



CROSS CONNECTIONS

February
2022

Dear friends,

Each year, you elect new elders to serve on your session. Because terms rotate, typically a third of session members are new when the group convenes for the first time in late January. This year, the session also chose to gather earlier in the month for a half-day retreat, so that we might build deeper friendship and offer our prayers for the church. Having shared that in-person retreat time, and then gathered by Zoom for our monthly meeting, I want you to know what confidence I feel in this constellation of leaders, as I watch them begin to work together, and open their hearts to God's leading.

We began our retreat with a simple ice-breaker prompt: "Tell us something about yourself that we are unlikely to know." As we shared responses, I was reminded how important it is to hear each other's stories—and also of the vulnerability that is required of us, in order to let ourselves be known. Your session already is rising to the invitation of this season with the questions they are asking, the prayers they are lifting, the offerings they are making.

In the Presbyterian system of governance, the session has broad responsibility for the life of the church. Pastors moderate session meetings, but their votes count the same as each elder's. Sessions seek to discern God's leading together, trusting that through all the various gifts in the body, God has equipped the church with everything necessary to fulfill its mission. You are in good hands.

You already know that your Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) is hard at work seeking the pastor God is calling to serve with you in the years ahead, but it's important that their work not be rushed. Because I will leave on May 27 of this year, it is likely that there will be a gap between my departure and the arrival of your new pastor. Anticipating that, your session has appointed a team of three (Dave Householder, Carol Papa and Denise Landers) to seek out a local pastor who could bridge that gap with you.

The months ahead will be filled with work and joy and anticipation. With that in mind, I leave you this blessing by John O'Donohue:

Margaret

FOR A NEW BEGINNING

In out-of-the-way places of the heart,
Where your thoughts never think to wander,
This beginning has been quietly forming,
Waiting until you were ready to emerge.

For a long time it has watched your desire,
Feeling the emptiness growing inside you,
Noticing how you willed yourself on,
Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.

It watched you play with the seduction of safety
And the gray promises that sameness whispered,
Heard the waves of turmoil rise and relent,
Wondered would you always live like this.

Then the delight, when your courage kindled,
And out you stepped onto new ground,
Your eyes young again with energy and dream,
A path of plenitude opening before you.

Though your destination is not yet clear
You can trust the promise of this opening;
Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning
That is at one with your life's desire.

Awaken your spirit to adventure;
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk;
Soon you will home in a new rhythm,
For your soul senses the world that awaits you.

• **Message from the Pastor Nominating Committee**

We have begun! We wrote our Mission Information Form (MIF) in October. Our session approved it in November and presbytery approved it in December. After Christmas, our MIF was posted on the PC(USA) denomination's website so any pastor looking for a new church opportunity can learn about us. Pastors wanting to relocate fill out a Personal Information Form (PIF) telling their training and experience, their leadership styles, and their personal statements of faith. They submit them to the PC(USA) website where they are sorted and then sent to churches looking for pastors.

We have already received the first batch of PIFs and have received training in how to read and evaluate them. As they sound promising, we will contact the applicants to ask for additional information. We will receive another batch of PIFs in about three weeks, and so on until we find the pastor God has planned for our church. All of us on the PNC will read all of the PIFs and compare our impressions. When one or more candidates begin to stand out above the rest, we will contact them with further questions and conversation. As you can see, this is just the beginning of a lengthy process that will last several months. We plan to meet weekly.

What can you do? Please pray for us as we meet on Monday evenings at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom. Pray for our next pastor, that he or she will be receptive to God's call. And if you know any pastors outside our Peace River Presbytery that might be good candidates, please give us their names and encourage them to apply. They will know how to do it.

In joyful service,

Frank Frey, moderator
Steve Knopik, secretary
Michael Fingerle
David Landers
Carrie Mills
Janet Olshewsky
Kay Steinman

• **Current COVID Guidelines On-Campus**

Due to the elevated COVID transmission rates in our area, our session has returned to required face mask-wearing on-campus. Please wear a mask while on the church campus and during worship services, whether or not you have been vaccinated. It is our goal to protect the health and provide comfort for all, especially to our most vulnerable, as we gather.

Under the guidance of the Worship and Music Committee, ribbons will be used to block off every other pew on one half of the sanctuary for those desiring extra space between seating. The doors to the sanctuary will also be open if the weather permits. In the Fellowship Hall chairs will be spaced widely to allow for social distancing.

• **Mark Your Calendar: Souper Bowl of Caring Sunday, February 13**



Souper Bowl of Caring began in 1990 with the simple prayer by a Presbyterian seminary intern, with a desire to inspire others on Super Bowl Sunday to donate to those “who are without a bowl of soup to eat.” Since then, youth groups have been harnessing the energy of people coming together for football, food, and fun to raise funds to help feed those in need.

Our youth will be stationed with soup pots at the door after both services on **Sunday, February 13**, to receive your gifts of money to help alleviate hunger in our area. Checks may be made to First Presbyterian Church with “Souper Bowl” in the memo line.

• **Including Your Photo in the Online Church Directory**

On **Sundays, February 13 and 20**, the Membership and Fellowship Committee will be on hand to take individual and family pictures for the online church directory. The photo shoot will be in the courtyard from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. No appointment is needed—just show up when you are able during these times. You also have the option of sending a favorite photo of yourself to the church office to be added to the online directory. Email: info@firstpressarasota.org

• **Caritas Announcement**

Caritas of Sarasota was established in 1980 as a joint effort of five downtown churches headed by St. Martha's Catholic Church, with First Baptist Church, First United Methodist Church, Church of the Redeemer, and First Presbyterian Church, Sarasota.

It is an outreach ministry that provides food and other assistance to Sarasota residents in acute financial need (e.g., utility payments, prescriptions, transportation, and work attire). The **Herrig Caritas Center**, which replaced the original interview facilities, is located at 1645 Fruitville Road, and was dedicated in 2018. The **Caritas Food Pantry** is housed at First Baptist Church on Main Street.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in new safety operating procedures that necessitate additional volunteers. Our church does not currently have sufficient volunteers to assist clients at the **Herrig Caritas Center**. However, FPC will continue sending financial support to the mission at **Herrig Caritas Center**. We are grateful for our teams of FPC volunteers who will continue to serve by assisting in the **Caritas Food Pantry**. We also thank the many volunteers that served Caritas of Sarasota for the past 20-plus years. If you would like to join this team, please contact Dave Householder: dphouse47@gmail.com



• **Adult Education Opportunities**

Every Living Creature: God's Design for Animals Wednesdays, February 23 - April 3



The launch of this class was postponed due to high COVID transmission rates. The class will begin on **Wednesday, February 23, at 12:00 noon by Zoom**. The Zoom link is in **News@First!** This class, taught by Doug DeCelle, retired minister, and Hal Serrie, anthropologist, will present the biblical evidence that God's intention is to preserve all living things, bringing them to perfection and a joyous, harmonious existence. We will consider the nature and destiny of the whole created world. For details about this unique class, visit Doug DeCelle's website: <https://www.douglasdecelle.net/every-living-creature-gods-design-for-animals/>

Look To the Cross: A Lenten Study Tuesdays, March 8 - April 12



Lent is a time to focus on the cross as a central symbol of Christianity. Ever since early Christians began to reflect on the death of Jesus Christ, they knew the three hours when Jesus hung on a Roman cross were decisively important to their eternal salvation and their relationship with God. They found the cross had the power to change lives forever, through the forgiveness of sins and the new life that comes through the power of God. Biblical and theological perspectives will be explored to understand why and how Jesus' death is so crucial to our faith. This class will be led by Elaine Barnett via Zoom and held **Tuesdays at 11:30 a.m. beginning March 8**. Sign-up by emailing Elaine at ewbarnet@me.com. Lesson titles are:

- March 8 - The Crux of the Matter
- March 15 - The Cross as Necessary?
- March 22 - Accessing the Presence of God
- March 29 - Picturing the Atonement
- April 5 - The Cross in the Tradition of the Reformers
- April 12 - The Invitation to Live into the Way of the Cross

• **News from the Faith Focus Weekend/ Pastoral Development Seminar Leadership Team**

by Elaine Barnett, member FFW/PDS team

For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Romans 8:24-25

2000 years after Paul wrote those words, Christ's Church continues to learn lessons about the relationship between patience and hope! Through 2020, 2021, and into 2022 your Faith Focus Weekend and Pastoral Development Seminar Leadership Team continued to meet, to imagine possibilities, to put plans in place, and then to revise those plans as circumstances required.

With the assistance of the Rev. Paul Roberts and the Manasota Interracial Book Clubs, we were delighted in October 2021 to host a marvelous Faith Focus Weekend on the topic of *Bridging the Racial Divide*. And we look forward to having the Rev. Dr. Neddy Astudillo here on **Sunday, February 6** to preach and lead conversation on the Christian response and responsibility for care of the earth and the climate. We have found ways to honor the *Faith Focus Weekend* part of our initiative, but it simply has not been possible to safely gather young pastors from around the country for our *Pastor Development Seminar*. Three times we have made plans with a fine group of young pastors who were eager to come, only to watch COVID numbers rise to such an extent that we all agreed it was not prudent for them to travel. In the meantime, though, the Rev. Lori Raible of Selwyn Avenue Presbyterian Church in Charlotte has used Zoom to build community with these gifted young leaders. All involved have reported being blessed by that experience. God continues to work God's purposes out, often in ways that surprise us.

In the midst of our current COVID spike, our leadership team has made the painful but wise decision to pause planning for the next Pastoral Development Seminar and Faith Focus Weekend until COVID is more in the rearview mirror and our new pastor is called and installed. We look forward with great hope to beginning this ministry again in October 2023.

The response over the years from members of our church family has been amazing as they gave financial support, hosted participants, fed many people and came to listen and offer comment to sermons. We know we can count on you when we return.

We began with hope, and we continue to be filled with hope for the future for FPC and this ministry!

The current members of the FFW/PDS Leadership Team, along with me, are George and Merle Chorba, Michael Fingerle, Marvin Miller, Sandi Soper, and from the staff, Rachel Martin, Pam Schweizer, and Margaret LaMotte Torrence.



• **The Rev. Dr. Neddy Astudillo Will Be Our Guest Preacher Sunday, February 6**



Neddy is a Venezuelan-American, an ecotheologian and PC(USA) pastor who has taught in seminaries in Guatemala, Bolivia, Peru, México and the United States.

She explains ecotheology this way: "Ecotheology is reflecting on our faith from a belief in God as Creator. It seeks to find faith-based solutions to the environmental challenges of our time, lifting up Creation care as an act of faith."

Neddy has a Doctor of Ministry in "Greening the Church." In 1998, she co-founded the Angelic Organics Learning Center, a farm-based nonprofit organization, where people connect with food, farming and caring for the earth.

Neddy will be preaching in both the 9:00 a.m. NewSong worship service and the 11:00 a.m. traditional service. Between services, from 10:15 to 10:45 a.m. in the Fellowship Hall, Neddy will be available for a question-and-answer time. We look forward to hearing from this vibrant and engaging leader in the church!



• **Social Justice Corner**

by Dorothy Murphy
SURE Team Leader

SURE Working to Win an Adult Civil Citation Program

Because of COVID concerns, all research meetings with the team and officials were conducted over Zoom. We continue to reaffirm the serious nature of the problem we are researching.

Clerk of Court Submits Requested Data

The purpose of the meeting with the Clerk of Court was to receive raw data on adult arrests in Sarasota County so that we can conduct the analysis we have done in other counties.

What SURE Requested

1. All arrests and “Notice to Appear” events in the county (including felonies)
2. All dates in 2019
3. All the arresting agencies in Sarasota County
4. Information provided electronically in an Excel spreadsheet with line-by-line arrests.

After much discussion and some clarification, the Clerk of Court stated that a list would be sent of all of the 2019 misdemeanor and felony cases, including the case number, name, date of birth, arrest data, and race. This has been received for our review.

The team is indebted to master data expert Doug Griffin of St. Wilfred Episcopal Church. His expertise is needed so that we have a better understanding of how we relate to officials and ascertain that what we are presenting is based upon accurate information.

Adult Civil Citation Draft Received from Assistant State Attorney

We received the draft of an adult civil citation program from the Assistant State Attorney which he titles, Adult Pre-Arrest Diversion (APAD). SURE’s Criminal Justice Committee attended the meeting with the Assistant State Attorney fully aware they were participating to better understand the rationale for particular

items in the proposal and to learn the timeline for implementation.

A Special Thank-You to Thoughtful Giving Donors

SURE was one of the twenty FPC mission partners listed in the Christmas 2021 Thoughtful Giving pamphlet. We thank our FPC congregants for their thoughtful response to this worthwhile endeavor.

BE
joyful
IN HOPE
patient
IN AFFLICTION
faithful
IN PRAYER
-ROMANS 12:12



• **Presbyterian Women**

On January 4, Presbyterian Women hosted Cindie Moore from the Association of Mam Christian Women for Development to receive an update on the progress in Guatemala. The Mam are an indigenous group of people living in the mountainous region of Guatemala near Mexico. In the recent past, we assisted the Mam women with funds to purchase cook stoves, cattle sheds and incaparina, a drink mix for their malnourished children.

Cindie tells us the need is still great to reduce hunger in the children. Each malnourished child is weighed, measured and given incaparina and then monitored. Mothers are given instruction on nutrition and how to raise egg-laying chickens and grow vegetables. If you want to help continue our support of the Mam women by providing incaparina, please send or leave your donation for Mary Webb in the church office before the end of February. **Checks should be made out to Presbyterian Women with “incaparina” in the memo line.**

Distribution of Incaparina



Save March 28 and 29 to attend the Peace River PW Spring Retreat at DaySpring Conference Center in Ellenton. Watch for details in upcoming church emails and bulletins.



Are you, or someone you know, at a place where they would say, “My life is falling to pieces?” An unexpected event can take everything that was once clear and shatter it. One has no clear way to begin and a sense



of helplessness with the right direction to go. Even worse can be the nagging worry that life can never be put back together again. These are fearful and isolating times.

During such a crisis, Stephen Ministers can provide real comfort and companionship. There can be nothing more joyful than to work on a puzzle with a friend. Stephen Ministers provide continuing, confidential care for as long as they are needed. They are also equipped to help you find resources that may be appropriate for you through a dark time should that also be needed.

Currently, we have openings to offer care assistance. If you or someone you know is hurting, find out more about Stephen Ministry. Please call the church office (941) 955-8119 to speak with Pastor Margaret LaMotte Torrence, Faith Community Nurse Cheryl Track, or Director of Music Ministries/Congregational Care Steven Phillips.



• ***Giving From the Heart is Good for Your Heart***

*by Cheryl Track,
Faith Community Nurse*

Giving blood is part of a heart-healthy lifestyle and donating on a regular basis has proven health benefits. In fact, studies have shown that donating blood can be good for your heart.

There have been studies published that show blood donors enjoy better health (*Transfusion 2007*) and blood donation reduces blood pressure (*Transfusion 2016*) and cholesterol (*Am J Epi 1998*).

High blood pressure is one of the leading risks for heart attacks and there is evidence that regular blood donations may be beneficial. Being a regular donor may help with blood flow and reduce arterial blockages.

High iron stores can increase a person's risk of heart attacks. When you give blood it depletes your iron stores and helps your body create new blood. About 500ml of whole blood is taken during each blood donation, which removes 225-250mg of iron. You do have to be careful if you tend to be on the anemic side that you don't give too much each year. There are plenty of other meaningful things you can do to promote heart health. Check out *28 Days Towards a Healthy Heart Calendar* https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/sites/default/files/publications/HM-2022-28-DaysFactSheet_508.pdf.

Each time you donate you'll receive a free wellness checkup that includes blood pressure check, pulse and temperature taken, iron count, and cholesterol reading. You can use the results of this checkup to determine your cardiovascular risk factor as well as other possible health conditions.

The Health and Wholeness Ministry hosts SunCoast Blood Mobile four times a year. Our drive liaison recently shared these numbers from our 2021 drives:

- March 28: Donors presented: 15,
Units Collected: 15, New Donors: 1
- August 29: Donors presented: 29,
Units Collected: 35, New Donors: 10
- October 24: Donors presented: 17,
Units Collected: 18, New Donors: 1
- December 19: Donors presented: 20,
Units Collected: 23, New Donors 3

The 2021 total is 81 donors presenting, 91 units collected, and 15 new donors. The total lives potentially saved by First Presbyterian Church is 273 in our community. Awesome job! Thank you for all you did for our community and our local hospitals in 2021. Looking forward to our next blood drive, **Sunday, March 20, 2022.**



• ***Love Note***

Ellen and I are so thankful for the many cards and messages of encouragement that we have received during this very difficult time in our life due to the death of our beloved son, Reid. Your thoughts and prayers along with God's grace are sustaining us and will continue to lift us up through the days ahead. We will be leaving in mid-January on a previously planned, extended trip so we will not be physically with you each Sunday but will certainly continue to pray for our church family.

Craig Gesell

Dear First Presbyterian Church,

I'd like to thank you for adopting my classroom. I'm super excited about it because I have never been adopted and it means a lot to me. Your generosity will help me buy some new books for my students to enjoy, among other needed supplies. I so appreciate your generosity.

Warm regards,

Mary Enos

Brentwood Elementary School

5th Grade ESE Inclusion

(ESE: Exceptional Student Education for Children with Disabilities)

• **Invest in Children**

by Jinny Miller, co-coordinator



Let's Celebrate!

Happy Anniversary, Invest in Children!

It has been five years since February, 2017 when members of First Presbyterian Church were first invited to consider volunteering at Brentwood Elementary school.

A Steering Committee had been formed, Brentwood had been recommended by a school district administrator, and, in meetings with the Brentwood vice-principal, it was discovered that their greatest need was for volunteers. Thus began a unique mission partnership which has blossomed into a cadre of volunteers, the adoption of many classes, Christmas blessings for students and their families in need, and a much appreciated "welcome back" brunch for the staff. Thank you, First Presbyterian Church, for your investment in this ministry!

Though COVID-19 and its variants have made a dent in our ability to provide volunteers, there is hope that volunteers will soon be welcomed back to the Brentwood campus. Until then, please continue to pray for Brentwood and other schools as they contend with the virus.

Steering Committee members George Chorba, Kay Dunn, Lorraine Foltz, Alan and Linda Nelson, Sandi Soper, Jinny and Ron Miller, Rachel Martin, and new members Mary and Tony Williams would be thrilled to receive "Happy Anniversary" greetings as they celebrate five years of a powerful ministry with the students and staff of Brentwood Elementary School!



The stage is set for opening Francis House; household goods, baby items, and food are gathered, thanks to your generosity. Because this initiative is a new concept to Family Promise, there are guidelines to be followed for mothers and their children to reside at Francis House. They must be highly motivated moms who, through a temporary setback, find their families experiencing homelessness. Families can remain at Francis House up to 90 days. The right fit for this program is someone wanting to return to financial independence and provide a safe and secure home for her family.

Thank you for your generous support through the holiday season. As 2022 begins, we ask you to join in supporting this mission work to bring safety, comfort, and hope to new mothers and their children. Requests for needed goods and assistance will be detailed in future FPC Sarasota publications. Visit the Family Promise website to learn more: <https://www.familypromisesarasota.org>

Pam Mathes: pjmathes@hotmail.com
Joanne Simons: simonsjc1@gmail.com

• **Birthdays**

- 1 Barbara Epperson
Charlotte Chapdelain
Spencer Chapdelain
Ida Tidwell
- 2 Judy Kelly
Sue Nurczyk
Dwight Ferguson
Rogers Knopik
- 3 Stephie Fleming
Betsy Cairns
Kathleen Harmon
- 4 Lauren Van Nostrand
- 6 Connor Davis
- 8 Cajun Camastro
Rich Drude
- 9 Emma John
- 10 Siena Cook
Stephanie Tarnowsky
Karen Putt
- 11 Jo Ann Heburn
Linda Parks
Nikki Garraus
- 14 Wells Weitekamp
El Gesell
Charlie Armstrong
- 15 Wes Burquest, Jr
- 16 Stephen Gifford-Bell
- 17 Jeff Steinwachs
- 18 Martin Sabin
- 20 David Soper
Peg Moffett
- 22 Beth Knopik
James-Allen McPheeters
Wayne Estes

- 23 Matthew Ulsh
Lydia Chapdelain
Jessica Armstrong
- 24 Beverly Koach
Karen Frieder
Eleanor McCausey
- 26 Emily Rickloff
- 27 Sharon Oxley
- 28 Marcia Morris
Ray Hord

• **Anniversaries**

- 4 John & Elizabeth Allen
- 18 Bob & Diane Bittner
- 21 Dale & Joan Learn
- 26 Charlie & Dee Stottlemeyer
Bill & Jo Ann Heburn
Todd & Emily Weitekamp
Phil & Jodilyn Khuu
- 28 Michael & Becky Fingerle

**February
Blessings
from
your church
family**



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Cross Connections

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Return Service Requested



Annual Meeting & Celebration

Sunday, February 27, 10am

- One combined service

Ash Wednesday Service

March 2, 6pm

Palm/Passion Sunday Service

April 10, 9am & 11am

Maundy Thursday Service

April 14, 7pm

- Communion & tenebrae

Easter

Sunday, April 17, 9am & 11am