



First Christian Letter

Fall 2011

Volume LIV, Issue 4

Rev. Kathleen Kline Chesson
Senior Minister

Phil D. Gilliland
Minister of Community Life

Lunette S. Arledge
Director of Music Ministries

Karen Falkenstein
Office Manager

**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.***

Water's Mighty Patience

(We asked Steve Findley about his summer vacation and whether it had any spiritual aspects. This is his report).

As I watch the remnants of Tropical Storm Lee wring water from the thick clouds above, I am mindful of the awesome power of water to bring life and death, and to shape the very world around us.

The effects of water are complex, and too much water, when it ventures beyond its channel, can spell disaster to those who find themselves in its path. And while man-

kind and human creations may fare poorly against this irresistible force, nature may rebound abundantly in the wake of a flood, as



plants draw life from the nutrients newly available.

It was the life-giving qualities of water, and its mystical nature, that were on display to me and my

by Steve Findley

family on our recent vacation to the Ozarks of Missouri and the Great Smoky Mountains of Tennessee.

The Ozark region where my parents grew up features thick deposits of limestone, courtesy of the time when a vast shallow sea covered much of the Midwest. Limestone and water interact in unique ways to create caverns, "losing" streams, and great springs

of gushing water that feed verdant rivers. A "losing" stream is one that carries less water than it receives, with the losses occurring

(Continued on page 5)

FCCFC Considers Return of Hispanic Church

After five years at another location, a Hispanic church led by Hector Solis wants to return to FCCFC.

The church board will consider this request at its Sept. 20 meeting, according to Mel Cotner, who said it could help FCCFC have a larger presence in the local Hispanic community.

Board members are expected to consider a number of related issues, such as the times sought for services and the compensation.

The Spanish-speaking church, the Sala Evangelica, is seeking worship space for

two hours on Sunday mornings for 25-30 participants. The preferred time is 9 a.m. to 11 a.m, but it would consider starts as early as 8:30 a.m. or as late as 10:30 a.m.

In addition, it seeks evening prayer meeting space at 7 p.m. on Wednesdays, Fridays, or Saturdays (or possibly Sundays) for 15 to 20 participants.

It also seeks use of Fellowship Hall and the kitchen on the eve of Dec. 31 for the annual children's service, as well as occasional use of the Baptistry.

A small sign would invite participation, with the wording and location to be approved by First Christian.

For all this, the church would pay \$10,000 annually to help finance maintenance, janitorial service, utilities, and insurance.

For the past five years, the church rented space in the Christian Academy off Gallows Road near Tyson's Corner, and paid \$400 monthly. Now, Christian Academy is merging with a larger congregation and no longer has space.

(Continued on page 5)

Ice Cream Social is More than Just Social

Ice cream has long been a unifier.

The church's Fellowship Hall was packed with people on Sunday evening, Sept. 5, as men of the church scooped out homemade varieties to members of the congregation and their family and friends.

For \$2, you got two scoops of your favorite flavor, along with a piece of cake (or you could have four scoops instead or two pieces of cake). A close observer could tell the servers often helped themselves. There was much laughter, always a good sign of a successful event.



There is no indication that Jesus himself ate ice cream, even though a check of the records shows that there were early versions of the stuff when he was alive. These origins go back to the 4th century before Christ. Nero ordered ice brought from mountains and combined with fruit toppings. Ice-cream like fruit and ice desserts were common in the Middle East and China. Some say the Chinese pioneered using salt to freeze ice cream mixes.

The first real ice cream as we know it today was made in England and America in the 18th century. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Ben Franklin and Dolly Madison loved it, just as we do.

And so the ice cream evening set the stage for much to come at

our church this fall and winter.

Shrine Mont will be held Oct. 21-23; the Teddy Bear affair in which members buy new teddy bears for hospitalized youth on Sept. 25; a new Yoga class begins on Sept. 19; pumpkin-patch sales are likely in October; and there will be other events as well.

When winter comes, Safe Haven will operate on Tuesdays as well as Thursdays as we increase our responsibilities to the homeless and hungry, in cooperation with other churches in the area. And there will



be many decisions ahead as we seek ways to grow and thrive in a challenging era and practice our fellowship with friends and neighbors and visitors.

Butter pecan, please.

Organ Renovation Nears Completion

by Lunette Arledge

The organ renovation is close to completion. In July, pipes that had been removed and stored on site were put back in place, and the organ was usable again after being out of commission for several weeks. Casavant called with the good news that the remaining pipes that had been shipped to Canada were repaired and on their way back to us earlier than expected. On September 12 and 13, they were reinstalled and the organ fully tuned.

In early 2012, a concert will be held to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the original installation and to honor Loel and Sharon Schaaf and Sharon Schaaf Tweedie, who provided significant funding for the renovation, and the many people who were involved in and contributed to the purchase of the organ in 1972.

The entire renovation project, including needed repair to the organ chambers and the baptistery, required approximately \$35,000, \$15,000 of which was provided by the Schaaf family. An organ fund was established to raise the remaining \$20,000. To date, we have received nearly 40% of that, close to \$8,000 in donations. All contributions will be gratefully accepted as we work towards that goal.

This was an ambitious project that will preserve the beauty and integrity of our very fine instrument for generations to come, and we're grateful for those who have helped and will continue to help make it possible.

From the Pastor...

By Rev. Kathleen Kline Chesson



A mother of two of our younger children met me in my office recently after church. She approached me with an idea (a very good one) for helping to engage her middle school aged son in the practice and involvement in his faith. She was characteristically positive and warm in her relationship. However, later in the conversation she shared with me that her son is on the edge of complete disengagement with church life. Worship is for “adults” he says. He behaves properly. He sits quietly. He receives nothing. They visited “lots” of churches during the summer and had experienced wonderful programs and wanted to share their ideas. We are so blessed that, in the midst of their faith questions and needs, loyalty to First Christian has been thus far a continuing factor. Otherwise they would have left a long time ago.

The camp and conference program has blessedly filled so many holes that we have been unable to access. I hear the testimonies of our excited kids following camp, and the powerful experiences they have had. How I wish we could recreate such commitment here on a regular basis. But we must face facts. There is tremendous competition out there. The churches with staff and finances and a priority for children, youth, and young adults will soon entice away even our most faithful.

This is a serious problem that we must all face together. Without the engagement of our children, youth, and young adults and the vibrancy they bring to church life, we will continue to face serious obstacles to any kind of forward movement as a community of God’s faithful.

Following Rev. Lee Hull-Moses’ departure three years ago, we have had gifted and energetic chairs of Christian Education and youth ministry. And they have, with the support of so many teachers and church members, been able to maintain our current programs with strength, but not without great personal challenge. The job is just too big. Cultural shifts are just too powerful. Sundays are a day of sports games, boy and girl scouts, dance competitions, music lessons, and growing demands of homework. Few of our kids live nearby one another, and this distance creates a very difficult scenario for simply “hanging out” which is so necessary for relationship building. We need a new model.

We made a decision a year ago to live within our financial means. And for understandable reasons. However, that meant cutting back on ministry staff – which had been happening for three years (with a continuous downward spiral of tithes and ministry commitments). Without the expertise and passion of a committed youth and young adult minister, I cannot see the vibrancy of our program rising. Being a solo minister church leaves us in the precarious position of being unable to pastor adequately to a program sized ministry church. And we are a program sized church.

Is there a solution? Of course! There is always a solution. As we grapple in the future with our goals and vision, I would like to suggest we throw our passion into what it might take to re-engage our youth and young adults. What might that look like? Commitment on the part of the *entire* church. People who are already committed to outreach and music ministries, women’s and men’s ministries, Sunday School and worship ministries, administration and building issues... if *all* of us decide that we will commit ourselves personally, spiritually, and financially to the rebuilding of our children, youth, and young adult ministries then we will have made a big step forward towards the renewal we so need.

I recognize that this will take both unity and sacrifice. Our congregation is filled with creative, smart, faithful people. I am confident we can find a way.

With faith and hope,

Kathleen

News & Notes

JOB(S) FOR ERNEST — Perseverance pays. After two years of searching during tough economic times, Ernest Williams has landed



two jobs. The first is at the Mark Center in Alexandria, where he does janitorial work in government offices. Then, he completes his day by working at a bakery, The Cupcake Factory in Shirlington, cleaning up and doing dishes.

CONGRATULATIONS — To Andy and Maryjean Falkenstein on the birth of their daughter, Emma Jean Falkenstein, on June 23 (9:31 a.m.; 7 pounds, 2 ounces; 20 1/2 inches). Emma joins brothers



Charles (4) and William (2). The proud grandparents are Tim and FCCFC office manager Karen Falkenstein. The proud great-grandparents are Gary and Damitra Meeds. Damitra is a charter member of First Christian.

HOME EC DELIVERS — The interesting things that FCCFC members do can be surprising. Take Hazel

Tontz. With a college degree in home economics (which she personally never taught in her years as a teacher), she now belongs to an international group seeking to bolster home economics programs in high schools, this time in St. Lucia and Guatemala. At their last meeting, Hazel joined some 40 activists at our church for a luncheon (said to be delicious) to discuss the program. Members brought an entire truckload of home economics needs, such as sewing machines, utensils, dishes, and much more, which will ultimately be shipped to St. Lucia, hurt by recent flooding, and Guatemala for use in high school home economics programs. One of the members is 100 years old (Hazel is only 90). Hazel explained that many schools are no longer teaching home economics courses like the ones she remembers, even as she says it is essential.

HOME AGAIN — Fernando and Erika Reyes Ortiz, previously active in Hispanic ministry at our church, are back in America again after being deported to Bolivia on Aug. 2, 2010. Erika said they appealed, then prayed and fasted a lot, “proclaiming that God will give us justice.” They got the word last Dec. 28 that their visa had been approved to return to the U.S. In April, she said, they arrived in Houston to open a new church while maintaining contact with Hispanic people in Northern Virginia. “We are home now,” said Erika, as she and Fernando seek green cards and ultimately citizenship.

YOGA CLASSES: Bree McCarthy is offering free Yoga classes at our



church as she prepares for teacher certification. The Monday classes begin on Sept. 19 at 5:45 p.m. and last an hour.

RECOMMITMENT CEREMONY — On September 9 Rev. Chesson had the privilege of performing a renewal of wedding vows for Gloria and Ronald Hrabe, who were mar-



ried in our First Christian sanctuary on September 9, 1961. Their five children have arranged a beautiful 50th anniversary celebration and the couple looked much younger than their 70 years!

EXPRESS YOURSELF — A “Recollections” initiative has begun at FCCFC. You can share about your faith and your spiritual experiences with prose or poetry. Ruth Neikirk, with the help of Wendel Miser, has put a poster in the foyer and a scrapbook in the parlor where you can express yourself.

Water

(Continued from page 1)

due to cracks in the bedrock of the stream channel. The “lost” water finds its way through fissures in the limestone, gathers again in chambers underground, then explodes from the ground in huge spring pools of emerald green and turquoise.

We visited two such springs on our vacation. Emanating near my mother’s home town of Buffalo, Mo., Bennett Spring pours an average of 100 million gallons of pure, cold water a day from its mouth. Trees overhang the river that arises here, and gardens of watercress glow like green jewels from the shores and riverbed. The smell of sycamore trees and river water adds to the sensory feast.

To visit Bennett Spring is to immerse oneself in life. To complete the experience, Pam, Anna, Becky, and I took a canoe trip on the Niangua River one beautiful Friday morning. Fed by Bennett and other, smaller springs, the Niangua

winds its way past farm fields and under limestone bluffs, sliding over multicolored stones smoothed by the flowing water. The air was perfumed with the smoke of occasional campfires from camps along the shore. A bob-white quail called plaintively from a field nearby, and I wondered how long it had been since I last heard that song.

Another day, we stopped at Alley Spring near the boyhood home of my father, who used to camp there in his Boy Scouting days. It had been raining the day we visited, but the rain stopped before we reached the spring, and a mysterious haze of mist formed over the spring pool and flowed down the stream channel over the rushing water, like the “Spirit of God moving over the face of the deep.” The spring pool itself formed at the base of a high bluff, as if Moses had struck the rock and the water poured forth. The old red mill reflected uncertainly through the mist on the water. Spirits seemed to inhabit the place that day, spirits of

memory, and of life, and of God.

From Missouri, we made our way home via the Great Smoky Mountains. On our first day there, we stopped for lunch by a rushing mountain stream shaded by tall trees and lush stands of Rhododendron. I found a rock to sit on at the stream’s edge, and dangled my feet in the water as I ate. After lunch, we turned over rocks to find crayfish underneath. Another day found us lunching by another stream, its sweet water-music serenading us, water-jewels dancing in the sun on the moving surface of the water.

As I looked up at the vast bulk of the mountains above, I realized that the great mountains were being worn down and carried away by the insistent water. I thought about the kind of faith that can move mountains, and it occurred to me that maybe faith is like the water: its power is in its persistence, and maybe, just maybe, it can indeed move mountains, if we will only be patient.

Hispanic Church

(Continued from page 1)

The board will prayerfully consider the request when it meets, but there are no guarantees of a swift decision, church leaders said.

Cotner said that Hector promises to cooperate in neighborhood outreach and evangelism activities. Also, Solis would host an annual Hispanic dinner for our church.

The church’s Safe Haven program also provides help for many Spanish-speaking Hispanic people.

According to background provided by Mel, the Hispanic church began in the early 1990s with our help. FCCFC saw the potential for a Spanish-speaking Disciples church within the church, forming a nurturing committee. The committee pro-

vided Spanish bibles and study material for Spanish-to-English classes and sought to help the group make connections with Disciple groups.

But, according to Mel’s background information, Solis concentrated more on addressing the spiritual needs of his congregation and less on denominational matters. Over time, “Hector’s church gradually evolved into a small independent Hispanic Christian Church,” according to Mel.

Mel said the group follows the same sacramental practices as FCCFC, namely baptism by immersion at age of understanding and weekly communion. However, the Hispanic church is more conservative and tends to follow traditions from their own countries.



First Christian’s Dick Brooks has been unanimously approved for ordination in the Christian Church after an interview with the commission on ministry.

A Service of Ordination will take place in October. Further details will be announced soon.

Congratulations to Dick.

Take Heart — Mel Cotner Has a Plan

Not long ago, Mel Cotner visited his daughter in Pottstown, PA and learned that her local church there had purchased a defibrillator for those with heart troubles.

As the man in charge of our church's emergency preparedness committee, Mel decided that would be a good tool to have at our church. And so, he went out and bought a defibrillator. "They're not very expensive," he said. "They are very easy to use. The instructions are in plain English."

Well, actually, they aren't that cheap. Mel paid \$1,500 for it, but he did it willingly and with love for the congregation. "I have been fortunate in my life," he said. "I can handle it."

Mel can handle a lot of things. In agreeing to take over the emergency preparedness committee, he has put the church in good position to establish a more comprehensive plan for dealing with disasters large and small.

The church board is expected to take up the committee's recommendations at its Sept. 20 meeting.

But in the meantime, Mel said, the committee has done some work. For instance, the members discovered the location of the natural gas turnout. It inventoried first-aid equipment, and discovered much of it had to be replaced. They checked out the fire extinguishers and batteries that are supposed to give light when the power goes out.

Serving with him on the committee are Tracy Williams, Joe Ward, and Dulce Arroyo. Tracy, he said, was especially interested in CPR training and first aid.

The Emergency Preparedness Plan it is presenting calls for an emergency contact system of members, turning the church into a shelter during disasters, preparing people for long periods of time of blackouts and poor access to food, and posting an evacuation plan if needed.

It also calls for protection of legal documents and community response training. The plan is "built on stuff we got from Fairfax County," he said, and it is voluntary.

But the need for planning is great, Mel said. He said a group of ministers known as Faith Community in Action have indicated an interest in emergency planning but has never gotten organized. Our church could be the place where experts on emergency preparedness come to teach such ministers, he said.

These plans are designed to deal with almost any kind of emergency. Mel said it is time for churches to get organized for the worst, and systematically deal with any shortcomings, whether it is food, shelter, or just a band-aid.

He knows a lot about preparedness from his youthful days, when he worked on the family farm in Kansas and had heavy responsibilities when he was just a lad.

Back to Nature

I have always been interested in animals and nature. My biblical hero is Noah! In my younger years, I had thoughts of being a veterinarian. In college, I studied animal science and biology. I have wandered among different jobs, including licensed veterinary technician, medical information specialist, and bookkeeper, but my heart keeps drawing me back to the natural world of God's creation.

In keeping with my desire to get back to my "roots," I joined the Fairfax Master Naturalists (FMN), taking their basic training in 2009. I still need to complete 8 hours of advanced training to be certified as

a Master Naturalist. Since Jan. 2011, I have volunteered as an FMN at the Walker Nature Education Center in Reston, VA. I covered the welcome desk, guiding visitors to the attractions and opportunities of the Nature Center and answering questions about the Nature Center and nature in Reston.

This volunteer position led me to my new job as a teacher naturalist. My primary role will be leading groups of school-age (kindergarten through 5th grade) children on field trips at the Nature Center. These field trips support parts of the Virginia SOL science curriculum, covering various themes of nature and

the environment, such as sensory awareness (using our senses to explore nature), habitats, trees, earth cycles, and geology. I will lead children in exploring these themes using nature hikes, games, dancing and singing, and other fun, hands-on learning activities.

What's the difference between a naturalist and an environmentalist. While I consider myself both, the words evoke different pictures. Simply put, a naturalist is someone who studies nature. An environmentalist is someone who is actively involved in efforts to protect the environment.

by Pam Findley

Fall Worship Themes

Holy Adventure: Trust in Travail Sept. 7—Oct. 23

Sept. 18
Running For Our Lives
Exodus 14: 19-31
Matthew 18:21-35

Sept. 25
Losing Our Vision
Exodus 16:2-15
Matthew 20:1-6

Oct. 2
Hankering For More
Exodus 17:1-7
Matthew 21:23-32

Oct. 9
Feeling Abandoned
Exodus 20: 1-3, 7-9, 12-20
Matthew 21:33-46

Oct. 16
Falling Apart
Exodus 32:1-14
Matthew 22:1-14

Oct. 23
Shrine Mont
Sensing the Unseen
Exodus 33:12-23
Matthew 22:15-22

Thankful People Oct. 30—Nov. 23

Oct. 30:
Home
Deuteronomy 34: 1-12
Psalm 107:1-7, 33-37
Matthew 23:1-12

Nov. 6
All Saints Sunday
The Journey (that brought us Home)
Psalm 78:1-7
Matthew 25:1-13



Nov. 13
Thanksgiving Special Offering
Mercy (on the Journey that brought us Home)
Psalm 123
Matthew 25:14-30

Nov. 23
Thanksgiving Sunday
Steadfast Love (that provided Mercy on the Journey that brought us Home)
Psalm 100;
Matthew 25:31-26

Tom Hone to Lead Study of Genesis

Tom Hone, a retired professor at the U.S. Naval War College, is stepping into teaching shoes at FCCFC with a course on Genesis.

For 11 weeks beginning on Sept. 18, Prof. Hone said he would take the same approach to Genesis as did C.S. Lewis: “What might God want me to learn from this?”

Many people here know Tom as an exuberant, intelligent man who takes his religion seriously and loves our church.

Asked why he is doing this “seminar” in particular, Tom responded via email:

“I have always had an interest in the Book of Genesis. I have done things like this before. I was a college professor for ten years when I

was young, and I taught courses in an area related to this one — especially political and moral philosophy

“I do think that the Book of Genesis is misunderstood. I think any reader of Genesis needs to ask himself or herself, What’s the message here? Why might God want me to read this?”

“I have believed for a very long time that people who see Genesis as a textbook have missed the point. What matters is not how many days it took God to create the world, but why God created the world in the first place.

“And why was God pleased with creation? The ancient Jews understood this, I think. They understood that order — which is what God brought to the universe — was good and disorder was not

good. In Genesis, God creates an orderly, structured, and sensible natural world. In the Book of Exodus, God gives laws to Moses and the children of Israel so that they can have an orderly society — a structured and sensible social world. From the Book of Genesis, order is seen by God as good and disorder is portrayed as bad.

“Anyone who comes to the course wanting to persuade the rest of us that every word in Genesis is literally true will be very disappointed. I will focus on what might be called the theology of Genesis — on what it tells us about God and about ourselves. Genesis was carefully written to tell us things about God and about ourselves, and I will ask questions of those in the course to get them to think about what Genesis tells us.”

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH, FALLS CHURCH

6165 LEESBURG PIKE
FALLS CHURCH, VA
22044

Phone: 703-532-8220

Fax: 703-532-6383

www.fccfc.org

Rev. Kathleen Kline Chesson

rev.chesson@fccfc.org

Phil Gilliland

Phil.Gilliland@fccfc.org

Karen Falkenstein

karen@fccfc.org



Got News?

The First Christian Letter is published bi-monthly. Submissions must be received by the 20th of the preceding month to be included. Send information or inquiries to:

newsletter@fccfc.org

Bill Neikirk

Editor-in-Chief

Ashley Martinage

Production Editor

My Two Cents

After what seems like an eternity since we have met collectively as a board, I am excited to get back together to do the work of the church.

There have been many positive things that occurred over the summer that may ultimately bode well for our congregation.

We have been presented some opportunities which may result in unexpected income for our church.

However, last week, we found out how vulnerable we are to setbacks that can occur due to unpredictable circumstances.

Late Thursday afternoon I received a phone call which anxiously expressed concern that water was rushing into the choir room and requesting assistance.

Fortunately, choir rehearsal was scheduled for that evening, so about 6

members were available to help with the bail out.

It didn't take long to find other areas in the building that had succumbed to the violence of the almost biblical storm that throttled most of Fairfax County.

In hindsight, we were very fortunate to only suffer minimum damage, but it brought to light a bigger issue: our building is getting older and we need to take care of her. To do so requires us to be proactive about future events, rather than be reactive to crisis situations.

It was at this point that I realized this situation was nothing less than a metaphor for where we stand as a congregation in 2011.

When I first became the board chair, I told the constituency that I did not want to merely keep the oars in the water and the boat

by Mark Fredenburg

afloat, but I also wanted to follow my predecessors and give our journey some direction in the process.

While this "job" frequently requires putting out fires, we have created a leadership model that has moved us forward.

One such outcome of this is that, in the coming months, the board has a plan to have at least one church-wide activity per month. While the detail of each event has not been completely fleshed out, it represents an opportunity for members of the congregation to become more fully involved in the life of the church either as a participant or a leader.

I am looking forward to these opportunities to interact as an entire church community and hope you will join in supporting this effort.

Good News Corner

By Kathleen Kline Chesson

First Christian has been blessed by several generous and unexpected gifts this summer ~ each of which is a sign of blessing for us as a congregation.

We received a proposal from the Fairfax County Department of Public Works – Land Acquisition Division desiring to construct a 6-foot wide asphalt walkway across our property (roughly in the same location as our current dirt path). The County proposes to do this project we have long envisioned (but been unable to afford) for us, and in the process pay us for the privilege! A licensed appraiser valued the land at \$90,700.00. Our trustees and additional professionals determined that the deal was generous and solid, and following Board approval, a check for

\$90,700 will be delivered post haste!

A generous member of the Arlington community, Ms. Dorothy Jones, who has no relationship with First Christian that we know of, left a memorial gift in the amount of \$25,000 to our church! No children, she left most of her estate to her caregiver, some to a niece and nephew, and the rest to us. As I have pondered this generosity and why she chose us, I can only feel grateful that our church is widely known in the community as a sanctuary that welcomes and feeds all people.

Finally, Debbie Hutchison, the niece of charter member Walton Follin who passed away in January, presented the church a check in the amount of \$10,000 to be used in a way that would help build up the body of Christ at First Christian.

What good news these gifts are in a time of need!