



# FIRST and ForMOST

November 2009

## FROM YOUR PASTOR:

***“Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, ‘How are we robbing You?’ In your tithes and offerings! You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me – the whole nation of you! Bring a full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house of worship, and thus put Me to the test, says the LORD; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.”*** (Malachi 3: 8-10)

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In a sermon I preached on this very difficult Scripture passage three years ago, I said:

*“Many Americans do not tithe 10% of their income to their churches, as God commands us to do in Scripture. And, there are many credible (and also many not-so-credible) reasons why this is so. However, if you believe that tithing 10% of your annual income to the church is truly God’s will for your life, like I do, then the best way to increase your giving is to do it gradually. Let’s say you give 2% of your annual income to the church and you believe that the Holy Spirit is moving you to increase your giving to reach a full tithe (10%). What do you do? Well, I suggest that you figure out what percentage of your annual income you are currently pledging to the church; then, begin increasing your pledging by ½% of your annual income each year thereafter. A person who starts at 2% of their annual income will be able to achieve a **“full tithe to the Lord”** (10%) in just 16 years.”*

In my 21 years of ordained ministry, I have struggled greatly with the whole concept of tithing. Though I know it to be Biblical, I believe it to be God’s Word to us, and personally practice tithing 10% of my annual income to Christ’s Church, I have the utmost respect for those who cannot or do not choose to tithe.

First of all, it’s hard to give 10% of one’s income to the church! Many people simply cannot afford to do so. For many, to do so would put themselves and/or their families at great risk of not having enough money for food, shelter, and other basic needs.

Secondly, most Presbyterians were never taught to tithe to their church. Though tithing is mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments as being the minimum offering that we are supposed to dedicate and give to God and His Church, the whole subject of tithing has been avoided like the plague by pastors and elders for years. Perhaps we pastors have thought that we would offend too many people if we mentioned tithing. Perhaps we thought people would leave our churches if we even broached the subject. After all, I have to admit that asking my friends in Christ for money is about the most difficult and anxiety-producing thing that I do as a pastor! Frankly, it scares me to death!

Thirdly, the more money and time that a Christian gives to Christ’s Church, the less that that same Christian will have not only for his/her needs, but his/her wants. By ignoring this

Biblical teaching, generations upon generations have gotten used to a lower standard of giving to our churches. And, there is no one to blame more for this than pastors like myself! Frankly, we have been afraid to talk about tithing for so long, that to do so now is almost a taboo in our present-day society.

Yet, that does not change the fact that tithing 10% of one's income (whether it be of one's net or gross income...which is one of the questions that I have been asked a million times...and to which I don't even pretend to have an answer) **is what God commands us to do in both the Old and New Testaments of Scripture.**

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So, what's a pastor to do? Well, I think that there is only one way that I can possibly be true to God's Word as a pastor and still effectively teach Christians to tithe to Christ's Church. And, that is to lovingly and humbly suggest the Biblical, gradual, sensible, and realistic way that I preached three years ago from FPCA's pulpit.

If you are not currently tithing to Christ's Church and wish to do so, I would humbly suggest that you do it slowly and in reasonable increments, by 1/2% to 1% of your annual income per year. This way, you'll eventually make your goal of 10% and achieve a "**full tithe to the Lord**" in a decent, orderly, Biblical, and reasonable period of time.

This is how I did it when the Holy Spirit of God convinced me that I should tithe to Christ's Church. Sure, it took me a few years. But, with each passing year, I felt more and more satisfied that what I was doing really was God's Will.

To this day, I have never met a person who tithes to Christ's Church and is unhappy. Now, why do you think that is? Maybe Jesus was right when He said, "**It is more blessed to give than receive.**" (Acts 20: 35).

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May God "**ble**ss" you during the upcoming Thanksgiving holidays with "**overflowing blessings.**"

*Your Friend and Pastor, Chris*

### **CONFIRMATION CLASS IS ONGOING!**

The Confirmation Class has started and is doing well. It will go through the 5<sup>th</sup> of November. On Wednesday, the 18<sup>th</sup>, the Confirmands will enjoy dinner with the Session, and Sunday, the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November will be their big day when the Confirmands will be received during Worship Service



**ATTENTION!**

**Deadline for the December issue of FIRST and ForMOST is November 19, 2009. Please e-mail your announcements and reports to the Editor, Marta Strada, [LUXI7777@aol.com](mailto:LUXI7777@aol.com), or put them in the FIRST and ForMOST drawer in the church office. Thank you.**

## PREACHING SCHEDULE for NOVEMBER, 2009

- November 1, 2009:** Scripture Lessons: Deuteronomy 6: 4-9; Mark 12: 28-34  
Sermon: **"GOD IS GREAT, GOD IS GOOD..."**  
*Dr. Looker, Preaching*
- November 8, 2009:** Scripture Lesson: Mark 12: 38-44  
Sermon: **"THANK GOD FOR THE POOR WIDOW"**  
*Dr. Looker, Preaching*
- November 15, 2009:** Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 60: 1-5 ; Mark 13: 1-8 and 24-32  
Sermon: **"HEAVEN AND EARTH WILL PASS AWAY, BUT..."**  
*Dr. Looker, Preaching*
- November 22, 2009:** Scripture Lesson: John 18: 33-37  
Sermon: **"KING OF KINGS, LORD OF LORDS"**  
*Elder Susan Ennis, Preaching*
- November 25, 2009:** **Special Community Thanksgiving Service**  
**Time:** 7:30 PM  
**Place:** First Presbyterian Church of Annandale
- November 29, 2009:** **The First Sunday of Advent**  
Scripture Lessons: I Thessalonians 3: 9-13; Luke 21: 25-36  
Sermon: **"IT'S SO HARD TO WAIT!"**  
*Dr. Looker, Preaching*  
**Special Guests: The Rev. Dr. David and Mrs. Maureen Irwin**  
**(Visiting us from Northern Ireland)**

  **HAPPY BIRTHDAY!**  

Pat Fuller ~ November 2  
Jeannie Scott ~ November 8  
Alan Young ~ November 11  
Sara Schmoyer ~ November 13  
Brenda Johnson ~ November 15

Loraine Reitman ~ November 18  
Stuart Beal ~ November 20  
Larry Young ~ November 24  
Yong Ping Iwanicki ~ November 28

## YOU CAN HELP!

**Isabella Jackson** is in a contest at [gapkids.com](http://gapkids.com). She really wants to win but she needs your help. Please go on the internet to [www.gapkids.com](http://www.gapkids.com) and click on enter now. You will be asked to register by giving your email address and creating a password. Then go to Photo Gallery and type in danadiva28. There will be five pictures of Isabella. You can vote once a day for each picture. They are judged as individual not as a group.

"Thank you so much!"

*Dana & Isabella*

## BLESSED THANKSGIVING

### TO ALL OF YOU!

*from your Editor, Marta Strada*

### THE BLESSING I'VE RECEIVED

I have never spoken with my God in person, face to face,  
Yet deep within my heart I know I was saved by his loving grace.  
I speak with Him through prayer and can feel His presence near.

I know that He is with me when my gloomy days are here.

I long for Him to hold me in his loving arms one day,  
But until then I'll be content to whisper, "I love You," as I pray.  
What a glad and joyful day it was when in Him I first believed.

How can I ever thank Him for the blessings I've received?  
God has done so many wonderful things, but the ones I treasure the most,  
Are the gifts of love He gave to us – His Son, Jesus, and the Holy Ghost.

*by Shirley Hile Powell*

**Yes, let us celebrate Thanksgiving! Let us be grateful for our country, our family and friends, and, above all for God's love!**

## SPECIAL COMMUNITY THANKSGIVING WORSHIP SERVICE AT FPCA

This year's Special Community Thanksgiving Worship Service will be held at our church on Wednesday, November 25, 2009. The service will begin at 7:30 PM in our Sanctuary. Christians from FPCA, FKPCV, our new Hindi-Urdu Christian Fellowship, Ravensworth Baptist Church, Hope Lutheran Church, St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, and Immanuel United Methodist Church will all come together to worship and thank God for His many blessings this past year. Special music will be provided by choirs consisting of singers from all of these wonderful churches. And, all will be welcome to participate in the sacrament of Holy Communion. So, please mark your calendars: Wednesday, November 25, 2009 at 7:30 PM. Thank you.

## SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

September 16, 2009

Dr. Looker reported that FPCA is working on plans to reduce the use of paper, perhaps by projecting the contents of the Worship Service bulletin and announcements on the wall of the Sanctuary during service, and handing out bulletins only to those who prefer using them.

He also announced that Elder Training for FPCA's current and new Elders will be held on November 1, 8, and 15, from 6:00 to 8:30 pm. Elders of FKPCV are also being invited to attend.

Dr. Looker encouraged the Elders to turn in the Session Liaison Assignment List which had been e-mailed to them earlier, indicating on which Commission they preferred to serve, so he can formulate a proposal for Session Liaison Assignments at the next (October 21, 2009) Stated Session Meeting.

Assistant to the Pastor, Susan Ennis, reported that she would conduct the Confirmation Class held October/November 2009, based on the Presbyterian Church curriculum. (see also p.2)

For the **Mission Commission**, Elder Nadine Dingess reported that Parenting Partnership (Nurturing Parenting) is starting again on Monday, September 21, at 6:30 pm, and will continue through the end of December. Each Monday volunteers from FPCA will cook and serve dinner for about 40 adults and children. She also reported that Betty Beal's classes on learning and practicing English as second language will be held each Tuesday from 6:30 to 8:30 pm. Elder Dingess also mentioned that the joint FPCA/FKPCV Mission Trip to Camp Paddy Run was a great success.

For the **Nominating Committee**, Elder Nadine Dingess told the Session who had been nominated for Elders and Deacons (see *Slate of Newly Elected Officers for 2010* on p. 6) Carroll Thompson, Marianne Artherholt, Paula Santen, Ruth Hartman, and Norma Muller will serve in the Decorating Committee

For the **Buildings and Grounds Commission**, Elder Barb Matos reported that the boiler had been replaced. Only some fine-tuning is still to be done. The program for church improvement includes electrical upgrades, improved lighting, new sound/multimedia system, stage reorientation and expansion, wall and ceiling repairs and painting, new carpeting.

Though Elder Sandy Mori, chair of the **Worship Commission**, was absent, Dr. Looker informed the Session that this year the Community Thanksgiving Worship Service will take place at FPCA on November 23, 2009, at 7:30 pm. Assistant to the Pastor Susan Ennis is presenting a Testimonial of Thanksgiving to Presbytery, emphasizing that our church sees itself as an International Welcoming Church and Mission Center, and is assembling pictures which illustrate our multicultural activities, including the mission trips.

For the **Marketing and Stewardship Commission**, Elder Ruth Sutton reported that the Mission sign has been put up on the lawn in front of the church, that an announcement will be put in the Washington Times, with a picture of the church and an invitation to attend, and that the Commission is working on cards showing a picture of the church, the mission statement, church services and activities, to be mailed out in the Annandale, Falls Church, Springfield, etc. areas.

Elder Marta Strada had e-mailed the **Christian Education Commission's** report to the Session, and Elder Cara Lauler had e-mailed the report for the **Congregational Life and New Member Commission**. [See the October issue of FIRST and ForMOST for the 2009/2010 Church School activities, and the Congregational Life and New Member Commission's activities and plans.]

## SLATE OF NEWLY ELECTED OFFICERS FOR 2010

### Elder Class for 2012

Thomas Martin  
Sandy Mori  
Marta Strada

### Elder Class for 2011

Susan Hanson

### Elder Class for 2010

Oscar Alcantara

### Youth Elder for 2010

Kyle Hanson

### Deacons Class for 2012

Florence Jimenez  
Ruth Hartman  
Patti Young

### Nominating Committee at Large

Stephanie Berg  
Lee Fuller  
Pat Pascoe

## SESSION RETREAT

As you may recall, in the September and October issues were articles from the Congregational Life and New Member Commission calling us as a church to be aware of our opportunities and responsibilities to bring new members to our church. The Session will be having a retreat on November 6 & 7 in order to spend time discerning how God is calling every one of us, not just the Congregational Life and New Member Commission, to do the important work of introducing the Kingdom of God to all that we might meet.

Stay tuned for the details of how you will be a part of this ministry.

*Susi Ennis*

## A GREAT STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

### Commissions Cooperating Plan for our Future

What can fifth Wednesdays be good for? No other meetings are scheduled --- so, they can be used for something we have not done before: have the Commission Chairs get together and plan how our commissions can work together successfully. So far, some activities have been duplicated by individual commissions, other have been neglected due to the assumption that somebody else is doing it. Wrong! We have to work together, assign responsibilities and cooperate in order to succeed. There should be no walls between the commissions – we are determined to break them down.

So, on the fifth Wednesday in September, an ambitious group met and started making plans – discussing how the commissions can be involved in church activities during the final months of 2009 as well as in 2010, working together with the Green Team. Sandy Mori will be keeping us in good order. We all work for FPCA, we all work for the Church, we all work for God. Let us do it in harmony!

## **FPCA INVITES NEIGHBORS TO WORSHIP WITH US**

The "Neighborhood Invitational" was a great success. A small group from our congregation met at the church on the morning of October 10<sup>th</sup> and, after a word of prayer, walked out into the FPCA neighborhood to invite people to church. It was a cool day, and at times a little rainy, but it was one of those classic autumn days when the air is crisp and easy to breathe. It felt good -- it felt good to be outside, to be with friends, and to be doing something we knew was pleasing to God. We visited about 100 nearby homes, handing out invitations to FPCA worship.

Our neighbors are very kind. We shared smiles with every person who answered the door, and many expressed appreciation for our visit and wished us well. There is work still to be done, though. We covered the area west of the church grounds, but there are more neighbors thirsty for Jesus' living water. Look for opportunities to join in another "neighborhood invitational" - perhaps in the Spring.

### **BOOK CLUB**

The new selection is the novel, *The People of the Book* by Geraldine Brooks. We'll meet at 7:30 PM on Monday, November 16 in the church library. Newcomers are welcome

### **WELCOME, JABEEN GHULAM!**

Jabeen Ghulam is a nurse at Inova Fairfax Hospital. She was born in Lahore, Pakistan, and attended the huge Presbyterian church there. In December of 1981, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Health brought her to Kuwait to serve as a nurse. The pastor at her church in Kuwait, an American, reminds her quite a lot of our Chris Looker. Her sons, Joshua and Elisha Musih (pronounced "muh-zee"), were born in Kuwait. In 1999, Jabeen won a visa lottery (part of the U.S. Immigration Act of 1990), came to the U.S. that September, and settled in Annandale. Josh was almost four years old and Elisha was just three at the time. In 2005, the family took a trip to Pakistan and visited the cities of Lahore and Karachi. Josh (just turned 14) and Elisha (13) are in the eighth grade at Poe Middle School. They are fierce Scrabble competitors at FPCA Family Game Night. Josh likes playing football, and Elisha likes hymns. Jabeen is happy to be a member with all the nice people here at FPCA.

### **ACOLYTE SCHEDULE**

November 8	Mitchell Youmans
November 15	Carrie Rodriguez
November 22	Ben Looker
November 29	Joshua Musih

# MY RECENT ADVENTURES WHILE LIVING AND WORKING IN BAGHDAD, IRAQ.

By Hugh Iwanicki

With my vacation in Jordan now a distant memory, it was back to the “normal” routine of life at the US Embassy in Baghdad, where I had the honor of experiencing the finest that Iraqi weather had to offer: dust storms! The soil in and around Baghdad is very sandy, and not the white sand you would think of at a beach in the Bahamas. Instead, it is a dirty fine powdery sand that gets into everything. I would know when a sandstorm arrived when I would wake up in the morning and it still looked dark outside. If I couldn’t see the Chancery building from my window then I knew it was going to be a rough day.

Outside was an eerie brownish/orange scene, similar to the whiteouts I used to remember from the blizzards growing up near Buffalo, New York. I got dressed for work, making sure to leave my white shirts in the closet, and walked out of the apartment to see a brownish haze hanging in the hallway. Upon walking outside, things deteriorated rapidly. It felt like I couldn’t breathe, and my eyes immediately stung from the dust but were somehow unable to make tears. Then came the taste of dust laden with fecal matter, penetrating my throat, ears, and every conceivable opening in my body. It was a huge relief to step inside my workplace, which was blessed with an effective ventilation system. Sometimes these “storms” would last hours; other times they could last for days or even weeks, as happened several times this year. To wake up to blue sky after a week-long dust storm felt like Christmas morning.

The isolation of being on the 65-acre US Embassy compound, unable to leave, except for a few trips within the four square mile International zone, would really start to play games with one’s mind. I would fantasize about all the kayaking trips I would do when I got back, or the vacations I had always wanted to take, which no longer included the Middle East. A problem I developed along with close to 50% of my colleagues was insomnia. As hard as I tried, I couldn’t get a good night’s sleep. This problem persisted for months and only abated while I was on leave at home for two weeks, where I slept like a baby, only to have insomnia return as soon as leave was over. While my bed may not have been top-of-the-line, it was certainly comfortable enough, and noise was never a problem through my ballistic glass windows. In fact, if it wasn’t for the Duck and Cover Alarms, I would rarely hear the exploding rockets in the distance that other contractors would hear while sleeping in their “soft” CHUs (Containerized Housing Units). However, there was an underlying stress of life that showed up in strange ways, such as getting upset when the laundry would lose a pair of socks.

In the course of one of my audits, I had been trying to arrange a meeting for weeks with the head of a department responsible for reconstruction projects throughout Iraq. Finally, we both had a day when we could meet after six weeks of missing each other. Then, shortly before we met, the second in charge of this office, together with a Muslim PhD Engineer, were blown up by an IED while returning from a project inspecting a new water filtration plant for the Iraqi people in one of the provinces. These two individuals were very hardworking and truly dedicated to the cause of helping the Iraqi people, but the Islamic terrorists blew them up anyway. The department was devastated and thrown into disarray, and my meeting was postponed indefinitely, making my work part of the collateral damage. I thought to myself, we are spending untold

billions to help the Iraqi people with new schools, roads, sewage treatment and water plants and this is how they reward us?

One of the few weekly escapes from the monotony of life in Baghdad was Friday, when my plumber friend (who spoke some Chinese) and I would go to the Chinese restaurant across the street from the Embassy. The food wasn't bad considering the environment, but we went mostly to practice our conversational Chinese with the Chinese workers. The two Chinese waitresses came to Iraq for the same reasons as most American civilians: money to support families back home. I found out after conversing with the waitresses in Chinese that the restaurant was owned by an Iraqi businessman who had seized their passports and was holding one of them against her will. When I suggested she contact the Chinese Embassy for assistance, she replied that she had but to no avail. Despite this situation, we enjoyed going to the restaurant and our presence seemed to cheer our new Chinese friends.

Several weeks later, the sirens sounded again on the Embassy compound, as a whistling rocket flew overhead and exploded across the street from the Embassy. Shortly after, I heard from initial reports that the rocket had blown up the Chinese Restaurant! I was horrified to think that these new friends had been killed and really started to get a feel for what it was like to live in a war zone. I frantically called the Restaurant to find out if they were okay. No answer. I tried again: no answer... Finally, a half hour later, I tried a third time and one of the girls answered. She replied that they were very shaken, but everyone survived, because the rocket had landed right behind the restaurant and killed an American and his Iraqi wife instead!

Another memorable experience began with a buzz of activity at the Chancery. The Lobby was cleared of furniture and a platform and podium were set up, along with the Iraqi and American flags. This could only mean one thing: a VIP was coming. Could it be President Obama? No, he tried once before but didn't leave the airport because of a sandstorm. Then the news release came out: Vice President Biden was coming to the Embassy and would be making a speech, and all were welcome to attend. That afternoon, we had a sandstorm, but that didn't stop Biden, who took the riskier drive from the airport to the Embassy to speak to us. After a long wait into the evening, there was a hubbub at the chancery entrance and suddenly our Vice President appeared. I was especially excited because I had lived in Delaware (Biden's home state) for five years and still have a house there. The VP gave an impressive speech about his appreciation for all of our efforts, said that he planned to stay until everyone who wanted a photo taken with him got one, and did exactly that, staying late into the night. There were a number of reporters there covering the VP, including the familiar George Stephanopoulos. A friend had the opportunity to have her picture taken with George. He was initially wearing normal street clothes like everyone else inside the compound, but when it was time to do his 30 second segment for ABC news, he immediately put on his combat helmet and bullet proof vest, gave his interview and quickly thereafter dispatched his helmet and vest and went around clothed like everyone else. I was amazed at his behavior -- why would he do such a thing? Was he trying to deceive the American Public? Wasn't he supposed to be providing news rather than theatre?

For obvious security reasons, we at the Embassy had limited opportunities to go out into the "community," so my opportunities to meet Iraqis were frustratingly limited. But I used every chance that came up to get to know the Iraqis and their culture. One such opportunity was lunch with several Iraqi lawyers who were working in the Embassy Rule of Law program, which assists Iraq in setting up its legal institutions. These Iraqi Legal Advisors informed me that it is against the law to convert from Islam to any other religion, and to do so openly will get you killed. If the government didn't do it overtly through the legal system, it would be done instead by a neighbor, a family member, or one of the insurgents, and the government wouldn't do anything to punish the killer. However, it was perfectly acceptable to convert *to* Islam. One of the gentlemen said he was born a Muslim, doesn't believe in Islam, and tried to change his religion on his identity card but

the government wouldn't let him. When I asked the Iraqi lawyers what kind of government Iraq has, the three answered in unison: "Iraq is an Islamic government, and Islam controls virtually every aspect of life here." Iraq does have civil law in some cases, as long as, according to the Iraqi Constitution, it doesn't conflict with any form of Sharia (Islamic) law. Sharia law is not just for Muslims but for everyone. If ever a conflict arises, Sharia Law would take precedence. In both Shia and Sunni schools of Sharia Law, the penalty for apostasy (converting from Islam) is DEATH! If this is democracy, then it's nothing like what we call democracy back home. Thank goodness for Jefferson's Bill of Rights!

It was now the end of July, and after "much persuading" to my boss, I was finally "released" for a couple weeks to attend to some important matters back in the US. By now it was the height of summer in Baghdad. Summer in Iraq is slightly different from the summers I remember at the cottage in Canada when I was a child. I discovered that any weather over 110 degrees was physically painful no matter what the humidity. At 120 degrees it feels like my sister is sticking her high powered hair dryer about 1 inch from my eyeball. The 8-10 minute walk from the air conditioned office to the air conditioned DFAC for lunch would result in being completely drenched in perspiration. This was a new ugly kind of heat that I had never experienced before. In the middle of this heat, to prepare for my trip back, I had to put on my 30lb vest and helmet (PPE) and wait in the hot sun for a bus to take us to the airport. The next day, we prepared for our flight to Kuwait, which required us to stand on a paved runway in the midday heat; temperature around 125 degrees in full PPE gear, lugging our suitcases. Then we would have to line up behind the C-130 cargo plane with both engines blasting away. The 125 degree air felt cool compared to the blast of the jet engines, which had to be at least 150 degrees.

Breathing at this point became almost impossible; your eyes couldn't tear properly because the water was being evaporated before they could moisten. Upon entering the aircraft the temperature dropped back down to around 125 again, and inside was the smell of jet exhaust mixed with the stench of a large group of profusely perspiring individuals with mysterious diets. The plane to Jordan had broken down, so the Jordan passengers were crammed in with the Kuwait passengers. The plane was late in arriving at Ali Al Salem airbase in Kuwait, and there was no time to shower before we raced in the shuttle to the International Airport and our direct but smelly flight to Washington DC. The plane must've been filled with at least 50% government people and I felt sorry for the freshly showered passengers who had the misfortune of having to sit next to us. Thirteen hours later we arrived safe and sound in Metro Washington DC

## **CHANGES IN YOUR DIRECTORY**

You may already have these new e-mail addresses – just want to be sure you do:

**Ken and Ruth Hartman**  
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