE. She spent her teenage and college years in NC.

She was ordained as an elder at Forest Hills Presbyterian Church, High Point, NC. At the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill she studied Exercise and Sport Science. Her involvement and leadership in Presbyterian Campus Ministry led her to Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, VA, where she earned a dual degree (M.Div. and M.A.C.E.)

Allyson is in her fifth year as the Associate Pastor for Youth and their Families at Decatur Presbyterian Church. She has a leadership role in supporting youth pastors and bringing together youth of the presbytery. Allyson is passionate about bringing creativity and new life into worship and faith exploration. In seminary, she spent several months with the Presbyterian church in Ghana and found a love for connecting with others of different backgrounds and cultures.

She and her husband, Nathan, have an energetic beagle, Milo. Together, they enjoy cooking and

baking, exploring the North Georgia mountains, kayaking and camping. Allyson also likes to read by the water while Nathan is fishing.



**Rev. Kelly Staples,
Associate Pastor
NorthPark Presbyterian
Church, Dallas, TX**

Kelly Staples is originally from Shreveport, LA, where she lived until college. Her dream of being a music publisher led her to Middle Tennessee State University with studies in Recording Industry Management. She worked on Music Row in Nashville for a year and a half after college. At that time, she felt God’s call on her life, leading her to study at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

Kelly married and moved to Fort Worth, where she took a part-time job as a youth director at NorthPark Presbyterian Church, Dallas. Seven years and five positions later, she is still at the church where she started out with her current focus on youth ministry. Kelly is passionate about what youth ministry looks like in the current over-scheduled, over-competitive youth environment. She is developing an interest in communications and how we can use the digital world to do ministry and connect with others.

Kelly and her husband, Garrett, their two daughters and the family’s two cats live in Arlington, TX. Kelly has a 45-minute commute to work every day. She enjoys trying new foods and listening to podcasts on her long daily drive in the Dallas/Ft. Worth traffic.

• **Coping with Grief and Loss**

Join Vic Ford, D.Min., MFT, parish associate, for this six-week bereavement support group beginning **Thursday, February 21**, 5:30-7:00 p.m. Meet in the parlor. This group will offer you support, encouragement, and the beginning of your healing journey in a safe, confidential environment. This group will be in place of GriefShare. Contact Cheryl Track, faith community nurse, to sign up and for more information, (941) 320-3828.

• **Letters from Anne and Martin**

Combining the iconic voices of Anne Frank and Martin Luther King, Jr., this compelling production evokes the timeless message of hope for peace and a more united world. A discussion led by the Hon. Charles E. Williams will follow the performance.

Embracing Our Differences, the SCBA Diversity and Inclusion Committee, the Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee and the Boxser Diversity Initiative presents "Letters from Anne and Martin" on **Tuesday, February 5** at 7:00 p.m. at Temple Beth Shalom (1050 S. Tuttle Avenue, Sarasota).

General Admission-\$30 | VIP-\$100 |
Students-\$10 Call (941) 350-1089 for tickets.

• **The Language of Racism and Intolerance**

Racism continues to overshadow much of the progress that is being made in the United States and in the world.

On **Thursday, February 21**, at 6:30 p.m. the Boxser Diversity Initiative will bring together leading national experts to discuss this at the New College of Florida, Mildred Sainer Hall (5313 Bayshore Road, Sarasota).

• **Excerpts from Director's Corner Plant With Purpose**

What Gratitude Looks Like

Plant With Purpose, one of the organizations First Presbyterian Church of Sarasota supports with our mission gifts, reverses deforestation and poverty around the world by transforming the lives of the rural poor. Following is an excerpt

from a recent report from the executive director of Plant With Purpose, Scott Sabin, concerning their work and gratitude:

. . . one of the first changes I noticed when we switched from offering microcredit services to starting savings groups was that people stopped saying thank-you to us. The savings-led approach requires no outside capital from us, but is based on the mobilized savings of the group members. Each member commits to saving small amounts every week and, after appropriate training, the group lends the pool of money out to their own members at interest.

Not only has this proven to be a very effective way of providing small-scale financial services at very low cost in remote rural communities, it has had a profound impact on attitudes. People no longer tend to say "thanks" because they no longer feel dependent on us. They are aware that the money they are investing is money they have generated themselves from within their own community. People feel empowered by this newly discovered capacity, rather than grateful for the largesses of an outside benefactor.

. . . I quickly realized that the partnering farmers' sense of self-confidence was far better and more sustainable. I remember a woman in the Dominican Republic telling me, 'Our whole idea of who we are as a community has changed! The only thing we feel bad about is that we have had these resources all along and never knew it.'

However, people still express gratitude, often in remarkable ways. First, instead of thanking us, they much more appropriately give thanks to God for the blessings that they are experiencing. I hear that all the time.

. . . we are getting reports of the ways people are expressing their gratitude in paying forward what they have received. Many savings groups are tithing their group profits to their churches or to those in their own communities whom they perceive as even poorer.

There are many more stories like this. More news of the work that Plant With Purpose is doing can be found on their website www.plantwithpurpose.org.



• **SURE**
by Dorothy Murphy

Last year at Montreat our First Presbyterian youth created the following Affirmation of Faith:

We believe we have been called to learn and to help others to learn.

We believe that all God's children are dealt a fair hand—it's our society that stacks the deck.

It's our call as Christians to even the playing field, change the rules, and close the gaps that systematically keep the poor poor and the underprivileged under-resourced.

We are called to be the hands and feet of Christ and to move out of our comfort zone to serve our neighbors. Because we believe these things, we also believe God is calling us to work for justice through building community, show love, extend charity and act mercifully. This we believe. Amen.

In her January 6, 2019 sermon, Kelly Fitzgerald, captured the essence of this Affirmation of Faith by challenging us not to be "Casual Christians." Micah 6:6-8 states what the Lord requires of each of us to do: Act justly, love mercy and to walk humbly with God.

The words of author James Baldwin ring true for those of us supporting SURE (Sarasota United for Responsibility and Equity). "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

The 19 covenant congregations of SURE work consistently with area elected county, city, police and school officials to better understand and present injustices which need to be corrected in the lives of children and families. We realize we cannot transform everything. Our intent is to make an equitable difference in the lives of children and families.

Please plan to attend these two vitally important SURE functions:

**Rally in preparation for the Nehemiah Assembly
Monday, February 25, 6:00 p.m.**

First Congregational United Church of Christ
1031 South Euclid Avenue, Sarasota 34237

**Nehemiah Assembly
Monday, March 25, 6:30 p.m.**

Sarasota Municipal Auditorium
801 North Tamiami Trail, Sarasota 34236

The expected attendance for the Nehemiah Assembly will be 1,189 people. When you are contacted this month, whether in person or by phone, please say "yes" - I will be attending the Rally and Nehemiah Assembly.

Updates will be given at both events regarding civil citation, restorative justice (out-of-school suspension) and affordable housing. At the Nehemiah Assembly we will host the area officials working with SURE. They'll give us the answers as to what has been accomplished since last year's Nehemiah Assembly. Remember, we give a loud cheer if the answer to a question is yes. We remain absolutely quiet if the answer is no.

First Presbyterian Church attendance commitment for the Rally is 60 people. For the Nehemiah Assembly it is 90 people. Last year FPC was second largest attendance with 90 present. First Congregational Church of Christ had more than a 125 in attendance. Dream big; if each person who attends the Nehemiah Assembly brings one person with them, we would have 180 in attendance from our church. It's powerful when the auditorium is jam-packed. Together, we make a difference.

When the expected number comes together, 1,189 of us, we make a difference. This is not a political body. The issues we face are moral ones. . . . we are doing what the Lord calls us to do.

Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase.

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

• **Birthdays**

- | | | | |
|----|--|----|---|
| 1 | Robert Noble, III
Barbara Epperson
Kara Delaney
Charlotte Chapdelain
Spencer Chapdelain
Ida Tidwell | 10 | Karen Putt
Mike Frandsen |
| 2 | Allison Lindell
Judy Kelly
Sue Nurczyk
Diana O'Neill
Dwight Ferguson
Rogers Knopik | 11 | Jo Ann Heburn
Rob Harrison
Linda Parks
Shelby Tatum
Nikki Garraus |
| 3 | Claire Steiner
Kym Biggar, III
Stephie Fleming
Betsy Cairns
Kathleen Harmon | 12 | Julia Boehm |
| 4 | Lauren Van Nostrand | 13 | Sally Scott |
| 5 | Robert Schwartzkopf | 14 | Susan Robertson |
| 6 | Ernestine Harris
Shawn Gantert-O'Malley
Connor Davis | 15 | Doris Stelzer
Wells Weitekamp
El Gesell
Charlie Armstrong |
| 7 | Barbara Hostetler
Jon Raynor | 16 | Wes Burquest, Jr
Dick Schlup
Betty Fee |
| 8 | Cajun Camastro | 17 | Tristan O'Neill
Stephen Gifford-Bell |
| 9 | Leigh Armstrong
Emma John | 18 | Eleanor Strait
Jeff Steinwachs
Al Washington |
| 10 | Wesley Hord
Siena Cook
Stephanie Tarnowsky
Joel DeVane | 19 | Martin Sabin
Jack O'Neill
Tammy Taaffe |
| | | 20 | Chad Anderson
David Soper
Susan Morrison-Narring
Peg Moffett |
| | | 22 | Beth Knopik
Wayne Estes |

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| 23 | Matthew Ullsh
Lydia Chapdelain
Suzanne Messick
Sandy LaRose
Jessica Armstrong |
| 24 | Irene Halstead
Beverly Koach
Karen Frieder
Eleanor McCausey |
| 26 | Emily Rickloff |
| 27 | Cindy Balistreri
Sharon Oxley |
| 28 | Marcia Morris
Ray Hord |

• **Anniversaries**

- | | |
|----|---|
| 1 | Bill & Linda Wishart |
| 3 | David & Maryann Boehm |
| 4 | John & Elizabeth Allen |
| 5 | Bill & Judy Bosold |
| 13 | Jerry & Heather Blanton |
| 14 | Steven & Hilda Gaeta |
| 16 | Denis & Julianne Romanenko |
| 17 | David & Karen Johnston |
| 18 | Bob & Diane Bittner |
| 21 | Dale & Joan Learn |
| 25 | Jerry & Roxanne George |
| 26 | Charlie & Dee Stottlemeyer
Bill & Jo Ann Heburn
Todd & Emily Weitekamp
Phil & Jodilyn Khuu |
| 28 | Ed & Alia Wilson
Michael & Becky Fingerle |



**Blessings from
your church family**

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Cross Connections

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