

First Christian Letter

February 2010

Volume LIII, Issue 2



Rev. Kathleen Kline Chesson
Senior Minister

Mark Granfors-Hunt
Director of Program Ministries

Phil D. Gilliland
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Director of Music Ministries

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**Sunday
Mornings at
First Christian
Church**

**8:15 AM
Prayer &
Communion**

**9:00 AM
Sunday School**

**10:00 AM
Worship**

***As disciples of
Christ, we are
called by God
to worship
faithfully,
to be open to
transformation
by the
Holy Spirit,
and to serve
responsibly our
changing
community.***

The Meaning of Lent

by Steve Findley

Its name comes from an old English word meaning "spring." The season of Lent, which covers the days between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday in the Christian calendar, has long been a time of preparation for Easter. During Lent, Christians examine their hearts and often impose new disciplines in their lives to remind themselves of the trials and sacrifice of Jesus. But why is Lent 40 days long? And what does it mean to me?

The most common explanation for the 40 day period is that it reflects the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness being tempted by Satan. (Incidentally, the 40 days traditionally does not include Sundays, each of which is considered a mini-Easter). But the number

40 appears many times in the Bible, often associated with a journey that is also a time of trial or testing: 40 days and nights of rain in the great flood that launched Noah's Ark, 40 years of wandering in the wilderness during the Exodus from Egypt, 40 days



that Moses spent on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments from God. When early Christians began to observe the 40 days of Lent in sometime in the 3rd Century, the num-

ber 40 would have called these images to mind. For me, these images are powerful as well. But my view of the 40 days of Lent has also been influenced by an intriguing passage in a document called the Babylonian Talmud Tractate Sanhedrin:

"On the eve of the Passover Yeshu of Nazareth was hanged. For 40 days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, 'He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Anyone who can say anything in his favor, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.' But since nothing was brought forward in his favor he was hanged on the eve of the Passover!"

(Continued on page 6)

Pew Removal Plan On Hold

The FCCFC Board has pulled back from a proposal to remove three pews from the rear of the sanctuary to make room for elderly seating and other uses.

The board decided recently to take up the matter again at its Feb. 23 meeting after Board Chair Mark Fredenburg said it was not clear that a consensus had been achieved.

In the absence of such consensus, it is doubtful that the project will go forward.

The board had endorsed the plan at its December meeting, but received more negative feedback than expected.

Hazel Tontz, a long-time church member, came to the meeting to speak out against the proposal. She said that if room is needed

for members with handicaps, more pews in the center of the sanctuary could be shortened to make room for additional wheelchair space. She also spoke of the financial efforts church members in the past had made to build the sanctuary.

Fredenburg and others praised Hazel for coming to speak her mind. Steve

(Continued on page 6)

Week of Compassion...

... I've always thought that was a rather odd name, as though we Disciples set aside one week in which we practice compassion. But what about the other 51 weeks of the year? Of course, that is a total misrepresentation of the time-honored name of this 66-year-old relief, refugee and development mission fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Although the majority of resources are, indeed, collected during a concentrated week-long call for donations in late February, the response to requests for aid continues throughout the year.

Averaging about one response per day, aid is provided both within the US and internationally in response to sudden, urgent needs and to fund sustainable de-

velopment projects designed to overcome entrenched poverty.

The earthquake devastation of Haiti, coming so near to the end of Week of Compassion's traditional funding cycle, is a reminder that human suffering calls us to a compassionate response even when the coffers are empty. The Outreach Council thanks our congregation for its generous response to the extraordinary needs of the Haitian people in the aftermath of this extraordinary disaster. People gave nearly \$1,000. Combined with kits we assembled, the contribution sent approximately \$2,000 for Haitian relief.

We pray earnestly that the disaster in Haiti is the last of its kind, but the reality is that poverty, refugee displacement from con-

flict, and natural disasters are not at an end for 2010! Feb. 21 and 28 are the annual Week of Compassion offering dates on which we have an opportunity to help replenish the fund that will provide aid throughout the coming year. Please be prepared, with a compassionate heart, to be generous once again.

PS—if you have a computer and a credit card, you might consider visiting the WOC website (www.weekofcompassion.org), clicking on “donate” and finding out how you can make a one-time donation at any time, or even set up a recurring donation that will support this vital ministry throughout the year. Don't forget to list First Christian Church, Falls Church, VA as your congregation.

International Potluck Dinner

Start planning now what special “ethnic” food you or your family will bring to share with other church members as we recognize and help to celebrate the Disciples' “Global Outreach” ministries and missionaries at our **Annual International Potluck Dinner on Sunday, Feb. 21!** This gala event also puts the spotlight on our February offering to the Disciples' Week of Compassion. The Outreach Council urges all members and friends to put this special date on their calendars!

Homestretch Success

“You put a smile on our face,” said the letter from Odette.

“We're thankful for your kindness toward us,” said Amina and Dorniella.

It was for them, and others helped, the best Christmas ever.

Our church raised \$332 to buy Christmas presents for five families under the Homestretch program, according to Mel Cotner. Each child received three presents.

Under this outreach program, several church classes and the Holbert family pitched in. They got as much out of it as did the children. It was a small but significant way to demonstrate the true meaning of Christmas.

Tai Chi and Meditation Classes

A non-profit organization has asked to use our church as a location to provide its free tai chi and meditation classes. The company, Compassionate Services Society, is offering to pay a fee of \$100 to \$200 a month for the space, likely in Fellowship Hall.

The Board will be considering the impact on space and security issues and will make a decision after review of more specific information, including the rental fee.

Rev. Chesson is evaluating the proposal. She will send the information to all board members, who will examine it and respond within a week via email. If there are no objections, the church will move ahead with the rental.

From the Pastor...

By Rev. Kathleen Kline Chesson



Dearest Congregation,

Fresh from the glow of a day-long retreat with 2010 church leaders, I cannot help but sing. It may be a quiet song, perhaps a gentle hum, but I am encouraged. And confident. About so many things. Not just people rising to the occasion. Not simply the energy that is already at work. Not even that we have some young, new leaders jumping in with both feet. I suppose what I loved most was the laughter... laughter emerging from the common ground we were forging (which took some tears to get to) and a sense that maybe we were breaking some new ground.

When asked by Mark Fredenburg, our Board Chair, to describe what they were excited about, all of us around the table were amazed by the unity of response.

"I am excited about..."

"...the decisions we are going to make, and increasing my participation in leadership."

"...this great group of people I get to work with."

"...what I believe we can accomplish."

"...the possibilities that exist to integrate the kids into church life and the potential we have together."

"...the changes that are coming and seeing the church through a new set of eyes."

"...a revived leadership...and that the Disciples have Kentucky roots like me..."

"...the possibilities for transformation and renewal."

"...where we can go."

"...making the outreach of FCC approachable, accessible, more visible, and raising awareness among the whole congregation."

"...a new generation ready to jump in and help us renew."

"...serving – and returning to the Board and completing what I started."

"...experiencing hope and possibility that is grounded in reality."

"...being a part of this team of leaders wanting to 'go with God.'"

"...the spiritual growth I can already feel happening in the congregation."

There is no doubt that, as a church, we have come through a rough period. The realities could seem daunting if we allowed them to be. But the past was not what was on our agenda. Very clearly we are surging forward. Yes, finances are tight. Yes, membership and worship attendance is down. Yes, there is frustration with the slow pace at which we seem to move. Yes, we need more active involvement from more people. But from the long term to the new term, there was a whole lot of love for First Christian exhibited with eyes bright and sometimes glistening.

We are aware that with this energy, and the sense of urgency we feel, some very tough decisions will have to be made. The Board will be meeting monthly (at least these first three months) instead of quarterly in order to "capitalize on our momentum." With a 2010 focus on evangelism and church growth, and every member of the board on the same page, and knowing that with God nothing is impossible, we are clearly on a new path. Giving thanks for past leadership that has brought us to this point, may all of us join in this momentum. I dare you to catch the spirit... but be prepared to put in some blood, sweat, and tears (as so many already have). The things that matter the most always cost far more than a little. Thank you for your love and your partnership in the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Love in Abundance,

Kathleen

2010 Lay Leadership

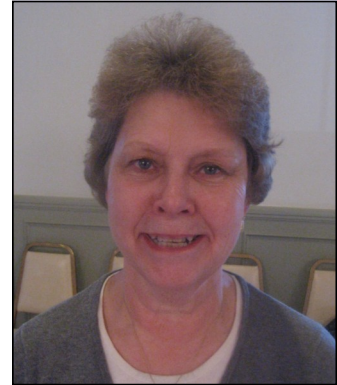
We welcome and give thanks for First Christian Church's 2010 lay leadership team! Each of them is an important connection point to what's happening here. If you are looking to plug into small groups, ask about Sunday School classes, help in the development of an alternative worship experience, cook or volunteer for our Safe Haven day shelter, sing in the choir... whatever, don't hesitate to contact any of them.



Mark Fredenburg, Chair



Reid Simmons, Vice Chair



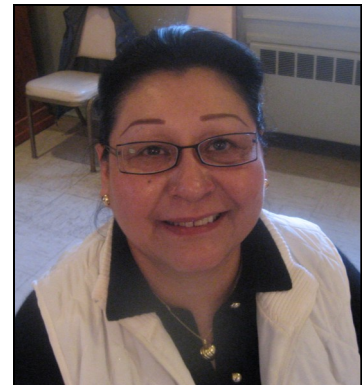
Janet Miller, Secretary



Anne Stevens, Trustees Chair



Steve Findley, Elders



Dulce Arroyo, Elders



Irv Denton, Board at Large

LEADERS NOT PICTURED:
 Hard as we tried, we were not able to get pictures of all our leaders. We give thanks for the ministries of: Leigh Duval (Acting Interim Treasurer), Frances Simmons (Diaconate), Bill LaLiberte (Disciples Men), Marilyn Gilliland (Christian Women's Fellowship) and Kevin Ogle and Betty Goodman (Board members at Large). (Note: Ministry Council Chairs are pictured on page 5.)



Mark Granfors-Hunt, Youth



2010 MINISTRY COUNCIL CHAIRS

Front row: Sarah Vandruff (Membership), Lynne Wilhoit (Christian Ed), Pam Findley (Music). Back row: Ginny George (Outreach), Bill Neikirk (Communications), Drex George, Jr. (Worship). Not pictured: Stasia Fine (Evangelism).

Class Profile: Connections

The Connections Class has been discussing some tough theological questions about the tragedy in Haiti as part of its probing of current events.

The "Wired Word" (a website the class uses) asked, for example, "what does it mean for faithful people to be in the hands of God when in life-threatening situations from which some faithful people do not survive?"

The class was inspired particularly by one story about a group of Christian leaders who were trapped in the Hotel Montana. In this case, the leaders helped each other as they could, singing songs like "Peace Like a River" and praying together. Many were in pain, and two died before rescuers came. One man who was spared said, "I'm grateful to be alive, and I accept that as a gift."

Such attitudes were helpful in enduring the pain or facing the possibility that some of them might die, class members said. "Their inner peace was sustaining other people," said Cherie Hutchison. The "emotional context" of a pain-causing injury is often a factor in the intensity of the pain, said Jennifer Gamboa, a physical therapist. "It depends on what your brain perceives as the biggest threat." She cited the case of a man who suffered a broken ankle, yet did not feel much pain because he did not look at his ankle and because people helping did not mention it and treated him cheerfully while getting him to the hospital.

Ron Hutchison, the rotating teacher of the day, said God "has a different perspective on pain and suffering" though faith "can help you cope." Yet understanding pain in a religious context isn't easy. Cheri said, "We should realize that we have a political martyr as the central focus of our faith. Jesus was really showing us that death was not the end. Pain and suffering is not really what it seems to be."

Irv Denton's Gift

Irving (Irv) Denton, 88, feels that he has been blessed in life, earning more from his savings than he needs.

So when he heard that the church did not have enough money to pay Mark Gransfors-Hunt a full-time salary, he decided to do something about it.

He donated \$30,000 to cover the deficit in the 2010 budget so that Mark could be full-time. But then, he was told that this would mean that "maybe we wouldn't be able to do it next year."

So, Rev. Chesson and Mark worked out an arrangement where Irv would pay \$10,000 in each of the next three years. Mark then could be virtually full-time for a longer period.

"I have been pretty chintzy up to now about my donations," Irv said in an interview. "I am sort of breaking loose now."

This former college professor and Air Force man has invested wisely and gets pleasure from helping his church and other charitable organizations. He also helps out in the Safe Haven program for the homeless and needy, washing sheets he purchased for their air mattresses.

Denton, who hails from Elkhart, Ind., once the home of major musical instrument manufacturers, also is a teacher in the Crusaders Class and likes to think of himself as progressive.

He enlisted in the Air Force after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. After finishing college, he served during the Korean War, describing it as "the war we haven't won yet." He served in the Pentagon for four years. After 31 years of military service in supply and maintenance, he retired and decided he wanted to teach. He got a job at the Northern Virginia Community College in Mansassas, and later moved to the Annandale campus. He taught accounting.

Irv has shown his generosity in other ways at FCCFC and feels a certain responsibility to do it. "I have had a good life," he said. "I feel like I owe the public all that I can give it."

Meaning of Lent

(Continued from page 1)

While Biblical scholars debate the authenticity of this passage as it relates to Jesus, it bears an interesting point: Jewish law would have prescribed that anyone sentenced to death would have the charges announced by a herald for 40 days before the execution, and would have invited people to offer testimony in defense of the accused. Whether this happened in the case of Jesus is a mystery, but it makes me think. Do I have testimony to offer in defense of Jesus during the 40 days of Lent? Does the way I live my life testify to the living presence of Jesus in my life?

Some practices of Lent are intended to make our Christian faith a more obvious presence in our lives. This begins on Ash Wednesday, when many choose to be marked with a cross of ashes as a reminder

and sign of their Christian faith. Some choose to be marked on their forehead, boldly proclaiming their faith to the world. I like to receive the cross on the top of my hand, where I can see it as a personal reminder of Lent's beginning. Others are marked in their hearts. There is no right or wrong way to bear the mark of the cross.

Many Christians willingly take on some new self-discipline during Lent to help them remember the sacrifice of Christ. I have known those who have given up specific foods for Lent, like meat or (gasp!) chocolate. I also have known people who have taken on a new discipline, such as exercise or daily Bible reading or meditation. Perhaps the most inspiring discipline I have heard was a colleague who told me she was giving up anger for Lent. Could I, could any of us, rise to such a challenge as an offering to God?

So Lent is a journey, an inward journey in faith that helps us spiritually prepare for Easter. That the name should come from an ancient word for spring reminds me of early spring's cold and darkness and the promise of coming light and warmth. For me, these thoughts gather together in a memory from my childhood, a memory of visiting the Moravian home church in Old Salem, North Carolina one Easter Sunday. Assembling with other worshipers in the darkness of early morning, we made our way to God's Acre, the town cemetery. There, as brass bands played hymns of the resurrection, the sun broke above the horizon, bringing its warmth and light and life-giving energy, scattering the mists of morning in a glorious dawn of celebration. This is the promise of spring, and the promise that awaits us on Easter morning.

Pew Decision

(Continued from page 1)

Findley, who heads the elders this year, told her that "if we have upset anyone, we beg your forgiveness."

The idea stemmed from recommendations made by a church consultant, Louis Saylor, to create a separate space in back of the sanc-

tuary. The idea was to create a multi-purpose space that could be used for seating the elderly and serve as a gathering place.

The Church Advisory Team recommended removal of three pews in the back of the sanctuary. A carpet would have been installed and armchairs provided for elderly

members.

Proponents said this would have resulted in increased space and more mobility for the aged, some of whom now sit in the parlor during church service. With Children's Church being conducted in the parlor, they said it made more sense.

Nurturing Opportunities During the Lenten Season

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, Feb. 17 this year. During the Lenten season, First Christian will offer the following opportunities for Lenten study, reflection and sharing.

First, we will make available a small group study called **Unbinding Your Heart: 40 Days of Prayer and Faith Sharing**, by Martha Grace Reece (a disciples theologian, writer, and evangelist). We will use this devotional guide as our church

places its focus on evangelism and church growth. This group will meet on Mondays and/or Thursday evenings. Please register your interest ASAP so that books can be purchased. Each member of the group will be asked to contribute what they can towards the purchase of these books.

Second, we will offer **Wednesday Evening Lenten Services, including a pastoral meditation**.

This service will take place in the church parlor from 7:30 – 8:00 PM on the Wednesdays of Lent. During

the service, Rev. Chesson will offer a meditation, which will also become a congregation wide weekly devotional.

Youth Devotionals will be given to our middle and high school youth to encourage their own spiritual disciplines.

We hope that you will take advantage of these opportunities to nurture your spirit and explore Lent more fully.

Notes on our Lenten Worship

By Rev. Kathleen Kline Chesson

This Lenten season, we will focus on things that, by his example, Jesus teaches us to “let go of” in order that we might more faithfully and urgently follow him. He begins his tutoring as he goes into the “wilderness” to prepare his spirit for the extreme challenges that will face him as he seeks to bring the Kingdom of God to all people.

Each week we will consider a single essential teaching of Jesus which will tell us as much about ourselves as about Jesus. Our goal is to encourage a systematic introspection of the stumbling blocks that Jesus teaches can interfere with a full knowledge of his complete and universal nature. Just perhaps we, like Jesus, can learn to let go of those capacities of mind and need that prevent the abundant life Jesus seeks for us.

“Jesus said to Mary, ‘do not hold on to me...’ (John 20: 17). According to the Gospel of John, at the time of the resurrection Mary stayed behind alone at the empty tomb, weeping for her beloved. Jesus appeared in veiled form and she recognized him as he called her by name. As she sought to grab onto him he wouldn’t let her, telling her she must not hold on to him as he previously was. She would have to come to know him in an entirely new way so that his message could expand beyond the current circle of believers.

As the worship team discussed this, we found messages in each of the Lenten gospels that allowed Jesus, and Mary, to grow into an ability to accept Jesus’ life on another level. He begins his earthly ministerial journey by intentionally retreating to the wilderness to confront his own personal stumbling blocks – essentially facing the demons in his own, very human life. These demons were related to ego and personal need. We considered that what Jesus had to let go of, so must we if we are to follow him in his mission.

We hope that our worship, preaching, and praying will help each member of the congregation prepare themselves to be able to accept, and experience the “risen” Christ. For we believe that Jesus Christ, as the human and divine expression of God, can lead us into all peace, joy, and purposeful living no matter what our circumstances or our human limitations. Christ came for all.

February Worship

Sunday, February 7

Empowered

Isaiah 6: 1-8

Luke 5: 1-11

Rev. Chesson preaching

Sunday, February 14

Transfigured

Transfiguration Sunday/Valentine’s Day

Exodus 34: 29-35

Luke 9: 28-36 (37-43a)

Mark Granfors-Hunt preaching

Wednesday, February 17

Ash Wednesday Service

7:30 PM

Sunday, February 21

Letting Go of Ego

First Sunday of Lent

Psalm 91: 1-2, 9-16;

Luke 4: 1-13

Rev. Chesson preaching

Sunday, February 28

Letting Go of Fear

Second Sunday of Lent

Psalm 27

Luke 13: 31-35

Rev. Chesson preaching

Ash Wednesday Service

February 17, 7:30 PM

“Letting Go...”

Ash Wednesday begins the 40 day period of Lent with a focus on confession, repentance, and “turning our hearts towards God.”

This service will be a taize based service of simple sung music, prayer, and a meditation that will define what “repentance” really means in light of a seeking faith in God through Jesus Christ.

The service, led by Rev. Chesson, will include an optional imposition of ashes.

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Got News?

The First Christian Letter is published monthly. Submissions must be received by the 20th of the month to be included in the next month's edition. Send information or inquiries to:

newsletter@fccfc.org

Bill Neikirk
Editor-in-Chief
Ashley Martinage
Production Editor

Mark's Youth News

Several members of the youth team met last month to plan our schedule for the upcoming season. Ashley Thornton, Aubrey Myers and I are working with Christian Youth Fellowship (CYF), grades 9 through 12, Tracy Williams and Cristin Duddy are working with the Chi Rho Fellowship, grades 6, 7 & 8, and Debbie Allen, Tammy Ferguson and Cherie Hutchison are working with Junior Youth Fellowship, grades 4 & 5.

We began by asking ourselves what we would like to accomplish. Tops on our list is to provide a loving and supportive community, one our youth know they are linked into and can turn to in time of need. We would like to develop a supportive peer network that is strong enough to survive outside the walls of FCC. We'd like to help develop a sense of relevancy for the church in the lives of our youth so that it is not just a Sunday event for them, but a way of life. AND, we want to have fun together!

These are lofty goals, indeed, but they come from our hearts. We cannot accomplish these goals by ourselves. It takes a community working together in Christian love to provide this for our youth and it will be God working through us all that will make the attainment of these goals possible. I'm privileged to work with such a caring team, and I eagerly look forward to our coming time to-

gether and to working with our youth.

One way to build community is through caring for others. Working together with a common purpose of providing for those who have less than we do, helps to define who we are as a Christian community. Just a couple of weeks have passed since our youth helped to assemble Hygiene Kits to assist those in Haiti who have literally lost everything they have. I myself delivered the 80 kits to the Church World Service warehouse in New Windsor, Maryland.

In 1990, this simple prayer "Lord, even as we enjoy the Super Bowl football game, help us be mindful of those who are without a bowl of soup to eat," inspired a teen movement that has become known as "Souper Bowl Sunday." The premise was that young people have the ability to serve and should be given opportunities to lead their communities in helping others.

On Feb. 7 following worship we are engaging in our own version and calling it "Souper Bowl on a Chili Day." Soup and/or Chili will be made available for 'take out,' following worship, as well as baked goods. The funds raised will be donated to a charity of our youth's choice.

Remember those paper cut-out chains you made when you were young, using construction paper and

by Mark Granfors-Hunt

white glue (or staples if you were impatient like me)? During the remainder of our time together on Feb. 7, we will be building a paper cut-out prayer chain. The idea is to find and write inspirational bible verses onto the links of the chain we glue together and then make it available to those who are participating in the 24 hour prayer chain taking place following our Ash Wednesday worship.

Here are some of the other activities we are putting together for the year:

- Feb. 19 or 21 — Movie night at the Williams' house or the church.
- March 7 — Compare/Contrast Denominations — worship with (gasp) another church. 12th Street Christian Church is one possibility.
- March 21 — Moroccan cooking for our meal together along with a discussion on the Muslim faith with a guest. We may also fill Easter eggs for the traditional Easter Sunday egg hunt.
- April 4 — Easter Sunday (no youth groups)
- April 18 — Group-building games; planning for Youth Sunday.
- May 2 — Planning for Youth Sunday
- May 9 — Mother's Day and Youth Sunday
- May 23 — Bowling Party at Bowl America

We hope all FCC youth will join us. 2010 is going to be a great year together!