



FIRST and ForMOST

FROM YOUR PASTOR

“Therefore we do not lose hope. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4: 16-18)

As Peter J. Gomes has written in his book, *THE GOOD BOOK*,

“Hope is what connects the present to the future; it is the mother of courage, confidence, and endurance. The good life is not that for which one hopes; hope is that which makes the good life possible, and thus the good life is not an objective but a consequence. When we are able to see that, and to adopt the reality as our own, we are free from the tyranny of an unredeemed past, a remorseless present, and an unknown future. We are free to become, in the glorious phrase of Zechariah 9:12, ‘prisoners of hope’.... Hope consists of the promises of God, promises that give those who hope in those promises the right to expect peace, justice, mercy, equity, joy, and equanimity. God has hallowed or made holy the future just as the past, and indeed, even the present, are hallowed by the presence of God, and thus hope becomes the operative opposite not of experience but of fear....Hope then is the opposite of both fear and anxiety....Despair is the absence of hope. Hope banishes despair and empowers the present, and for the future as well, those who hope.” (pgs. 206, 208, 209)

As I have written and said to you countless times, we Christians do not believe in a **RELIGION**, so much as in a **RELATIONSHIP**. And, our relationship is not so much with God’s law or even the Holy Scriptures, but with Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

It is in and through our relationship with Jesus Christ that hope is most fully realized. Without Jesus Christ, there exists less of a personal connection between human beings and God. Because God became fully human in the person of Jesus Christ, our hope is inexorably linked with the very hope of God Himself. If God had not loved us enough to become incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ, being fully human and fully divine, then we could have never fully known how truly special we are as human beings.

To put this more simply, God chose to become human in the person of Jesus Christ. With no other creature or object of creation did God ever choose to become incarnate...only with human beings.

Thus, our relationship with God through Jesus Christ is so much more than any relationship that we could have with a member of our family or a friend. Through the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ, God completely became human and humanity completely became God.

Though this miracle and mystery occurred only once in the person of Jesus Christ, its meaning and power must never escape those who **“fix their eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen...that which is eternal.”** Whatever trials and troubles we may have experienced in our lives, or are experiencing presently, we have a Savior who has felt every emotion, endured every pain, experienced every limitation, and formulated every thought that has or ever will be experienced by every human being who has ever lived. He has even suffered and died, as will all of us in terms of our earthly bodies. But, He also rose from death and was recognized in His resurrected human form by the disciples and countless others.

Though we shall never be able to fully understand how God became incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ or how Jesus Christ rose from the dead, the fact of the matter remains that by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, we confess and believe that both are as true as any other truth that exists in all the universe.

Thus, it is because of our faith in and relationship with Jesus Christ that we can more fully understand why it is so critically important that we never, ever lose hope.

Your Friend and Pastor,

PREACHING SCHEDULE for FEBRUARY 2012

February 5, 2012 -- Service of Holy Communion

Sermon Title: **“JONAH: THE PETULANT PROPHET”**

Scripture Lesson: Matthew 12: 38-41

The Rev. Bob Harris, Preaching

February 12, 2012

Sermon Title: **“SHHHHHHHHHH!”**

Scripture Lesson: Mark 1: 40-45

Dr. Chris Looker, Preaching

February 19, 2012 -- Transfiguration of the Lord Sunday

Sermon Title: **“WHY DON'T YOU EVER LISTEN TO ME?”**

Scripture Lesson: Mark 9: 2-9

Dr. Chris Looker, Preaching

February 22, 2012 Ash Wednesday Service - 7:30 pm

February 26, 2012 -- The First Sunday of Lent

Sermon Title: **“A PROMISE IS A PROMISE!”**

Scripture Lesson: **Genesis 9:8-15**

Dr. Chris Looker, Preaching

WELCOME, NEW ELDERS, NEW DEACONS!

A new year has started, a new, busy year for our Session and Deaconate. We welcome all, and hope we will work together well, come up with great ideas, do great things for our church, for our congregation, and, most of all, to God's glory.

We welcome Jabeen Ghulam and Roger Stevenson as newly ordained elders, as well as Susan Hanson who will stay on the Session for another three years. Unfortunately, this time we have no Youth Elder.

The recently ordained deacons are John Fennig and Alice Lal; the third deacon is Randy Meli who has been installed to rejoin the Board of Deacons for another three years.

At this time we also want to thank the departing elders, Cara Laufer and Paul Malone, Youth Elder Mariam Javed, and Deacons Carroll Thompson, Diane Malone and Marianne Artherholt. All have served our church in a wonderful way during the past three years. We can only thank the Lord that he had chosen them to be our officers.

Marta Strada, Clerk of Session

ADULT 11:30 AM SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS

Spring 2012 Schedule

We are looking forward to an interesting Adult Sunday School program during the coming months!

* **From February 26 through April 1, Lenten Study**, led by Dr. Chris Looker.

* After a "day off" on Easter Sunday, **Margaret Anderson** will hold a class on the month she spent in **India** in October

2011. This will take two Sundays, **April 15 and 22, 2012.**

* A class on his **Sabbatical in the Holy Land** will be presented by **Dr. Chris Looker**, starting on **April 29, 2012.** This will take 3 or 4 weeks, followed by a **Pastor's Class** till the end of our Spring Semester on June 10, 2012.

PER CAPITA ASSESSMENT

Each year all Presbyterian Churches are asked to pay a Per Capita assessment which is based upon church membership. This is an administrative fee which covers the administrative costs of the Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly. In keeping with this, our session has voted to pay this assessment which is \$35.35 per member. We are humbly asking those who are able and so desire to pay the assessment fee. This way the money which has been budgeted may be redirected to support other areas of need for our church. If you write a check, please indicate "Per Capita" on the memo line or use one of the envelopes marked "Per Capita," place it in the offering plate or mail to the church office.

Ruth Hartman, Co-Chair of Administration and Finance Commission

IMPORTANT NOTICE!
2012 ENVELOPES

Due to printing error on the 2012 envelopes, the “**Church Improvement Fund**” was included on the white envelopes along with the “**General Fund**”. Please use the white envelopes for the **General Fund** only and use the blue envelopes for the **Improvement Fund**.



Nell Logwood ~ February 7
John Rockett ~ February 7
Sarah Angelina Tariq ~ February 13

Aggie Jo Millard ~ February 17
Wolfgang Schubert ~ February 26
Dorothy Sheffert ~ February 26

GREETINGS FROM SUSI!

Greeting to all,

It is hard to believe that I have been here in Poplar for two whole months already. It still seems like I just got here. I have been busy first with Advent and now with preparations for Lent. The congregation here is so excited to see what God has in store for us.

My Service of Installation was held on January 8, 2012 with folks from all over Yellowstone Presbytery traveling to Poplar. This was a chance to get to meet a few folks. I was even able to attend my first Presbytery meeting and meet a few more folks. I have found that the people here have graciously welcomed me to a place that is very different from National Capital Presbytery.

I know this is a bit delayed; however, I would like to thank you all for the amazing support you showed me when it was time for me to accept this call. I was blown away by both the reception you held to show your appreciation of my work at FPCA and the reception following the ordination service. As usual all the cooks came out with their food and a good time was had by all!

I humbly thank you for the financial thank you I received. It was more than I expected but I know that it was what God led each of you to provide. It is just one more way that FPCA and FKPCV show how much they appreciate God and the people that God has brought to leadership for these two congregations.

As we go into a new year, please remember that all are welcome to drop in and visit a while in Poplar if you are ever in Montana.

In Christ,

Pastor Susi Ennis

THOUGHTS ABOUT LENT

By Marta Strada

This year we celebrate Ash Wednesday on February 22 – the first day of Lent. Dr. Chris Looker is starting an after-worship adult class on the first Sunday of Lent, 26th of February.

What do we know about Lent? We know that it lasts for 40 days – why? What about its history? Let us study it a little bit.

Lent is one of the oldest observations on the Christian calendar. In the first centuries after Christ it lasted only two or three days, as we learn from Father Irenaus of Lyons (c.130-c.200). However, in 325 AD, the Council of Nicea decided Lent should be observed for 40 days.

Why do we celebrate Lent for 40 days? When we study the symbolism of numbers, we find that *Forty* stands as a symbol of trial, testing, humiliation, desolation, a period of purification under the law. In the Bible we find this quite a few times. Just think of Noah: *“The rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights.* (Genesis 7:12) - What a period of testing for Noah and his people before they began their new life! We see Moses fasting on Mount Sinai: *“And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments”* (Exodus 34:28). Forty days spent in humility, accepting the law of the Lord. We see forty years as a period of desolation to some of the Israelites in Numbers 32:13: *“And the Lord’s anger was kindled against Israel, and he made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation that had done evil in the sight of the Lord was consumed.”* Jonah predicted the destruction of Nineveh in forty days (Jonah 3:4): *“Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he cried, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”*

In the New Testament we see Jesus fasting for forty days in the wilderness, a time of temptation (Matthew 4:1-2; Mark 1:13) In Luke 2:22 we read *“And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.”* According to the law, the time of purification was forty days after the birth of an infant: Jesus was presented to the Temple of Jerusalem for his legal purification. And, finally, the period between Jesus’ Resurrection and Ascension lasted for forty days, a period of testing the faith and steadfastness of the disciples: *“After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.”* (Acts 1:3)

During the centuries, it varied how the churches counted the 40 days. In the Eastern church, Christians only fasted on weekdays, while in the West Lent was one week shorter, but included Saturdays. The observance, however, was very strict everywhere. Only one meal was taken a day, near the evening. There was to be no meat, fish, or animal products eaten.

By the 800s, some Lenten practices became more relaxed. Christians were allowed to eat after 3 p.m. and by the 1400s, they could eat at noon. Eventually, various foods, like fish, were allowed. In 1966 the Roman Catholic Church only restricted fast days to Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. On the other hand, practices in Eastern Orthodox churches are still quite strict.

But the rules of fasting, the way the 40 days are counted are only external customs. What really matters is what Lent means to us, and that is shared by all denominations that do

observe Lent. It is a time of self-examination and penitence. Let us think and pray about that. Self-denial, as expressed in fasting, helps to us to concentrate on what Lent is really about –but it is not the most important part of it. Praying, repenting our sins, thanking God for sending Jesus to earth to die for us and save us, is what leads us closer to God and is the best preparation for Easter.

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE/NEW MEMBER COMMISSION **NEEDS MEMBERS!**

Sadly, the Congregational Life and New Member Commission folded this year after the Session was unsuccessful at recruiting commission members from within the FPCA congregation. That said, the FPCA Session believes the work of this commission would be central to any success FPCA can hope to achieve in engaging our community and adding and retaining new members. We need you to help make the future happen for FPCA. God has a plan for us; and yes, He is capable of simply willing his plan into being, but we know that He doesn't work that way. He loves us and invites us to be an active part of His plan. We've renovated God's house. Is that enough? The economy has shown us many empty houses in our neighborhoods. Will FPCA be one? It doesn't have to be. Every FPCA member has it within him- or herself to do God's work. No one is too old to serve. No one has served to their quota -- there is no quota. If it's been a while since you've given of your time and/or talent, maybe this is the opportunity you've been waiting for.

Respectfully submitted by

- *Cara Lauler, Chair*

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS **December 14, 2011**

Dr. Chris Looker called the meeting to order with prayer. He led the devotion by reading from The Gospel of John, v. 2, interpreted by William Barclay. It stressed that when we walk with Jesus we do not walk in darkness, we are delivered from fear and doubt. When you have the light, believe in the light – do not walk in darkness. Christ's blessing is offered to all of us, but we must do our part and grasp it in time.

Elder Strada reported that she had started working on the 2011 Annual Report as well as on the Annual Statistical Report for Presbytery. She also told Session that the church office had received a notice from Life Line Screening. Session decided to wait till 2013 before engaging the company again, and also look for another company that will do similar screening,

but be less expensive for the individuals subscribing to the screening. It will be best to hand over the project to the Mission Commission.

Dr. Chris Looker asked Session to approve that the Congregational Meeting, originally scheduled for January 29, 2012, be held on January 22, 2012, as he will be out of town on the 29th. Session agreed that both the Annual Corporation Meeting as well as the Annual Ecclesiastical Meeting be held on January 22, following worship service.

Deacon Ruth Hartman presented a list of Active Members to be considered to either move to the inactive roll or remove from the roll. Session made the following decision:

Leave on the Active Roll: Guy Hunter, Dan & Candy Parker, Bud & Rosellen Simone

Move to the Inactive Roll:

Wondem Degaga, Marcella Gooding

Victor and Pauline Njomo and children Victor & Margaret

Jan & Judi Reitman - inactive

Remove from roll: Susi Ennis (who had transferred to the First Presbyterian Church in Poplar, Montana to be their ordained pastor) and Kathleen McDermott (who had moved away).

The Session carefully reviewed the budget for 2012, went through line item by line item, and reduced the amount planned to spend on certain projects wherever possible. When finished, the amount pledged was still short of \$9,377.00. The Session not only agreed with the revision of the budget, but with the plan to make the congregation aware of the shortfall.

Reporting for the **Christian Education Commission**, Elder Marta Strada emphasized that the Commission suggests selecting a subcommittee to make plans to use the rooms vacated when the Sleepy Hollow Preschool vacates the building in July 2012, and find ways to attract the young people.

Reporting for the **Buildings and Grounds Commission**, Elder Jack Belz called to Session's attention that FPCA was told by the Fire-Marshal that an occupancy permit must be posted in the sanctuary.

Marta Strada, Clerk of Session

ECUMENICAL ADVOCACY DAYS

Economy, Livelihood and Our National Priorities

(Isaiah 58)

March 23 – 26, 2012 | Washington, DC

In this era of economic and political urgency, as critical decisions are being made about U.S. federal budget priorities and as national elections are fast approaching, Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD) asks,

"Is This the Fast I Seek?"

Come to the 10th annual EAD, March 23-26, 2012, in Washington, DC where we will explore economy, livelihood and our national priorities through the lens of Isaiah 58. Join other Christians in seeking a global economy and a national budget that break the yokes of injustice, poverty, hunger and unemployment throughout the world – heeding Isaiah's call to become "repairers of the breach and restorers of streets to live in."

In a global economy based on scarcity, corporate greed, and individualism, we will seek God's alternative vision for global community: one that breaks the chains of injustice and creates the possibility of a sustainable livelihood with dignity for all, thus living into a reality of God's abundance.

Please go to <http://advocacydays.org> to read the entire statement and get information about registering. There are a limited number of scholarships for women to attend this inspiring event. Contact Lois Bingham at ljbingham@gmail.com to learn more about the scholarships and to get a scholarship application. Application must be submitted by January 30, 2012.

"PRESBYTERIANS AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE"

Compassion Peace and Justice Training Day prior to Ecumenical Advocacy Days

New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, Washington, D.C.

March 23, 2012

Come join the Office of Public Witness and all the ministries of Compassion Peace and Justice in a training day in Washington, DC. Participants will have a full day of practical church based training and investigate the role Christians must play in today's changing society – particularly on issues of economics justice. Topics of plenary sessions and workshops will include: the following:

- Faith-based Community Organizing
- Practical Tools for Simple Living
- Justice as Discipleship Making
- Social Responsibility through Investing
- And more!

For more information and to register go to www.pcusa.org/washington

BOOK CLUB NEWS

The Book Club will meet on Tuesday, February 21 at 1:00 pm in the church library. Members of the group will discuss the non fiction book, Little Princes: One Man's Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal by Conor Grennan. We have checked out a kit containing 10 copies from the county library. Newcomers are welcome.

Randy Meli

YOUTH NEWS

by Genny Looker



The **Souperbowl/Superbowl** is coming up on February 5, 2012. Youth are asked to attend church to collect money and canned goods from church members that morning. No Superbowl party will be held this year, unfortunately, due to other activities.

THE ROAD THAT LEADS ME HOME

I've been on a long, long journey,
And it's been a rough old road,
But I just keep pressing onward,
Tho I carry a heavy load.
Many times I've asked the question:
"Why do I keep plodding on?"
It's then I am reminded:
This old road will lead me home.

Tho I stumble on the pathway,
Tho I fall along the way,
There's still hope for my tomorrows,
And there's strength for me today.
For there's a Hand that stretches downward,
Makes my feet to walk again.
Tho my journey may be rugged,
He'll be with me 'til the end.

Yes, this old road has been rocky,
But I travel not alone.
My dear Lord is ever with me –
As I cross each stepping stone.
Day by day, we're getting closer
To those gates that will swing wide
Where I'll be "welcomed home" to Heaven
As Jesus leads me safe inside.

D. Sue Jones Harton

*Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholdeth him with
His hand.*

 **ATTENTION!**

Deadline for the March issue of FIRST and ForMOST is February 15, 2012. Please e-mail your announcements and reports to the Editor, Marta Strada, LUXI7777@aol.com, or put them in the FIRST and ForMOST drawer in the church office. Thank you.