



FIRST and ForMOST

February 2007

WHY GO TO CHURCH?

by Dr. Chris Looker

“Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you.” (The Fourth Commandment, Deuteronomy 5:12)

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The other day I was reading about a gentleman who wrote to the Editor of a local Long Island, New York newspaper. He was complaining that it made no sense to go to church every Sunday. Here's what he wrote: *“I've gone to church now for 30 years and in that time, I must have heard something like 3000 sermons. But for the life of me, I can't remember a single one of them! So, I've come to the point in my life where I think that I'm just wasting my time going to church and all the pastors are wasting their time by preaching!”*

When the editor of the newspaper published the man's letter, he received an avalanche of responses, including this one:

“Dear Sir: I've been married for 30 years now. In our family, my wife cooks the food because I am a very poor chef! Anyway, throughout our marriage, my wife has cooked me some 32,000 meals. But for the life of me, I cannot recall the entire menu for a single one of those meals! But I do know this: Every one of those meals nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work and live my life. If my wife had not given me all those meals, I would be physically dead today. Likewise, if I had not gone to church for spiritual nourishment these many years, my soul would be dead today!”

Why go to church? To socialize? To see our friends? To sing our favorite hymns? To sit in our favorite pew? To hear the latest gossip? Sure, we like all of these things. But, are they the most important reasons why we should go to church?

Maybe one might want to ask what the reasons are that people do NOT go to church. In my 19 years of ordained ministry, here are just some of the excuses that I have heard:

“Church is boring!”

“The pastor's sermons are too long!”

“The pews are too uncomfortable!”

“Why go. All they want is our money!”

“The people who go to churches are such hypocrites!”

You know, maybe all of those excuses are accurate some of the time...perhaps all of the time. But, in the end, who gets hurt when one allows these excuses to keep one away from worshipping God? Whose soul dies when one stays away from God's House too long? Whose spirit decays and withers when one avoids worshipping, thanking, and praising the God who has given us every thing we have and has made us all that we are?

We may have the best excuses in the world for not coming to church...for not worshipping God regularly...for not allowing God to nourish our souls. But, those excuses will always result in the something that is truly tragic: The death of the soul.

Those who are spiritually dead may have the most beautiful and healthy bodies on the face of the earth. They may have three or four PhD's. But, if their souls are dead, they will **lack the ability to understand what their real purpose is in life.**

Why? Because it is the soul (not the body or the mind) that enables human beings to believe in God. The soul enables us to have faith. And, faith is "*the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen.*" (see *Hebrews 11: 1*). In other words, if our soul is dead, we will no longer have the ability to believe in any purpose, anything, or anyone greater than ourselves.

Can you imagine what life would be like WITHOUT faith in God? Can you imagine a life without the Bible? Without prayer? Without the promise of eternal life? Without the Holy Spirit? Without worship? Without the singing of hymns? Without our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ?

TODAY, there are literally millions of people in this world whose bodies are strong and minds are sound. **BUT, THEIR SOULS ARE DEAD! Why?** Because they are not opening themselves up to the opportunities that God provides to keep their souls healthy and nourished.

The fourth Commandment is NOT supposed to make us feel guilty or somehow force us to go to church! No. Rather, it is simply loving advice from God on how we should best take care of our souls.

It is like the parent who tells his child to look both ways before crossing the street...to eat his/her vegetables...to study hard and get good grades...to say her/his prayers before eating and before going to bed.

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT IS GREAT ADVICE FROM GOD AS TO HOW WE CAN KEEP OUR SOULS FROM DYING!

"Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy..." It is my sincere hope and prayer that 2007 will bring a large increase in the number of people who come to FPCA to worship God...not because they feel that they have to...but because it is the very best way to take good care of our souls.

Your Friend in Christ, Dr. Chris Looker

CHRIST IS WITH US

CHRIST FIRST and For MOST

Do you know why our newsletter is called **FIRSTandForMOST**, with a logo symbolizing the Chi-Ro sign in its heading?

The Chi-Ro logo is a pre-Christian symbol, signifying good fortune. It was adopted by the Roman Emperor Constantine, and became the symbol of his army, his battle standard. It represents the first two letters in the name of Christ, the Greek **X** (*Chi*) and **P** (*Rho*).

There is a legend that the Roman Emperor Constantine, who had serious difficulties in his struggle for dominance, claimed to have had a vision on the way to Rome, during the night before battle:

He saw the '*Chi-Ro*', the symbol of Christ, shining above the sun. Constantine saw this as a divine sign, and had his soldiers paint the symbol on their shields. Following this, Constantine went on to defeat the numerically stronger army of Maxentius at the Battle at the Milvian Bridge in October 312 AD. Constantine saw in it a sign from the Christian God, and, to show his gratitude, turned his empire over to Christianity, making it the state religion.

So, every time you look at our newsletter, think of it that the heading stands for **CHRIST FIRST and ForMOST** - yes, Christ is first - and here for most of us, even all of us. You could also think of Christ as being there "first and foremost" in our church, our lives.

STAINED GLASS WINDOW ABOVE THE ENTRANCE TO THE SANCTUARY

As the cover of the new Picture Directory reminds you, the stained glass window above the entrance to our church also displays the same symbol.

When you leave the sanctuary, you see the Greek letters **X** (*Chi*) and **P** (*Rho*), the first two letters of Christos (Christ), a traditional symbol of faith. From it radiates the light Christ brings us.

On the window we also see the stem of the letter P (*Rho*), shaped like a descending dove, with wings curving around the upper part of the letter P, and a halo of light around his head. Look at it when you leave the sanctuary, and think of it symbolizing God's Spirit going before us as we step out into the world. Marta Strada



THANK YOU, CHURCH FAMILY



I imagine all of the readers are wondering what this is all about. It's about something that I should have done a long time ago and it has been bothering me ever since. - Well it is "better late than never" as Sun Tzu used to say. I must apologize for not responding sooner and individually to everyone who sent me get well cards and notes - some more than once - food, and many prayers. It worked as I did indeed recover from a quadruple heart bypass operation a year ago September. To somewhat paraphrase Mark Twain - contrary to what Rev. Bob Curry said one day in church I did not have a heart attack. As the doctors said the heart is great but the "pipes" are clogged. (Three 90% blocked and one 100% blocked.) Actually I was feeling pretty good before the operation but Punch noticed some symptoms and got me in to see our family doctor who pointed me to a cardiologist. After a series of tests, including a cardiac catheterization, which concluded stents wouldn't do and consequently a quad bypass was necessary. Our son Donnie, our younger son Dean (Florida) and our daughter Jo Ann (Arizona) came for the operation. Dean was baptized, confirmed, and married in our church. Jo Ann was confirmed in our church. The bypass went very well. The only problem I had with the recovery was with the pain in my leg from which they took the vein for the bypass and resultant fatigue. I did lose about 30 pounds and have regained about 15 and plan to stay there. My energy has come back and I feel almost as good as I did before the operation. (Somewhat kidding.) Rev. Curry visited me a couple of times and once with Anne Manning where he administered Holy Communion which I deeply appreciated and also appreciated his visits.

Please accept my sincerest apologies for not responding sooner to all of your outpourings of love and concern and prayers. They worked.

God bless you all. Happy and HEALTHY New Year -2007

Donald "Don" Jackson

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Many thanks to all who sent cards and kept my family in your prayers during my mother's illness and death. I am very grateful to have a loving and caring church family. I cannot imagine how people without an extended church family can survive the tough times. I love you all.

Key Bedsole

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A sincere and heartfelt thank you to Pastor Looker, the Session, the members of the congregation and especially all the "behind the scenes" individuals who contributed in some way to my farewell reception. I was deeply touched and overwhelmed by your generosity.

I also want to thank everyone for their love and support during my tenure here at FPCA. I am deeply grateful and shall cherish all the friendships I have made as a result. This has been a truly rewarding experience for me, and I am a much richer person today than I was 7-1/2 years ago. I will miss everyone!

Love and blessings to all,
Home: (703)354-5994 Cell: (703)863-8666

Sandra Cummings

2007 PRAYER BREAKFAST

National Capital Presbyterian Women

Saturday, February 10, 2007, 9:00 am - 12:30 pm

Denise Dombkowski Hopkins is Professor of Hebrew Bible at Wesley Theological Seminary. She received her PhD from Vanderbilt University and has been speaking, teaching, and preaching for more than 25 years. Her publications include *Journey Through the Psalms* (Chalice Press, 2002) and *"Judith" in Women's Bible Commentary* (WJK, 1998). She is particularly interested in Psalms and other intersections between the Bible and pastoral care. Currently, she is team-teaching a course entitled "Grounded in the Living Word: The Hebrew Bible and Pastoral Care Practices" with her Presbyterian colleague at Wesley, Michael Koppel. They are working on a book of the same name to be published in 2008. This course has been chosen as one of four national winners of a Theological Education Award given by the Yale Center for Faith and Culture. Copies of *Journey Through the Psalms* will be available for purchase at the Prayer Breakfast.

Given that the Presbyterian Women's Bible Study this year focuses upon the women in Genesis, Dr. Hopkins' presentation will explore through small group discussion the particular kinds of problems with which Rebekah wrestles, she being the mother of Jacob, the paradigmatic wrestler in Israel. Investigating Rebekah's struggle can help us to identify and perhaps re-author the personal marital, family and ministerial myths that shape our behavior and our pastoral practices.

Dr. Denise Dombkowski Hopkins will speak on "Wrestling Hope Out of Chaos" at National Presbyterian Church, 4107 Nebraska Ave NW, Washington DC

Phone: 202-537-0800

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ASH WEDNESDAY

What is the meaning and purpose of Ash Wednesday?

Ash Wednesday is a wake-up call. **Ash Wednesday hits us squarely between the eyes, forcing us to face mortality and sinfulness.** We hear Scripture readings that are urgent and vivid. We have black ashes rubbed into our foreheads. We recite a Litany of Penitence that takes our breath away, or should. It is a tough day, but take heart! This is one religious day that won't fall into the clutches of retailers. There aren't any Hallmark cards celebrating sin and death; no shop windows are decked out with sackcloth and ashes.

On Ash Wednesday we come to church to kneel, to pray, and to ask God's forgiveness, surrounded by other sinners. Human sin is universal; we all do it, not only Christians. But our church tradition sets aside Ash Wednesday as a particular day to address sin and death. We do this mindful that "God hates nothing God has made and forgives the sins of all who are penitent." We are ALL sinners, no better and no worse than our brothers and sisters. This is not a day to compete ("my sins are worse than yours are"), but to confess....

Ash Wednesday is the gateway to Lent. **We have forty precious days to open ourselves up most particularly to God, to examine ourselves in the presence of one who created us, knows us, and loves us.** We have forty days to face ourselves and learn to not be afraid of our sinfulness. We are dust, and to dust we shall return, but with God's grace we can learn to live this life more fully, embracing our sinfulness, allowing God to transform us.

The Rev. Margaret Jones, from "[Ash Wednesday—A Wake-up Call](#)"

United College Ministries in Northern Virginia

8410 Little River Turnpike, Annandale, VA 22003

Tel: 703-426-1939

www.gmu.edu/org/ucm

January 2007 PRESS RELEASE

Nominations Sought for 14th Annual Emmett W. Cocke, Jr. Scholarship & Social Justice Award

United College Ministries in Northern Virginia is again seeking nominations for two separate awards to be presented this spring. Both awards honor the late Emmett W. Cocke, Jr., a Virginia United Methodist minister who was a denominational and ecumenical leader in both social justice and campus ministry. They are made possible by the Cocke Memorial Fund.

The first award is a **\$750 SCHOLARSHIP** to a student currently enrolled and in good standing at either Northern Virginia Community College or George Mason University. The award is based primarily on financial need and promise of service to social justice. To nominate a student, simply write a statement of no more than one page declaring why she or he should receive the award.

The second award is the **EMMETT W. COCKE SOCIAL JUSTICE AWARD** to an individual or organization whose life and work reflect extraordinary commitment to social justice. This is not a monetary award but a plaque of recognition. To nominate a person or organization, simply write a statement of no more than one page declaring why this person or group should receive the award. Previously nominated persons or groups may be considered again.

All nominations should be sent to United College Ministries, 8410 Little River Turnpike, Annandale, VA 22003. **Deadline for nominations is February 28.** Applications for both awards can be downloaded from our website. <www.gmu.edu/org/ucm>

Both awards will be presented at a free dinner Sunday April 15, 6 p.m. RSVP required.
Keynote: Jean Johnson, Founder, New Neighbors Education Center.



ATTENTION!

Deadline for March issue of *FIRST* and *ForMOST* is February 16, 2007.

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

The following items were discussed and/or approved by your Session at their regularly scheduled Session Meeting on Wednesday, January 17, 2007.

1. The 2007 Operating Budget was approved unanimously by the Session and will be presented to the congregation at the upcoming Annual Congregational Meeting to be held immediately after the worship service on Sunday, January 28, 2007.

2. The Docket was approved for the Annual Congregational Meeting and will be included in the bulletins handed out during the worship service. Additional copies of the Docket will be available.

3. The Moderator thanked those Active Elders whose terms were expiring: Patti Young, Phil Rodrigues, Lynette Kwaku, and Christine DeVera.

4. The Moderator welcomed the newly nominated Elders whose terms would begin after they were formally elected by the congregation at the Annual Congregational Meeting, Ordained, and/or Installed. These newly nominated Elders are: Hugh Iwanicki, Barb Matos, Sandy Mori, Jack Smith, and Tyler Young.

5. The Moderator also welcomed the newly nominated Deacons whose terms would begin after they were formally elected by the congregation at the Annual Congregational Meeting, Ordained, and/or Installed. These newly nominated Deacons are: Etha Cook, Patti Young, and Isabelle Fennig.

6. The Moderator thanked the three "At Large" nominees to the Church's Nominating Committee: Tom Martin, Jan Reitman, and Carroll Thompson.

7. The Session elected Elder Margaret Anderson to serve as the Clerk of Session for the one-year 2007 term. The Session elected Jan Reitman to serve as the Church Treasurer for another one-year 2007 term.

8. The Moderator reported to the Session that a tentative date for the Cumberland Youth Mission Trip was July 22-28, 2007.

9. The Session discussed the possibility of participating in a 2007 Adult (over 18 years old) Mission Trip to the Gulf Coast (Louisiana or Mississippi) sometime in 2007. The Mission Commission and the Moderator will be asking members of the congregation if they wish to participate in this type of loving and worthwhile act of Christian Mission Service. If there is enough interest, then we will proceed. **If you are interested in participating in an Adult Mission Trip to the Gulf Coast to help with the continued clean-up and restoration after Hurricane Katrina, please contact Elder Margaret Anderson, John Metzel, and/or Dr. Chris Looker.** Thank you!

10. The Session is in the process of putting together a WISH LIST. The WISH LIST is a list of priorities, ministries, projects, and/or improvements that the Session members believe would enable FPCA to attract more members, communicate the Gospel more effectively, minister to our current Active Members, beautify the church facility, and insure that FPCA would continue to thrive as a church now and long into the future. Sample items on the list so far are: Refurbishing the Sanctuary (New carpet, paint, etc.); Have more Mission Trips and Local Mission Service Opportunities for our Members; Provide Ministry, Fellowship, and Worship Opportunities for Specific Age and Interest Groups (Example: Those in their 20's and 30's, Those in their 40's, etc.); and Install a New Sound System in the Sanctuary.

THE SESSION IS CREATING THIS “WISH LIST” FOR THOSE OF US WHO WISH TO CONTRIBUTE FINANCIAL SUPPORT ABOVE AND BEYOND OUR ANNUAL OPERATING BUDGET PLEDGE AND HAVE THAT SPECIAL AND ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTION GO TOWARD A SPECIFIC PROJECT THAT IS NOT AND/OR CANNOT BE PROVIDED FOR IN THE FPCA ANNUAL OPERATING BUDGET.

Examples of individual FPCA members contributing above and beyond their Annual Operating Budget Pledges in 2006 were anonymous donations received that enabled FPCA to fully support the Cumberland Youth Mission Trip (\$1500.00) **and** make emergency, unanticipated, and essential repairs to our wonderful Tracker Pipe Organ (\$6000.00).

A final **WISH LIST** for 2007 will be published shortly to provide you, our devoted and generous members, with the opportunities to enable our wonderful church to afford to do those things that are critically needed, but are not affordable using the limited funds traditionally available in our Annual Operating Budgets. Thank you.

Prepared by Dr. Chris Looker, Moderator of the FPCA Session

COMMISSIONS’ ACTIVITIES

Buildings & Grounds Commission

The Buildings & Grounds Commission has established two dates for our **annual spring clean-up: March 24 and March 31**. This will not only spruce up FPCA in general, but will assure that our property (inside and out) will be welcoming to all for Palm Sunday and for Easter. In addition, it will allow us to showcase FPCA when our own Margaret Anderson is installed as Moderator of the National Capital Presbyterian Women in April. At that time we will have guests from many churches in the Presbytery - and we will want to have our property shine!

Save the dates - details will be in the next issue of *FIRST and ForMost* and also in Sunday bulletins.

Also - if you use specific rooms at FPCA and would like help in cleaning out and sprucing up - please contact Jack Smith to coordinate these efforts.

Christian Education Commission

While the Adult Church School classes are doing fine, the attendance of the children in the classes they share with the Koreans fluctuates. The parents should encourage their children to attend the classes. We hope to come up with a Lenten program for the young people, and plan an Easter Egg hunt. Mothers’ Day should also be celebrated, and Youth Sunday is planned to be held in May. The editor is grateful to the congregation that quite a few articles and thank you messages are being contributed, so it is easy to publish the monthly issues.

Congregational Life/New Member Commission

The commission began the new year with an overview of evangelism given by Chris Looker. He brought books for us to read to help us in our planning. The overview generated some ideas for new programs and ways to reach out to the community to bring new members into our church family. We will discuss these ideas and suggestions at the February meeting and will present some to the congregation in the First and ForMost. Stay tuned! We are ready to do our part for our New Beginning.

Worship Commission

The Worship Commission is coordinating a service for the first Sunday in March, celebrating the gifts of women in the Church.

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YOUTH NEWS

Thank you to all the youth who participated in our Christmas Eve worship service! Your participation was a memorable, special gift to those who attended, and to God.

On Sunday, February 4, 2007, the FPCA Youth will participate in the Souper Bowl of Caring. The Souper Bowl of Caring is a youth-led, grassroots movement of caring, the result of thousands of young people joining together to fight hunger and poverty in their communities. Since 1990, \$33 million has been raised for charities across the country. After the worship service, our youth will hold soup pots at the church door on Souper Bowl Sunday. They will join young people in churches all across the country to collect money for those who are hungry and hurting. In 2006, 11,000 groups in all 50 states and outside the United States participated in the Souper Bowl of Caring generating over \$5 million. All of the money collected will be donated to a local charity selected by our youth. Thank you for participating!

And, to celebrate our mission activity and a national event, the FPCA/FKPCV youth are invited to the Looker's house to watch the Superbowl on February 4, 2007. The game begins at 6:00 p.m., so people are welcome from 5:30 p.m. on. The Looker address is: 2501 Villanova Dr. in Vienna north of the Dunn Loring metro station on Gallows Road, take a left on Cottage St., right on Marymount, right on Villanova). Phone is: 703-698-5149.

Please bring a snack to share.

Genny Looker

COME TO THE LENTEN SERIES!

The DVD and discussion series "**The Life You've Always Wanted**" by Pastor John Ortberg, a life-changing series with discussions led by Dr. Chris Looker, starts February 28, 5:30-7:30 PM. It will be held on 6 consecutive Sundays, Feb. 25, March 4, 11, 18, 25, and Apr. 1. From 5:30-6:20 PM we enjoy a homemade soup and other refreshments!

THE POEM

*I knelt to pray but not for long,
I had too much to do.
I had to hurry and get to work
For bills would soon be due.
So I knelt and said a hurried prayer,
And jumped up off my knees.
My Christian duty was now done
My soul could rest at ease.....
All day long I had no time
To spread a word of cheer
No time to speak of Christ to friends,
They'd laugh at me I'd fear.*

*No time, no time, too much to do,
That was my constant cry,
No time to give to souls in need
But at last the time, the time to die.
I went before the Lord,
I came, I stood with downcast eyes.
For in his hands God! held a book;
It was the book of life.
God looked into his book and said
"Your name I cannot find
I once was going to write it down...
But never found the time"*



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