

WEEKLY PASTORAL LETTER – October 27, 2011



PEACE RIVER
PRESBYTERY



Dear Colleagues and Friends,

I was privileged to be at [Peace Presbyterian Church](#) this past Sunday on the 2nd annual celebration of their organization as the 39th congregation in Peace River. I was grateful to experience vibrant worship, a thoughtful and helpful message, a warm welcome, and the chance to come together around the Lord's table, which Peace celebrates weekly. It was encouraging to see a full church and hear about the 16 new members who have joined in the past year since Peace moved to its new rented facility, as well as see the pictures of the 20 new individuals and families who have recently found their way to the new location, and are considering joining.



At the service, everyone was given a “gratitude” rock as part of the fall stewardship emphasis, and Robin Miller, an elder and stewardship team leader, delivered a thoughtful call to commitment. She wrote a wonderful and easily understood insert for the bulletin – I would call it Stewardship 101. I have attached it and have permission to share it, so, if you find it helpful and use it, let [Elizabeth](#) know, and encourage them in your prayers.

A prayer concern is they just recently have learned that their landlord intends to sell the facility that they rent, but they are not yet ready to build on the property the Presbytery has purchased for them in Lakewood Ranch.



Even as Peace celebrated their birthday, our 2nd youngest church, [Christ Church of Longboat Key](#) celebrated the first Sunday in their new church building. The dedication Sunday will be

January 15th, so mark your calendars as we celebrate with them the good things God is doing in their midst. They had over 200 in worship, but pray that they get their permanent occupancy permit. They were given a temporary 1 week occupancy permit until the builder finishes some work. Bruce Porter said, if they don't get it, they will have to worship in the parking lot. [Click here for a virtual tour of their new building.](#)

Finally, last week I was privileged to be with other colleagues (Stated Clerks and Executive Presbyters) as we looked at issues the church is dealing with at this time. I am one of those hopeful folks who believes that even when it looks like things are falling apart, God is at work. I am not naïve, nor am I Pollyanna, but the sky is not falling. When the astronauts went to the moon, they had to go through continuous course corrections, or else they would miss the moon. Without those constant corrections and careful monitoring of their coordinates, they could have overshoot the moon by a wide margin. So in the language of Phyllis Tickle, the church is going through its once every 500 years garage sale. We are in a period of mid-course correction. It is an uneasy time, but we of all people are not without hope. (See last week's pastoral letter.) Over the next several weeks, I will share some quotes and summaries from the presentations at the Fall Polity conference and Association of Executive Presbyters annual meeting.

[Tod Bolsinger](#) (click his name to go to Ted's blog), pastor of San Clemente Presbyterian Church and chairperson of the 21 member [Mid-Council](#) (that's the new name for the Middle Governing Body GA commission) talked about two of the main questions that were in the charge to the Middle Governing Body (MGB) Commission:

1. How are governing bodies best organized to be responsive both to the Spirit of Christ and the changing opportunities for discipleship?
2. Are the structures of history the best platforms for carrying our mission into the future?

He said that the new Form of Government (nFOG) states that "Councils of the church exist to help congregations and the church as a whole to be more faithful participants in the mission of Christ" (G-3.0101). This has been the key to shaping their conversations. If presbyteries really do exist to help congregations and the church to be more faithful participants in the mission of Christ:

- a. What should we be doing?
- b. What changes should be made?
- c. What experiments can we allow?
- d. How can we give permission for creativity to flourish in how we support congregations in their mission?
- e. How can we create new kinds of structures that will create more participation?

Thus, the question is really not about structure, it's about creativity and leadership.

[Click here to go to the resources page](#) for the Commission. They have some very helpful documents posted.

So amidst all that is and all that will be I continue to say:

Thanks be to God who continues to be the wind in our sails and helps us steer into the future!

Peace,

Graham

Graham Hart
General Presbyter
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PS – See below a letter from our denominational leaders for Reformation Sunday as well as some important mission news from the Sudan.



Reformation Day 2011

To the congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):

The church affirms Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda secundum verbum Dei, that is, "The church reformed, always to be reformed according to the Word of God" in the power of the Spirit. (Book of Order, F-2.02)

Presbyterian roots go back – way back – nearly 500 years to the beginning of the Protestant Reformation when, on October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to a church door in Wittenberg, Germany. Luther, John Calvin, and other leaders of that movement would be astounded today to see the fruits of their faith-filled, courageous witness: The gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed in word and deed in and through worshiping communities around the world that seek to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, and confront injustice in its many forms.

We celebrate our reformed heritage and continually draw nourishment from these deep roots, especially during this present time of dramatic change within and beyond the church. Change generates both excitement and anxiety, possibility and perplexity. Where is God leading us? What is out there on the horizon?

Looking extensively to the past, however, or gazing anxiously to the future can lead to missing what is happening in our midst now. God spoke through the prophet Isaiah: "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (Isa. 43:19).

Today, in our time, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is in the midst of another reformation. God is creating a new church in and through us. Signs of it and responses to it are plentiful:

- New worshiping communities are springing up, many of them looking different from traditional congregations.
- We have a new Form of Government that provides more flexibility for congregations to do mission more effectively in their particular contexts.
- Special committees and groups across the entire church are envisioning new possibilities for the church in the 21st century, possibilities that reflect a growing multicultural reality and the need to

adjust our structure from a corporate, top-down approach to one that enhances even further the work of congregations and presbyteries.

It is both an exciting and unsettling time in the life of the PC(USA). We suspect that Calvin felt similar pangs of anticipation and anxiety when he was in the midst of another season of dramatic change in the life of the church. Yet Calvin's strong faith in a steadfast and sovereign God is evident in his hymn, "I Greet Thee, Who My Sure Redeemer Art." One of the stanzas reads:

Thou art the life, by which alone we live,
And all our substance and our strength receive;
Sustain us by Thy faith and by Thy power,
And give us strength in every trying hour.

As we celebrate and give thanks for the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, we also celebrate and give thanks for the mission and ministry of the PC(USA) in this time of another great reformation. Like Calvin and his colleagues, may we respond in unity with eagerness, faithfulness, wisdom, and joy:

Our hope is in no other, save in thee
Our faith is built upon thy promise free
Lord, give us peace and make us calm and sure
That in thy strength we evermore endure.

To God be the glory!



Elder Cindy Bolbach
Moderator, 219th General Assembly (2010)



The Reverend Landon Whitsitt
Vice Moderator, 219th General Assembly (2010)



The Reverend Gradye Parsons
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly



Elder Linda Valentine
Executive Director, General Assembly Mission Council

Please add these concerns to your personal prayer list.

Please pray for:

Rev. Dr. Ted Land has been diagnosed with prostate cancer, and treatment is underway.

Please continue to pray for:

Rev. Dr. Bob Rea

Pastors and Educators in transition

Those affected by natural disasters in the United States

Nations in crisis

Please also keep in your prayers:

Beth-El Farmworker Ministry

Misión Peniel

Cedarkirk Camp and Conference Center

PLEASE PRAY FOR THE CONGREGATION OF THE WEEK - OCTOBER 30

Chartered in October 2009, **Peace Presbyterian Church in Lakewood Ranch** is the newest congregation in our presbytery. Rev. Elizabeth M. Deibert and Rev. Tricia Dillon Thomas serve this church as teaching elders, and are grateful to have six retired (or otherwise occupied) teaching elders who assist them. One year ago Peace moved from a Sunday morning lease of State College of Florida to the Event and Conference Center of Lakewood Ranch, where they lease space all week in a great location! Your prayers are requested as they try to secure their lease while the owners consider selling the property. In three years, Peace hopes to have completed a building on the land purchased by presbytery. www.PEACEpcusa.org

LIST FOR THE MONTH OF OCTOBER:

October 2	First Presbyterian Church, Fort Myers Paul deJong, Pastor pastor_paul@rocketmail.com
October 9	Hope United Church (PCUSA), Fort Myers Jim Berger, Pastor dowberger@comcast.net
October 16	Chapel by the Sea, Fort Myers Beach Maynard Pittendreigh, Pastor maynard@chapelbts.org
October 23	Holy Trinity Presbyterian Church, North Fort Myers Russ Hickman, Temporary Supply Pastor hickman77@embarqmail.com
October 30	Peace Presbyterian Church, Lakewood Ranch Elizabeth Deibert, Pastor edeibert@mindspring.com

World Mission e-News
Presbyterians at work around the world

MISSION HEADLINES

Texas church funds two urgent positions

First Presbyterian Church in Fort Worth, Texas, has pledged \$100,000 over three years to fund two World Mission positions—one in Haiti and a second one in a sensitive location in Central Asia. The position in Haiti is that of facilitator for the Joining Hands network in that country, the newest Joining Hands initiative of the Presbyterian Hunger Program. The networks build bridges of solidarity between coalitions of churches in the United States and networks of overseas churches, grassroots groups and NGOs working to alleviate hunger and eliminate its causes. The theme of the Haiti network's activities is "Restoring the Environment toward Food Sustainability and Sovereignty." The mission worker in this position will work closely with the local network, the Presbyterian Hunger Program, and partner U.S. presbyteries, assisting with coordination, planning, training and communication.



Because of security issues, details cannot be given about the second position, but it is one that assists a Christian humanitarian program that addresses poverty and develops skills among the people served.

The whole church is called to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. First Church in Fort Worth is responding to that call and is helping mission workers make a difference in the lives of individuals and communities around the world.



Raising the new flag in South Sudan

"It was a day like any other" for many in South Sudan—but it was not an ordinary day. "This was to be the day all had waited for, fought for, prayed for—the Independence of the Republic of South Sudan, 55th country in Africa, 196th country in the world." So wrote Nancy McGaughey, one of the PC(USA)'s workers in South Sudan. [Read more](#) →

Related: PC(USA) mission workers Jacob and Aliamma George also witnessed the birth of South Sudan. [Read their account and the text of the new national anthem.](#)

Tribal conflict in South Sudan a challenge for medical workers

It's not unusual for medical workers at Akobo Hospital in the South Sudan state of Jonglei to treat victims of cattle raids. Warring tribes in the area consider cattle a mark of success and raid other tribes to add to their herds. Recently more than 600 people were killed and more than 700 wounded in a mid-August raid in Urur County. [Read more](#) →



Church council sends peace teams to South Sudan

The Sudan Council of Churches has dispatched peace teams to calm regions of Jonglei state in South Sudan, where humanitarian agencies say hundreds have died and more than 26,000

people have been displaced in inter-ethnic fighting. [Read more](#) →

Related: BBC News reports Sudan and South Sudan have signed a border deal to ease tensions.
[Read more](#) →

The articles below may interest you. I have found some of them in my reading, and others have been passed on to me. *Just click on the underlined phrases.*

[Theology and white noise](#)

Patheos: Frederick Schmidt says theologians often misrepresent the gospel and the church. Take the recent writings of Rob Bell, for instance.

[Are we turning Steve Jobs into a saint?](#)

CNN Belief blog: Three experts on religion weigh in on whether former Apple chief Steve Jobs is achieving a kind of secular sainthood.

Scientific American: [Steve Jobs: A genius, yes; a role model for the rest of us, no way](#)

[Closing the gap between psychology and God](#)

Scientific American: A Harvard psychologist is developing evidence-based treatments for the devout.

[Why companies aren't getting the employees they need](#)

Wall Street Journal: The conventional wisdom is that our education system is failing our economy. But our companies deserve a lot of the blame themselves.

[Vatican calls for new global financial authority amid economic crisis](#)

CNN Belief blog: Vatican calls for a new "global public authority" to help reform the world's finance and economic systems.

National Post (Canada): [Vatican releases 'strange remedy' to global financial crisis](#)

[Survey: Religious identity slips among U.S. Catholics](#)

USA Today: One in four Americans call themselves Catholic, but a survey finds this is more a cultural brand label for many than a religious identity.

National Catholic Reporter: [Fifth survey of Catholics in America released](#)

[Osteen: Faith at 'all-time high'](#)

Washington Times: Evangelist champions optimism, shuns politics as divisive.

[The narcissistic leader: not as good as he \(or you\) may think](#)

Big Think: Is narcissism actually a good quality in a leader?

PRESBYTERY CALENDAR (for more details, go to www.peaceriverpresbytery.org)

OCTOBER, 2011

27th
Council

Nominations (at Presbytery office)

NOVEMBER, 2011

1st

Mission/Vision Guide Team \ Standing Rules Revision Task Force
Interim Lunch
Disaster Preparedness and Response Task Force

3rd

Records and Overtures

5th

Presbyterian Women Leadership Training Help Shop at Church of the Palms

8th

Committee on Ministry

9th

Preparation for Ministry

10th

Board of Trustees
Nominations
Leadership and Congregational Development

15th

Evangelism and Church Development

17th

Stated Meeting at First Presbyterian Church, Arcadia

19th and 20th

All Youth Retreat at Cedarkirk

24th and 25th

Presbytery office is closed