



# First Christian Letter

Lent, 2011

Volume LIV, Issue I

**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.*

## Skunk: An Easter Story

*Mel Cotner, a long-time member of our church, penned this vignette in his marvelous memoir about growing up in Kansas.*

At a crossroads in the old Pierson school district about a mile and a half from our Kansas farm residence stood a one-room church building some 35 by 50 feet long.

My grandfather, George McClelland Cotner, had teamed up with the landowner, Charlie Bryant, and other farmers to build this church just before World War One. We called it the Pierson Sunday School, a non-denominational group with no minister. Lay leaders, including my grandfather, taught Bible classes. It served a rural area some 7

miles northwest of Coffeyville, KS. Participation ranged from 30 to 60, representing 15 to 18 families.



We elected a Sunday School Superintendent each year. We gathered in one large room for singing and prayer before breaking into

various classes among the rows of bench seats or pews. My mother played an old upright piano. Two strategically located pot-bellied stoves heated the building. The church had a small vestibule as an entry way and a steeple with a bell. Used only on Sundays, it had no lights or telephone. There were two outside "privies," one marked "men" and the other "ladies."

A janitor was paid 50 cents per week to open up, dust the pews and start coal fires during winter. In 1940 and 1941, I was that janitor. On a typical Sunday, I rode my bicycle to the church with about a half dozen kerosene-soaked corncobs. I opened the

*(Continued on page 5)*

## Board Moving Forward on Many Initiatives

In its second meeting of the year, the church's board took up a number of projects at its Feb. 15 meeting.

Mark Fredenburg, Board Chair, and Rev. Chesson led the board as it pondered a host of issues confronting the congregation in a tough economic climate.

Zandy Williams, head of the Finance Council, said church leaders are providing weekly information to the congregation to inform them of the tight budget situation and show week-to-week receipts and expen-

ditures. Rev. Chesson said she is building relationships among new and more isolated members by having small gatherings at her home. In addition, she reported that there have been 18 repeat visitors.

She said she is considering an invitation to attend Wesley Theological Seminary in a doctor of ministry program. There would be a series of classes in May, and the next round of classes would be held next January. The Pastoral Relations Committee supports

this continuing education, she noted, but the cost is high and may require her taking out a loan. The board took this request under advisement.

Kevin Ogle gave the board a rundown on the senior minister's covenant—in essence her contract—which had been rewritten to make it clearer and more understandable.

Thanks to a \$5,000 gift from a donor not a member of the church, the Safe Haven Committee is going ahead with several projects,

*(Continued on page 4)*

## Membership Committee News

“Getting to know you, getting to know all about you, getting to like you, getting to hope you like me.”

—The King and I

In the famed musical, *Anna*, the proper British teacher, sings these words to the royal family of a king in faraway Siam. But the lyrics also apply to the fellowship that binds us as a congregation.

Although worship is the reason we gather together (getting to know God), the Membership Committee wants to strengthen that nurturing and welcoming fellowship to which we continually strive. We are committed to providing weekly opportunities to get to know each other better. We invite, yes challenge, everyone to take part in these fellowship-building activities.

On most Sundays, participation will be as simple as joining us in Fellowship Hall for a few minutes at our weekly Coffee and Conversa-

tion (C&C). While you’re there, make a special effort to greet someone you don’t know or would like to know a bit better. The Membership Council is happy to host, but we’d also love to have help with setup or cleanup, and we will always accept donations of simple snacks that we can share (just call Sarah Vandruff or Ginny George and make us an offer).

And we think the C&C works best when there is a theme. To supply that theme, we encourage you to give us a special reason or occasion. You might host a celebration for a birthday or anniversary, highlight the activities of a church or community program you support (Sunday School class, CWF group, scouts, service groups, etc.), honor a special school or work achievement, share a favorite family tradition, etc.

And don’t be intimidated by the task of hosting. Some of us tend to

be a bit extravagant with our hospitality, but the C&C is really about fellowship, not about food. Celebrate a birthday with cake and punch, bake your favorite cookies or buy a few of your favorite snacks to share.

Although we sometimes joke about the classic church potluck, as Disciples we understand the powerful symbolism of the shared meal. So the Membership Council will also be partnering with various groups to sponsor shared meals each month. Our recent International Potluck was hosted by the Outreach Council. On March 27 be prepared to enjoy a Shrine Mont-style meal as we highlight the culinary delights of our congregation’s annual October retreat. In April, invite your friends to join us breakfast following our Easter Sunrise Service.

We look forward to getting to know you better!

## Spring Retreats By Cheri Hutchison

Once in a while, we need to take care of ourselves — Relax, Renew, Recharge — to step out of our everyday routines and give God a chance to reach us. We need fresh air in a place where we can be filled with the wonder of God’s working in our lives. We will never find time, so we have to make time, deliberately. That time is now.

This spring, the season of rebirth, the Christian Church-Capital Area is sponsoring spiritual retreats for all ages.

Several are at our beautiful, rustic, retreat center in Western Maryland. We are holding a three-day retreat for CYF (youth grades 9-12), April 8-10; for Chi Rho (youth

grades 6-8), April 29-May 1; and Discovery Camp for families with young children, May 13-15.

Young, mature, and senior adults will have their retreats at our Conference Center in Delaware’s Bethany Beach. The facilities at Bethany are less rustic and are handicap accessible. Senior Adult Conference is May 15-18, during the week when it’s less crowded.

The retreat for college-aged adults (out of high school) is Memorial Day weekend, May 27-30, when the beach areas are teeming with other young adults and recent high school graduates.

And our ever-popular YAC (Young Adults Conference, post high school up to about age 30), will be June 16-19, directed by Rev. Marshall Dunn.

Finally is the *Regional CWF Spring Retreat* at Bethany Beach, June 3-5. It’s for women of all ages and generations. Our theme this year is “Living Above Worry and Stress.” The weekend will include time for introspection and sharing, singing and praying, relaxing on the beach and visiting the annual craft fair on the boardwalk.

Childcare will be arranged on request. Get a group together and join us. Financial Aid and sponsorships are available and carpools can be arranged for those needing transportation.

If you would like more information, call Cherie Hutchison at 703-509-7687 (cell) (or Ron Hutchison, Sarah Vandruff 703-644-4968, Ginny George 703-425-8469, or DeDe or Bob McCoy 703-256-0560).

## From the Pastor...

By Rev. Kathleen Kline Chesson

Dearest First Ones,

This month, as the newsletter is back up and thriving, I revel in the stories and pictures that illuminate our life together. As we live into a new ministry paradigm, I have found myself more centered and certain in our direction and calling. The strength of our membership was highlighted in a moving and thoughtful Laity Sunday, with our soon to be ordained Elizabeth Baird in the pulpit. The reach of our mission and vision was captured in a major Washington Post Sunday article (Feb. 20) in which our congregation's efforts to serve our direct community were noted in action through our Safe Haven program. The depth of our faithful foundation was celebrated as we mourned the loss of three special church members – two of whom helped to found First Christian. As I seek to listen for God's voice in the midst of our growing and changing community, and respond to expressed spiritual longings, I am deeply gratified by the gifts that devotion and compassion produce!

Within our institutional life, a number of initiatives were contemplated, discussed, approved and/or tabled for further review and discernment at our most recent Board meeting:

- Elizabeth Baird was recommended with enthusiasm for ordination into the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) by her ordination council from FCC, chaired by Ginny George. Elizabeth will meet with the Commission on the Ministry for her ordination interview in the next month.
- Many facilities projects are underway thanks to our hard working facilities gurus: conversion of the east entrance "coat room" to a meditation/reading room, upgrades to the family and women's bathrooms, exploration of tasteful hand rails and ramp access to the choir loft and communion table, Baptistry repair project, mold remediation bids, office storage space was created in balcony, locks to be put on downstairs classroom doors (security).
- A healthy financial start for 2011 was noted– the January figures have us in the black!
- Safe Haven special donations and organizational health will enable Safe Haven to participate in the funding of important facility upgrade projects, to include new locks, painting, and landscaping.
- The Senior Minister's Covenant was completed by Personnel and submitted for review.
- A Youth Group from New Hampshire is set to visit FCC for one week following Easter and assist us in our mission work. Magic "ice cream" will be created in our kitchen.
- Three more pledges were received since January, the revenue of which will go to fund the Baptistry repair project.
- Mel Cotner will spearhead an initiative to develop an "emergency response plan" for our members as suggested by Fairfax County.
- Future goals and enthusiastic visions were shared by our Membership, Communication, Christian Education, Outreach, Worship, and Finance councils.

Throughout these pages you will get a chance to learn more about some of our new members, our youth, and the lives of those who helped to shape our vision. I invite you to think about how you might grow your own mind and spirit amidst the emerging springtime of Lent. As the living Christ continues to shape our community in wondrous new ways, how might Christ work anew in shaping your attitude and spirit in holiness? Thank you for the privilege of sharing in ministry and life with you!

Your Servant in Christ...

*Kathleen*



## Board Meeting

*(Continued from page 1)*

including locks on downstairs classrooms for security purposes. Phil Gilliland, head of the committee, said installing two doors in the hall downstairs also is being considered, despite some concerns about this idea.

Pam Findley and Diana Fredenburg have agreed to “spruce up” the family bathroom on the main floor, using a \$3,000 church fund set up for this purpose. They will also work on improvements in the women’s bathroom. Needy Safe Haven clients would also be paid for painting in the family bathroom on the main floor.

Also under discussion is the viability of a ramp that leads to the choir loft or installing rails next to the pulpit and lectern to help with

stability walking up and down the stairs. If it is done, the cost is estimated at \$1,000.

Plans are moving ahead on repairing and painting the Baptistry and for converting the closets on the east side of the church into a library/meditation room.

Zandy Williams said the Baptistry cost is likely to be \$5,000, although its repair fund only has \$2,700.

On the new library/meditation room, Frank and Bill Miller have done considerable cleanup to make the new room possible, with Jeff Hill helping in the design. It is expected that the conversion could be done with expenses not exceeding \$200. “The aim is to have it more usable, and not just a junk room,” said Rev. Chesson.

Storage for Karen’s office will be expanded, if needed, with new shelves to be placed in the small closet in the balcony, thanks to Frank Miller. But more shelves will be built in the balcony if needed.

The church is considering a “stop-gap” measure of removing mold. Stripping, sealing and painting around window wells and other areas where mold is considerable is being discussed. Bill Miller has done considerable work on this project.

Mel Cotner is heading a committee to explore Fairfax County’s plan to establish an emergency response plan in the event of a major disaster. The goal is to spell out responses by people and institutions (such as the church) in case of disasters, including terrorist acts with widespread effects.

## FCCFC Welcomes Interim Organist Wes McCune

Wesley (Wes) McCune started his music career when he was a 13-year-old high school freshman in St. Marys, West Virginia, a small town along the Ohio River.

The son of a Methodist minister, he had become proficient enough playing the piano that the Episcopal Church (across the street from his dad’s church) hired him to play at the 9 AM service. His pay: \$2.

Then his father’s church wanted him to play for its 11 AM and so he did—both the piano and the organ, too. But his dad felt that he should be paid more. So Wes got \$3 per performance from the Methodists.

“It gave me a world of experience,” said Wes, who has been hired as our interim organist.

Wes is an award-winning musician/educator. In 2008, the Wash-

ington Post named him the Alexandria City Public Schools Agnes Meyer Outstanding Teacher for his work at John Adams Elementary School.

Among other things, he was cited for developing an opera education program for grades three to five. He integrated social studies Standards of Learning with music standards. Fifth graders write text, rhythms, and melodies for arias about Virginia political figures, such as Thomas Jefferson and George Washington.

He is certified in the Orff-Schulwerk method of music instruction, and founded the John Adams Orff Ensemble which performs lively concerts in the D.C. area.

Wes received his bachelor’s degree from Illinois Wesleyan, where



he graduated cum laude, and he has a master of music degree from Ohio University.

Wes also taught at the college and high school level after graduation, but decided that he was more comfortable with teaching younger students. In addition to his educational work, he also played the organ at a number of churches.

“When I am not playing in a church, I miss it very much,” he said. “I feel it is part of my spiritual life. It is hard for me to sit in a congregation.”

(Continued from page 1)

dampers and lit the corncobs to start the fire. By Sunday School time, the stoves would be red hot if the dampers were left open. I dusted the pews and arranged song-books and performed other chores. Then, pulling a rope from the steeple that came through the vestibule ceiling, I rang the church bell with gusto. It could be heard as far away as my home.

One cold Sunday in early March of 1941, when I was but 14, I made the usual trip to the church and opened the building. In this instance, I noticed papers and song books on the floor. Some curtains were torn. Somewhat perplexed, I proceeded to light the fires. As the room started to warm up, I could tell from the smell. A skunk had been (or was) in the church. I looked around, and then spotted him in the vestibule hiding under a spare pot belly stove situated near the coal bin. I had been very near the skunk a few moments earlier when I got the kerosene-soaked corn cobs and obtained a bucket of coal. Eager to rid the church of the skunk, I went to a neighbor's house a short distance down the road, borrowed a 22-caliber rifle, and shot the skunk as he hid under the stove.

Needless to say, we did not have Sunday School that day.

Apparently the skunk had been in the building all week. The previous Sunday had been very warm and the entry door was left open during the two-hour Sunday school period. We surmise that the skunk

wandered in at that time. On the Tuesday following this ignominious event, the Coffeyville Journal carried a very short story on the event—headlined “Skunk to Sunday School.” The following Sunday, we tried to hold Sunday School but the smell still was overwhelming. We let the church air out and tried two weeks later, but the skunk's odor still permeated the building. The fact is, Sunday School was never held there again, much to my chagrin. Ironically, I closed the church my grandfather helped build, a church that was very active between World War One and World War Two.

Now for the rest of the story: On an interim basis, Sunday School was held in the Cedar Bluff grade school located two miles east of the Pierson Sunday School building. As it turns out this location was closer to most of the families attending (and the building certainly smelled better).

Attendance had been dwindling at the Pierson Church and the new location seemed to help. In the late '40s, the old Pierson Sunday School was torn down. The land reverted to the Bryant farm. The Sunday School at Cedar Bluff built a new facility near that school. I had understood that a steeple was part of this new building and the Pierson Sunday School bell is in it. Also I understood that it became a Baptist church.

Over the 2010 Memorial Day weekend, I returned to Coffeyville for a visit. My brother Ed and his wife, Carol joined me. Ed and I at-

tended worship at First Christian where we were baptized. Later we visited the Cedar Bluff area and the small Baptist Church. Yes, the church still has a small belfry which



houses the Pierson Sunday School building bell, a bell that is a century old. The bell still welcomes its congregants each Sunday.

After the move to the Cedar Bluff School, my parents decided to attend the Coffeyville Christian Church. They both had been baptized in the Christian Church earlier. I was baptized at age 14 at the Coffeyville Christian Church. I have told the skunk to Sunday School story several times and conclude with this question...

Could it be that God was working through that skunk to get the church relocated, get it to grow and get a new church built? I can only say this possibility did not enter my mind when I pulled the trigger.

### Want to blog?

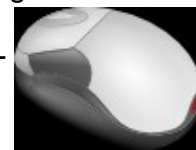
Have you checked out the updated First Christian Church website? Our web presence has been completely overhauled and updated to provide more information in an

easier-to-use format. You can see for yourself at [www.fccfc.org](http://www.fccfc.org).

While you're there, Rev. Pierson invites you to respond to thought-provoking religious questions that she raises in her blog. Just

click on the “Pastors Thoughts” icon on the first page of the website.

Join the conversation!



## In Memoriam

*The First Christian family mourns the loss of three of its members over the last several months.*

### Lisa Ann Williams

Lisa Ann Williams had many challenges but she was full of life, announcing to Rev. Chesson not long ago that she was going to take up pottery classes. "I can't wait to begin," she told the senior minister.

She had not sounded this animated in a long time, Kathleen said. Some of the old excitement was coming back. But, unfortunately, on Dec. 23, a week after this revelation, Lisa succumbed to a weakening heart. She was 47.

Lisa lived in a world of constant pain, darkness, and an inability to go anywhere or even walk without substantial help. Yet she loved people and liked to joke around despite many tragedies in her life.



"For many of us here at First Christian, who have known Lisa only these last four years of her living, we were unaware of the healthy, humorous, vibrant Lisa who sang in musicals, played on the beach, and laughed with ease and fullness," Rev. Chesson said at her

funeral.

Born on June 23, 1963 in Florida as Lisa Ann Aleshire, her sight problem soon became evident to her parents. Her first surgery to remove cataracts occurred when she was 4. Her parents moved to Fairfax, VA because eye surgeons were plentiful here. Yet she lost sight in her right eye when she was seven. And her other eye weakened, too, requiring many transplants.

After starting at Fairfax High School, she heard about Helen Keller and persuaded her parents to send her to the Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, MA, where she graduated.

But tragedy struck. At 18, a drunk driver hit her and left her with broken bones that required months of recovery. At 22, she married and had a child, but her husband was killed in a traffic accident and her child, Rachel, developed autism and subsequently was sent to a foster home. Her mother died in 1991. Lisa remarried a few years later, but it ended in 3 ½ years.

Her next door neighbor, Mike McFarland, turned out to be a close friend, even though he fought spinabifida.

In 1995, she met Lance Williams, who heard God speak to him, that he could sustain the challenges in her life as she could help sustain his own. They were married on Christmas Eve-Christmas Day. And now, a grieving Lance wants to build a memorial garden at the church where he can spread her ashes.

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### Ona Mathers

Ona Choice Mathers, a charter member who passed away on Jan. 9, had a natural and witty intelligence that served her well as a long-time church leader and as a working mother.

She and her late husband, Robert (Bob) Mathers helped build the church. She served as a deaconess, board secretary, and chair of the diaconate, and also was active with the Sarah Group and the Meals on Wheels Committee. He led the architectural committee planning the sanctuary and education wing.



Ona was born on Dec. 17, 1971, in Turley, OK, along with her twin sister, Ola, to Robert Herschel Choice and Clara Mabel Crowley Choice.

She had met Bob when both were employees at the Oklahoma Power and Electric Co., she as a secretary and he as an electrical engineer. They were married in 1941. Enlisting in the Navy, he served as a radar officer aboard the

USS Lexington during combat in the Pacific. After the war, he took a job with the Department of the Navy in Washington.

When her daughters Marilyn and Margaret were young, Ona stayed home and wanted to make sure they had the best of everything. But unfortunately her husband died on Jan. 1, 1957 at age 42 after a third heart attack.

Then Ona went back to work, landing a good job as an executive secretary in the Defense Department. Marilyn said she and her sister never wanted for anything. Her mom paid for Margaret to go on a European vacation. And for Marilyn's ice skating lessons. She paid for their college educations. And she traveled, entertained visitors and took an active role in our church until her health began to fail in 1996.

Then, she moved into the Washington House. Although mostly confined to a wheelchair, her daughter Marilyn said her mind was "sharp as a tack." She was blessed with many visitors, including our church choir who came caroling every Christmas.

Her ashes were interred at Arlington National Cemetery next to her husband's grave, situated next to Robert F. Kennedy's final resting place. Rev. Chesson called her life "long, fruitful and dedicated."

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### Walt Follin

James Walton (Walt) Follin built a career as a union man who was proud of his heritage and his church. He also relished telling jokes—and playing them on others.

One day when he was asked how he felt, he responded, "When I

wake up the morning, I look down at my toes. If there isn't a tag on them, I know I'm O.K."

This good man with a keen sense of humor passed away at age 92 on Jan. 26. He was a charter member well loved by the congregation and well respected for his union leadership.



His father, who served in the Civil War as a Confederate soldier, was 71 when Walt was born on Oct. 16, 1918. Even though his dad was only 15 when the Civil War broke out, he falsified his age so he could enlist. Walt often bragged he was the youngest offspring of a Confederate soldier in the U.S.

Walt served in the military, too, enlisting in the Navy in 1942. He served in the Pacific on the USS Vicksburg, but injury to his spine caused a medical discharge two years later.

He was born on the family farm named Magnolia Glen on some 410 acres purchased by his great grandfather who fought in the Revolutionary War. The farm was near Colvin Run.

Walt began his education in a

one-room school house and later attended McLean and Fairfax High Schools. In 1929, his mother died, and he and a brother went to live with an older sibling and had to work on the farm from 4 AM to 7 PM.

He began his business career in 1937 as a meat clerk for Sanitary stores (which later became Safeway), working 72 hours a week, and soon became a charter member of the local meat-cutters union. He worked his way up in union ranks over the years he worked at Safeway, serving as chairman of its health and welfare plan and its organizing committee. He was an institute instructor and delegate to all international conventions. He retired in 1974 as vice president of local 593.

He married Audrey Reamy in 1937 when he was 19 and she only 14. They had three children, Walton Lee, Tom and Lynda. But Audrey died in 1953 of complications from surgery. In 1955, he married for a second time, this time to Bina Ruth Hutchison Brown.

Walt and Bina were active church members at FCCFC, and many members recalled him fondly as a genuine comedian and a serious, principled man proud of his heritage.

Bob McCoy still remembers the time when Walt showed off his "rattlesnake eggs" to his young daughters—he wound up rubber bands around two eggs and put them in envelopes. When he released the taut rubber bands he held with his hands, the eggs leaped up and the girls leaped back. Walt said he didn't know they were ready to hatch.

## Welcome New Members

*Join us in welcoming four people who have come forward to join FCCFC in recent months.*

**Ken By** — Ken is a new church member who works hard in Safe Haven feeding the poor and homeless even as he looks for work in an economy where jobs are scarce.



But he knows hardships very well. He came to this country from Cambodia in 1981 as a refugee from a brutal regime. In the fall of 1980, he lived in a refugee camp just across the border in Thailand, with little hope of finding a way out.

That's when a woman he had befriended asked a big favor—and offered a deal: Would he go back into Cambodia, risking his life to find four children of a man who had already come to the U.S.? The family's mother had died, and the children were in great need.

Bring them back, she told Ken, and I can help you escape and go to the US. Ken agreed, heading off through the jungle with his cousin to a small town he estimated was 80 miles away.

They trudged for about three days to the small town, and found the children—who ranged in age from 4 to 11. They had no food, and ate what they could find. The cousin bartered a gold ring near the

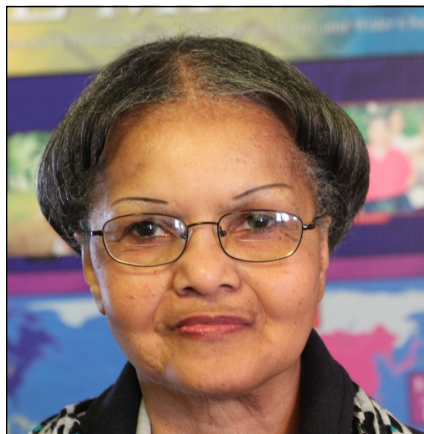
border with Thailand. They alternated carrying the youngest two. When they arrived back at the camp, the woman who sent them was “so pleased and so happy with the kids. They were exhausted.”

As she arranged to get the kids back to the U.S., she also made good on the deal to enable Ken to come to America. In the states, he had to cope with a new country, getting jobs and losing them, and dealing with a new culture. Though he has experienced many troubles since arriving here, he is hopeful of getting a job and moving ahead.

**Celestine Mullins** — Celestine is a petite mother and grandmother who had a special reason for coming to First Christian Church of Falls Church.

“It was closer than the Methodist Church I had been attending,” she said. Indeed, all Celestine has to do now is walk across Route 7, and she's arrived. And that was appealing for this 74-year-old woman who doesn't look her age.

She was born in the District of Columbia and received her secondary school education there. “I came to Falls Church in 1974,” she said.



Her husband died in 1991, and that forced her to look for a job. She took courses at Northern Virginia Community College, training for a job in a child-care center. She has worked for more than 12 years in a child-care center.

Celestine is proud of her four children. “They are all grown up and they have their careers,” she said. She enjoys her three grandchildren.

Now, she is looking for something different to do with her life. “You always think of going out and doing something else,” she said. “If I were to go out like this, I'll help with seniors. I would like to go out and talk with (senior) people in the community who need help.”

She expresses a short and simple philosophy about church. “What keeps me going is God,” she said.

**Tom Hone** — It is hard to have a chat with Tom Hone without digging deep into substance that ranges from military strategy to theology to economics to political science.

Tom, who comes to the early meditation and communion service, is a teacher at the Naval War College who relishes talking about the Bible and Jesus' teaching as well the strengths and weaknesses of American government.

In a chat the other day about some of his views, he brought up the French philosopher Montesquieu and his theory about the “spirit” of laws as being extremely important. His erudition shows.

“My whole life is an accident,” he said, explaining that he taught at the college level in various Midwestern universities—six jobs in 10 years, he said, chiefly in political

science, before he accepted an invitation to join the Naval War College's faculty. And he loves it.

He has written several books, and said most of them are technical. In Sunday school, he enjoys talking about how Jesus brought a revolutionary view of God and religion during his ministry.

Tom is not a know-it-all kind of person. He loves to discuss religious issues and from time to time participates in blogs on the church website. The discussions are civil, and—with Tom aboard—often profound.



He enjoys the early service, in which a small number gather, often with the senior minister, to talk about issues of faith and belief. Often, the discussion continues past the appointed end time, so that members can finish their thoughts. In addition to his verbal contributions, he ensures that everyone has a chair—fetching one quickly if there are not enough to go around.

Tom, 66, is planning to retire this year. Although divorced, he helps support his former wife. He has a son and a grandson.

**Joe Ward** — Joe is a Texas-born lawyer who joined the church recently after attending National City

Christian Church in Washington for many years.

"This church is the closest Christian church to my house," he said. "I've always been impressed with the church. I like the minister and the people."

He came to the D.C. area in 1965 as an attorney for the Internal Revenue Service, then went to work with the Senate Finance Committee, then headed by Sen. Russell Long of Louisiana.

Joe, now 80, retired in 1995—and he admits that he still misses the excitement of being in the middle of big events and in the hurly-burly of politics and the law.



He is like a lot of people who have retired after such an active career and harbor wishes of going back all the time. "I'm kind of foot-loose," he said. "I miss the business, the push and pull, and I miss the camaraderie."

Joe grew up in Childress, Tex, and received his law degree from SMU. He worked in Dallas for eight years before coming east to D.C. He has a wife and four sons. His wife is Catholic, but Joe said he has been a member of a Christian Church all his life.

## FCCFC Youth Shine

*FCCFC is home to many talented youth. Here are a few highlights.*

\***Lilly Bowen**, daughter of Celsi and a 9<sup>th</sup> grader at Yorktown High School, is the only girl on the wrestling team. Even though she hurt her shoulder in January and lost in the 103-pound weight class in the regional quarterfinals of the National District Wrestling Championship, she's had a successful season.

She wants to stay in that weight class over her years in high school, saying that she would have a greater chance of winning. Asked what kind of lessons about life that wrestling taught her, she said, "You kind of don't think about it. You go with the flow. That's how you've got to think about your life."

In 8<sup>th</sup> grade, Lilly earned second place in the district championship.

\***Nate Ogle**, Kevin's son, is a star high school basketball player for the George Mason Mustangs, scoring 14 points as his team defeated Clarke County by 43-30 in the semifinals of Virginia's Region B basketball tournament. The Mustangs went on to win the Region B Championship over Dan River, with Nate scoring 7 points. The team next faces Middlesex in the quarterfinals on March 5. Nate also made first team on the All-Regional Team.

\*On Feb. 27, **Joslyn Chesson**, daughter of Kathleen and soprano with the Episcopal High School Chamber Choir, traveled with her choir to New York City to sing at Carnegie Hall. Her choir was chosen by audition to be one of six from across the country to join the "National Youth Choir" directed by Dr. Anton Armstrong.

## Examining the Implications of Our New Staffing Configuration

*(This article was authored by Mark Fredenburg, board chair, and Kevin Ogle, chair of the Personnel Committee, with contributions from other committee members).*

As we prepare to enter the liturgical season of Lent, the time is ripe for us as a First Christian community to reflect on what we of necessity have given up for the 2011 calendar and budget year and the implications for our life together.

The Board decided at the December 2010 Board meeting (where the FCCFC 2011 budget was discerned and adopted) that to be fiscally responsible we could no longer budget for even a part-time second ministry position on the staff. Due to the economic reality that we faced in 2011, we no longer had the luxury of an additional minister in the office to share the duties and responsibilities of sustaining our church.

As we live into this new staffing configuration, with a senior minister who is now the sole pastor of a "program size" congregation, we find ourselves in unfamiliar territory. The Board recognizes that with elimination of the second ministry position, adjustments will need to be made in order to meet the needs of the congregation with available ministry resources

The Board and Personnel Committee do not fully understand what this means for the immediate future. However, we do understand that this new reality invites all of us to discern how God is calling everyone to support and nurture our community life together and our ministries within and beyond our church building's walls. This will be

a time of separating wants from needs, and discovering what volunteers can and can't be expected to do.

There are, however, implications for what this means right now. You may have already noticed some changes that have occurred in the first few months of this year.

Kathleen continues to prioritize crisis pastoral care (for example, hospital visitations, family care following a death), but Elders will likely need to be responsible for follow-up and long-term care needs of congregants. While she will continue to visit the homebound and chronically ill, the frequency of those visits may have to be reduced. Kathleen will continue to preach 75/80 percent of the time, as she has in the past, but other Sundays the pulpit will be filled by guests and volunteers because of the absence of a second minister. The "guest preacher" line-item in the 2011 budget was increased for this very reason.

In addition, only one month of a four-month Sabbatical has been taken. The Personnel Committee and Pastoral Relations Committee are supporting Kathleen in planning for that Sabbatical time to explore a Doctor of Ministry program at Wesley Theological Seminary in Congregational Leadership. This may begin in 2011 as part of her standard study leave and possibly involve Sabbatical time.

Many are aware of Karen Falkenstein's dual role as office manager and book keeper. A decision was made by the board to allow her 1-2 full days a month to work from home on days before Board meetings and 4 days annually for organi-

zation and cleanup. Please be aware that lay volunteers may be covering the office some days when you call.

Phil Gilliland will continue to provide leadership as our licensed lay minister of community life. Lurette Arledge is excited to have a new partner in the music program with the addition of organist Wesley McCune, who has graced us with wonderful sounds from our glorious Casavant organ.

Rob Paxton has brought new vitality and leadership to our Safe Haven ministry as its coordinator, a position which is funded by Fairfax County. The addition of an assistant, Erin McKenney, has helped immensely as we seek to find the proper balance between Safe Haven as a ministry of FCC (and other participating churches) and the requisites of being a partner with the county.

We have many gifts and graces as a congregation. We are confident that we all can respond to God's call to us faithfully if we embrace our Disciples of Christ heritage to be a "priesthood of all believers." It is our sincerest wish that we can improve our financial situation and put back those things that were eliminated in the most recent budget.

Please support our fine staff in this endeavor, and know that your concerns, ideas and feedback about our ministry needs and the new configuration can be addressed to the board officers, Personnel Committee members, Kathleen, or the Pastoral Relations Committee.

## Lent & Easter Sunday at FCCFC

By Drex George, Jr.

We have celebrated the birth of our Lord and then his life and teaching over the last several months. It is now time to begin to focus on the seminal events of Holy Week. Lent has long been a period of penitence and self-examination, and so during this season we follow Jesus' journey from his baptism by John the Baptist, through his ministry, to the cross.

The Worship Council and Ministerial staff worked together to develop a season of events that we hope will help our congregation in preparing for Easter. Our theme for Lent will be "Touching Lent" and each week's focus will be on one of the symbols of the season.

Listed below are the dates and themes of our services:

March 9 – Ash Wednesday Service (7:30 PM)

March 13 – Touching Emptiness

March 20 – Windborne

March 27 – Drawing Water

April 3 – Sight of Light

April 10 – Bone Dry...Living Still

April 17 – Parade to Passion

April 21 – Maundy Thursday Service (6:30 PM)

April 24 – Touching Life

Palm Sunday (April 17) will include both the children's Palm Processional and the reading of the passion of Christ. Our Maundy Thursday service will feature a Seder meal and will mark the beginning of the 24 Hour Chain of Prayer (see article on right).

Easter Sunday will begin with the Sunrise Service at 7:00 AM in our outdoor Chapel. The service will be followed by the traditional Easter Breakfast, children's Easter Egg hunt, Sunday School, and then our 10:00 AM service.

Please join us!



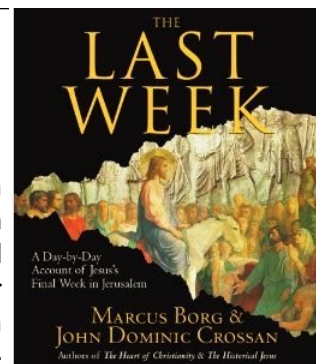
## Adult Lenten Study Monday Evenings, March 14 – April 18

Lent is the most sacred season in the Christian year: a six week period in which we are encouraged to re-engage with our Christian faith through prayer, study, self-examination, and personal discipline.

This year, Rev. Chesson will offer a Lenten study based on the book *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus' Final Days in Jerusalem*, by Marcus Borg and J. Crossan. The book will guide us in an in depth study on the final week of Jesus' life, focusing on Mark's narrative, "to tell and explain, against the backdrop of Jewish high-priestly collaboration with Roman Imperial control, the last week of Jesus' life on earth." We will discover "what Jesus was passionate about" as a way of understanding why his life ended in the passion of Good Friday and what that can mean for our own personal discipleship.

The study will meet for six consecutive Monday nights, March 14 – April 18, from 7:15 – 9 PM.

Please sign up at the display in the entrance foyer.



## 24 Hour Chain of Prayer

The Chain of Prayer is a continuous prayer by many persons during a certain period of time. The Chain of Prayer is a powerful force that offers to those who share in it the opportunity for a time of uninterrupted dialogue with God. When our congregation keeps its Prayer Vigil, it becomes an essential link in a vast Chain of Prayer. Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregations are thus joined together in unbroken prayer from the early hours of January 1 until the beginning of Easter morning.

FCCFC will participate in the Chain of Prayer beginning at 8:00 PM on Maundy Thursday (April 21) and continuing through 8:00 PM on Good Friday (April 22). We will break the 24 hours into half-hour time periods, which means we will need 48 people to sign up and participate.

The sign-up sheet will be available March 20 on the bulletin board in the Foyer. Please consider joining in this global endeavor.

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**Got News?**

The First Christian Letter is published seasonally. Approaching deadlines are published in the Quick Takes.

Send information or inquiries to:  
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**My Two Cents**

At the board retreat in January, the mantra for the day was action.

Not only were we to decide what we were going to do, but also when and how we were going to do it. To set the tone, it was important to construct an atmosphere that allowed brainstorming without being so wide open as to be counterproductive.

As I looked back at 2010, many ideas were discussed, but not always acted upon. Interestingly enough, as these ideas were listed on paper, an acronym came to mind: GRAPE.

**G**rowth, **R**etention, **A**ccess, **P**articipation and **E**ducation made up a large number of the agenda items emerging from last year's board meetings. *This was a perfect way to focus our attention on the concepts that seemed to be most pertinent.*

However, these ideas in and of themselves make for little more than an academic exercise if we do not have measurable goals that can be set and achieved in a specific amount of time. Such as:

- How do we grow the congregation? Are we



**Welcome back, Marshall!**

keeping everyone in the church who walks through the doors?

- Is there adequate accessibility for all, both physically and philosophically?
- Have we maximized our congregation's ability to participate in the leadership and life of our church?
- How do we educate the entire congregation about the board's intentions and decisions as well as the financial reality that is hitting us?

These were the types of questions that each "passion group" was asked to collaborate over and turn into an action plan for the future.

At the same time, it has become more and more evident that current leadership models do not fit our ever-changing situation.

In the past, councils had specific projects and responsibilities for which they were accountable. As a result, the board, as we know it, was living in silos. There was very little interaction and the only time that we ever found out what was going on was

*The Rev. Marshall Dunn is often teased for his frequent hand movements when he's preaching, and he did the same on Sunday, Feb. 27, when he urged contributions for the Week of Compassion. At left, he seems to be telling us the size of the fish he caught last summer.*

*At right, he tells the truth.*

**by Mark Fredenburg**

at a quarterly board meeting or in a newsletter article.

Maybe it is time for our current form of leadership to evolve into one that crosses between councils. How much more could we accomplish, if you used each team to hybridize our ideas rather than to keep them to ourselves? To that end, the GRAPE model will endeavor to encourage individuals on the board and those in the congregation to seek those areas in which they feel the most passionate.

Are you a gardener? A photographer? A writer?

Do you have great ideas, but need a team to do the work?

Do you have only a little time to donate and therefore cannot sign up for full time commitment?

Why not do something that you find interesting? The questions can go on and on, but the answer is always the same. What do YOU want YOUR church to be?

Maybe if you peel the grape, you will find your answer.

