

First Christian Letter

September/October 2010

Volume LIII, Issue 7



Rev. Kathleen Kline Chesson
Senior Minister

Mark Granfors-Hunt
Director of Program Ministries
Youth and Young Adult 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.

New Leadership for Safe Haven

The church's Safe Haven feeding and shelter program, one of the largest in Northern Virginia, has hired two leaders with experience in helping the poor.

Rob Paxton, 55, who will take over Caralita Moore's job as coordinator of the program, and Erin McKenney, 46, who will serve as his assistant, say they are enthusiastic about the program's further possibilities.

Paxton, born and raised in Northern Virginia, has a master's degree in public policy from George Washington University and worked in marketing for Intel Corp. for five years before becoming a realtor. He has

also taught financial education courses for the poor for Fairfax County, a job where he heard about the opening here.



McKenney, a native of Ft. Thomas, Ky., is a graduate of Georgetown College in the Bluegrass State, located near Lexington, where she played basketball and volleyball. With a degree in marketing and finance, she moved here in 1985 and worked in marketing and the call

center at Verizon. She left in 2005 and dedicated her life to volunteering to help the poor, although she does do some short-term jobs. "I'm a good saver," she said. Connected with the outreach activities at Annandale Methodist Church, she has helped poor people in the U.S. and in many countries around the world.

Rev. Chesson and Phil Gilliland, head of FCCFC's Safe Haven Coordinating Committee, said they are pleased with the new hires. And Paxton and McKinney said they are eager to build the program and engage more churches to cooperate in

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From the Board Chair

This time last year I was trying to discern what God had in mind for me as I was approached to be the next Board Chair at FCCFC. It was not a decision that I took lightly and therefore made sure that I was coming into it with my eyes wide open. One year later, I am a bit grayer (especially in my beard) and whole lot wiser to the inherent responsibilities of the position. At the Board Leadership Retreat in January, I tried to create a framework of goal setting for

our ministry councils and a consistent format for meetings. I was thrilled that at our first Board meeting, reports consisted of where we were headed instead of where we had been. It was exciting to hear each of us espouse the goal of moving forward and how their team was going to help us get there. To that end, I believe that we have made huge progress with outreach, evangelism and

by Mark Fredenburg



worship. We have struggled the most in facilities. Recently, a group found ways that the position could be broken down into smaller roles and this has worked so far. It is this observation that some things just don't work the same way they did in the past. People's geographi-

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Charge of the Light Brigade

Leave it to three guys to keep the lights on—Bill Miller, Frank Miller and Bob Goodman. Every so often, they will get together and replace burned-out bulbs with the young and the incandescent.

Recently, they covered every nook and cranny of the building to replace unlit bulbs, particularly those that light up exit signs. The Fire Department frowns on unlit exit signs, says Goodman.

They screwed in seven or eight bulbs in the latest round of replacement, but Bill Miller (who does all the climbing on ladders when the need arises) isn't sure exactly how many lights are in FCCFC's complex. Once intrepid

climbers, Frank and Bob merely hold the ladder, they say.

Frank and Bob know there is



trouble at home if they get too adventuresome and start climbing again. "He'd better not," said Frank's wife Judy. But they can regale you with stories about climbing on roofs and pulling out that 30-foot ladder.

The hardest part is replacing the high lights in the sanctuary. In most cases, bulbs can be screwed in by using long poles. But according to Bill Miller, a light directly above where the communion table is proved troublesome. When they tried to unscrew it, it shattered. Then they rolled out the big ladder, and Bill climbed to dizzying heights, only to discover the whole fixture was broken.

Asked how high he had to climb, Bill said, "It's up there." But he didn't feel any unease or fright over being up so high and brushed off the challenge as routine. "I was raised on the side of a mountain in West Virginia," he said.

The Choir Returns by Lunette Arledge

Scripture encourages us to "make a joyful noise to the Lord." To that end, the music program will kick off its fall season in September. The choir resumes rehearsals on Sept. 9 and returns to the loft on Sunday, Sept. 12.



We look forward to wonderful music-making throughout the fall and to a meaningful and delightful season of Advent. If you want to join a creative group that works hard and has a great time doing it, now is a good time to get started.

Our annual choir retreat will be held at Massanetta Springs Retreat Center in Harrisonburg Sept. 17-18. If you'd like to sing with the choir or participate in any other musical group, contact Lunette Arledge. We gladly welcome new members.

When Autumn Leaves Start to Fall...

By Ginny George

The **Shrine Mont** retreat will be held at the foot of the Great North Mountain in the Shenandoah Valley Oct. 22-24. Everyone is invited for unique worship experiences, fellowship, autumn colors, and delicious home-style meals. If you would like to go or have questions, contact the directors, Drex and Ginny George, ASAP, by phone 703-425-8439 or email drexgeorge@verizon.net. Full payment is due Oct. 10.

And... **THE PUMPKINS ARE COMING!** If you haven't seen First Christian's front lawn turn orange during the last few weeks of October, you're in for a treat . . . as well as a fun opportunity to participate in hands-on Outreach! The pumpkins will be arriving at noon on **Sunday Oct. 10**. Everyone is invited to stay after church for lunch, followed by

the Loading of the Pumpkins from truck to lawn. For the following three weeks, we'll need small groups of members, families, friends, etc. to volunteer to help man the sales booth each day. Bob McCoy or Mark Fredenburg will be calling.

The Outreach Council is looking for volunteers to make one Saturday especially festive, with a moonbounce, hotdogs on the grill, popcorn, face-painting, etc. We're targeting either Oct. 16 or 30, depending on when we can get the most folks involved. If you would be able to help out on one of those dates, please contact Ginny George at her phone number above or by email at ginygeorge@verizon.net.

P.S., now would be a great time to start cleaning out your holiday decorations since we're planning to set up a "decorate on a budget" sales table as part of this Fall Festival, with proceeds helping to fund our Christmas "Angel Tree" giving.

From the Pastor...

By Rev. Kathleen Kline Chesson

The curtains at my grandparents' cabin on a remote Minnesota lake are yellowed and dingy, coated with years of dust and soot that have adhered like memories to the brass rods that hold them.

These tired old curtains have adorned the Fisher cabin since it was built on the Canadian border in 1946. As time has passed, they have become somewhat mythic in proportion to their function. The curtains, for the generations of children and grandchildren that followed, grew into an unconscious representation of Grandma Mabel herself. Their original beauty and quality began to fade as rips and holes appeared. Unable to be removed for cleaning (my mom had carefully sewn the material to the rods themselves), the third generation of Fishers (of which I am one) never dared remove them, for to do so felt almost as if we would be removing a part of Grandma herself.

As human beings we can become very attached to *things* as we cling to the memories, meanings and dreams that such *things* can represent. My grandma's curtains are an example – but not just the curtains. The Fisher cabin today looks virtually identical to the way it looked 64 years ago... all the original furniture remains with the exception of a green chair which folded under my father's girth. Unfortunately, however, much about the cabin is falling apart. The roof needs to be replaced; the boat dock needs constant attention from the pounding of the lake's waves; the boat itself is a 1972 model; the septic system, out of compliance and obsolete, had to be capped. This year we had no flush toilet and, adding insult to injury, the hot water heater broke down. Yet the cabin retains its amazing beauty even as it slowly deteriorates, the overpowering expense of keeping it up to date so challenging during these harsh economic times.



It is very, very difficult to face certain realities – to consider that Grandma's design of the cabin should and must transform with the passage of time...not only to be in compliance with environmental regulations but also to accommodate the changing generations' needs and wants. A telephone line was put in years ago as my parents aged. My cousin brought in a stereo. Will my children or their cousins dare to add a TV, computer, or even insulate the cabin for longer use? I am torn. Part of me wants it left untouched, but it is really not up to me. Grandma and Grandpa wanted the cabin for successive generations and never expected we would try and memorialize them within its brick and mortar (or, should I say, pine logs and stone fireplace).

The church is not so different. Sometimes we become so attached to what we have always known that to make any changes whatsoever can feel like sacrilege. But, as First Christian prepares for the new season, we will continue to work together to consider small changes to improve the future. The key is to be open and humble in our journey, committed to goodwill and faithful service both to each other and to Our Lord.

Three weeks ago, with the somewhat reluctant agreement of my cousins, I carefully removed the old curtains. The result was immediate and amazing. The view of the lake through the trees brightened. The pine wood paneling shone like long ago. Of course, all that light made the old furniture look even more tired and worn. It, too, is ready for change. Maybe next year.

With Love long lasting and renewed,
Your Pastor,

Kathleen



News and Notes

Congratulations to **Dick and Cathy Brooks** who have recently become grandparents again. Catherine Gloria Brooks, known as Kate, was born on Aug. 25, and weighed exactly eight pounds. The daughter of Laura and James Brooks, Kate is healthy, brown-haired and beautiful.

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Our Dear Church Family,

Words cannot express the love that we feel for you all. Your prayers, gifts of transportation, food, cards, music and words of support have sustained Ken and our entire family during these challenging times. We know we are never alone and that you are a phone call away.

Bless you one and all,

The Vandruff Family

**Ken, Jane Sarah, Lara,
Elizabeth & Gary**

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Congratulations to **Bill and Ruth Neikirk**, who will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on Sept. 10. They will cap their celebration with a trip to Hawaii in November which will include the "usual" beauty of Hawaii, along with the opportunity to watch their beloved Kentucky Wildcats play in the Maui Invitational basketball tournament. Aloha!

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Dear First Christian,

Words alone could never express our deep appreciation for the most beautiful, never to be forgotten, memorial services that honored Bill. The heartfelt words and outstanding music have given us a memory that Bill would have been so proud of.

For all of the loving kindness shown to us by all of the First

Christian Church we will forever hold you tenderly in our hearts.

Barbara & Rocky LaLiberté

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Hello Rev. Chesson,

As I begin my long awaited retirement, we wanted to let you know how much we appreciated your support over these past seven years. We have felt your support through your willingness to allow us to utilize your entire church to support our studio. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for allowing us to feel so welcomed in your church. May God continue to bless you and the First Christian Church family.

With love and sincere gratitude,

Ernest & Frances Caldwell

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A Certificate of Appreciation was presented to **Katherine Dey** on June 22, 2010, for exceptional voluntary service and dedication to the Transportation Program of the American Red Cross in the National Capital Region. This is her second honor of late!

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The fifth in our series of Special Offerings will be highlighted on Sept. 26 and Oct. 3. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) celebrates the Gospel teaching that

God's children come from all places and that the power of love at God's table is able to bring together all races, languages, cultures and traditions. **The Reconciliation Ministry Special Ministry Offering** is used to support intentional dialogue, inclusive worship and experiential education to break down the barriers of racism and prejudice. Although this denominational offering is administered at the national level, supporting nation-wide and world-wide reconciliation activities, half of the proceeds are returned for use within our own, diverse region. Please prayerfully consider what you can contribute.

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The church board on Sept. 14 will discuss a counterproposal to its plan to remove some pews in the back of the church. More than 40 members, including active members and some no longer able to attend, have signed a statement in opposition.

Jeff Hill, who heads a committee exploring the aesthetics of the board's proposal, said no pews would be removed until a plan detailing a budget for furniture, carpeting, lighting, pew storage, among others, is approved by the board. He said his committee is well aware of the concerns.

The counterproposal says: "We do not consider it advisable to remove the back six pews [three per side] under the Church Sanctuary Balcony to give the appearance in a more limited area of a larger attendance. Such a property change would considerably lessen the existing beautiful design of the Sanctuary as the founders intended."

Safe Haven

(Continued from page 1)

providing meals.

"I took the job because I wanted to help people," said Rob. "It is rewarding—even more so in working with volunteers. The spirit that they bring is contagious." Already, he said, he has put



in more than the required hours because of that dedication.

And he and Erin are keen on trying to help

train some of the clients, perhaps with jobs and also with language training if our church will go along.

For an August 12 program

dedicated to Safe Haven's founder, the late Bill LaLiberte, and to Fernando and Erika Reyes-Ortiz, popular Hispanic leaders forced to move back to Bolivia, Rob obtained the services of David Dexter, a local popular chef, to cook a barbecue meal.

"Chef Dave" not only did a fantastic job but also showed Paxton some cooking tips, Rob said. Now, Rob is interested in having cooking classes for the clients if it can be worked out.

With the economic crisis, Rob said he expected the demand for services for the poor will be greater. "I am so excited to have Erin here," he said, "We're on the same page."

McKenney said she had helped with disaster relief after Hurricane Katrina and has traveled to a number of countries, including Mozambique and Brazil, to help the poor. This work has "opened a whole new world for me," she said.



And she still plays basketball in a local women's league. She plays all positions, even point guard. During her college years at Georgetown, she said she averaged between 12 and 14 points.

Rob, who graduated from Thomas Jefferson High School and George Mason University, is also a musician, playing the bass guitar. He has played in the Fairfax Symphony and has long been acquainted with John and Penny Farris, who were instrumental in getting the symphony started.

From the Board Chair

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cal distance from the church and the shrinking number who can be at church during the day mean that alternatives must be considered. To do this we must openly communicate about what we believe is God's plan for this church and what our role is in making that happen. Efforts to make Board discussions and decisions as transparent as possible have helped to make sure that the church does not function in a top down manner.

Which brings me to Jan. 24, 2010, when I stood in the pulpit and gave a "sermon" on Comfort Zones. It was intended to be a call to volunteerism and one of new beginnings. While I felt like I

was heard, an impassioned speech is only as good as the results that it generates. The percentage of members of the congregation that joined teams increased slightly and a few more individuals stepped up to be leaders, but my dream of everybody doing a little "something" did not occur to the level that I had hoped for.

As we approach 2011, I want the Board to continue to move this congregation forward. How can we make this happen? To quote Field of Dreams, "Don't worry (Daddy), people will come." Maybe we need to ask some key questions. Here are a few to get you thinking: How about filling the parking lot with cars that can be seen from Route 7, instead of hidden in the back? What about

making FCCFC a beautiful place on the outside welcoming those that we already know and those we have not yet met. How can we make the inside of our building inviting and accessible, while maintaining the spiritual integrity of God's home? We must be careful with our answers. We may add window dressing, but appearances are only part of it. Cars, flowers, plants, and a newly decorated building are nice touches, but it is the people inside the edifice, not the décor that makes the church function. It is my hope that we can combine and focus our energy on a way to make FCCFC what our founders intended; a place that invites people to find Jesus Christ and fellowship with others in a safe and loving environment.

What Makes a Children's Moment?

We asked Rev. Chesson and Mark Granfors-Hunt, minister to youth and young adults, to detail the importance of the children's moment on Sundays.

MARK GRANFORS-HUNT: In inviting children forward, I try to be more interactive than didactic, even though I want them to say what they've learned as positive reinforcement. I attempt to provide a sense of the presence of God as something comforting and interactive. I try to be approachable to show how they may approach both God and the Church.

These kids are working to find their boundaries within the congregation—how to be pleasing and how to act/react appropriately. Sometimes the kids know how cute they are, or their answers have been learned by rote. I'm delighted when they struggle for an answer. Then surprising, delightful answers often

come out. I aim to encourage an honest response more than the 'right' answer. I also want them to have some fun.

Partly my hope is that when our children become adults, they may fondly remember the times in worship in the house of God, where they were accepted just as they are, for who they are.

REV. CHESSON: Children's moment is important for me because 1. Through it they are able to develop a sense of belonging to the whole body of Christ. 2. It shows that worship is not exclusively adult, and that if we don't include the children, they will begin to question their value and purpose as a part of the worshiping community. Plus, often they provide the deepest, most genuine insights of the entire hour! 3. I'd like them to learn something, or, more often, re-enforce what they



already know.

On Aug. 29, I tried something I may continue. In the Luke scripture, I tried to make Jesus, and what he was up, become real to them. Then I asked them to pay attention when I read the full scripture later and see if they could answer this question, "What did Jesus want the people and us to understand about what he thought was most important?" The aim would be to have the children's moment turn into a process of engagement.

The Early Service

The early service begins at 8:15 and ends at 9:00. Those who attend share fellowship and communion. Only a small number of the Church's members regularly join in this service, and so it is held in the space between the foremost pews and the steps leading up to the altar.

This early meeting is ideal for those who work later on Sundays, or who prefer a smaller and more intimate service. There are about six "regulars" who share their experiences, their concerns, and their quiet passion for Christianity. By coming together every Sunday, they have created a pleasant but informal community under the larger auspices of First Christian.

Rev. Chesson often leads this



informal service, and Mark Granfors-Hunt has brought his insights and spirituality to almost every gathering, so that those meeting at 8:15 are often doubly blessed. They welcome visitors and any Church members who want a quiet beginning to the celebration of the Lord's day.

Laura Michele Ferrante can often be encouraged to sing for

us, and her memory for wonderful hymns is extraordinary. Herb Middle can be counted on to offer what I can only call a "common sense" view of Christianity. Herb's a philosopher, though he'd be the first to deny it, and he's also a rarity nowadays—a practicing Christian.

Joyce Bowen, who practices both physical and spiritual healing, is also a "regular," as is Sharon Blake, whose warm laughter is the music of the angels. I set up the chairs and put them away when we're done.

Together, we're our own "miniature congregation," celebrating the week just past and asking God's blessing on the week to come.

by Tom Hone

“An Uneasy Faith: Finding the Hidden and Confounding Truth”

Or

Sometimes the Bible records some pretty crazy things and it is really difficult to figure out what they mean...

The blessing of following the lectionary (an ecumenical order of biblical readings that, when used consistently will expose you to much of the Bible in three years), is that it helps to organize the Hebrew Scriptures, Psalms, Gospels, and Pastoral Letters in such a way that there is a connected theme, and the preacher is encouraged to engage the congregation on a wide variety of biblical themes.

The challenge of following the lectionary is that often the chosen readings are, simply put, confusing, disconnected and easily misunderstood! Sometimes the readings confront a particular theological viewpoint we don't agree with, and simply state, with raw force, a biblical imperative. Take Jeremiah 4:22, for example: *“For my people are foolish, they do not know me; they are stupid children, they have no understanding.”* What do we do with that but recognize that as much as that passage says what we don't want to hear, it is very often the exact truth.

Other times, passages are so complex that to preach on them would require more time than people are generally willing to spend – at least in the worship setting. Both Bible study *and* a thoughtful sermon would be necessary for more complete understanding.

The series of scripture readings for September and October fit into this category. They are challenging, raw, easily misunderstood, and often contradictory of our knowledge and understanding about God. Yet, your faithful team of worship leaders has decided that it is best to confront them anyway and try to wrap our hearts and heads around them ~ and find where God is leading us through them! We will explore what makes us *uneasy* about the biblical passages assigned and then try and identify Jesus' hidden message that can help us into understanding and deeper faith. We will also try and provide accessible Bible study for the congregation to access so that more can be accomplished in the sermon.

We hope that you can enjoy what we have come up with, and perhaps find a way into a new understanding of some of the more *difficult* scriptures that we'd prefer to ignore!

Faithfully Presented,

Kathleen, Mark, Lunette and Phil

Lectionary

Sunday, Sept. 12

Jeremiah 4: 11-12,
22-28

1 Timothy 1: 12-17
Luke 15: 1-10

Sunday, Sept. 19

Jeremiah 8: 18-9:1
1 Timothy 2: 1-7

Luke 16: 1-13

Sunday, Sept. 26

Jeremiah 32: 1-3a,
6-15

Psalms 91: 1-6, 14-16

1 Timothy 6: 6-19
Luke 16: 19-31

Sunday, Oct. 3 World Communion

Sunday

Psalms 137
1 Timothy 1: 1-14
Luke 17: 5-10

Sunday, Oct. 10

Jeremiah 29: 1, 4-7
2 Timothy 2: 8-15
Luke 17: 11-19

Sunday, Oct. 17

Jeremiah 31: 27-
1 Timothy 3: 14-4:5
Luke 18: 1-8

Sunday, Oct. 24

Shrine Mont Retreat

Guest Preacher to be announced

Joel 2:23-32
Psalm 65
2 Timothy 4:6-8,
16-18
Luke 18:9-14

Sunday, Oct. 31

Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4
Psalm 119:137-144
2 Thessalonians 1:1-4,
11-12
Luke 19:1-10



Grass growing in the sand near the surging ocean gives a quiet sense of stability in this unsettled world. Without protection, the sand is fickle and, like many people, inclined to go where the wind goes. All is fine when the wind is gentle, but not when it grows to gigantic proportion. Then, entire coast-lands are threatened. But the grass is a stabilizer, quietly building its defenses so that beaches have a better chance of survival. Like God, it should be viewed with awe.

~Bill Neikirk

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Got News?

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

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In Remembrance: Bill LaLiberte and Dottie Gilmore

How do you say goodbye to someone like Bill LaLiberte or like Dottie Gilmore? Well, you don't. They are too much a part of us, and we are too much a part of them.

William LaLiberte launched the Safe Haven shelter and feeding program. He could not bear the thought of homeless, hungry people shivering in the cold or even freezing to death. Dorothy Bell Gilmore was a deacon, and her husband played a key role in construction of the baptistery.

LaLiberte engendered enormous respect for his tireless efforts for the poor and downtrodden. He would look into the eyes of a homeless man and say, "there but for the grace of God go I." He was a central, and gentle, church leader in other endeavors, including the annual pumpkin sale to raise money for the needy. And he didn't miss a Sunday School class in more than 40 years.

Bill, born on Oct. 11, 1918, was a courageous Navy pilot of 25 years who garnered three distinguished flying crosses, 11 air medals and the Presidential unit citation. In action over the Pacific, he once pulled his plane out of a fiery dive at the last minute and landed it on a carrier, saving the lives of his crew. He took part in raids during the Korean War. He worked in NATO command during

the Cuban Missile crisis and as a consultant to defense contractors.

Born in Brewer, Maine, Bill came from a caring family fighting off deprivation in the Great Depression. His father—a talented musician — contracted tuberculosis, and his mother worked hard to make ends meet. Even at that, the family invited hoboes to dine. Bill loved to tell the story about his dad, who led a band that played at venues in New England. When he used a young clarinet player as a sub one night, his father told the young man he was terrible. The young man sang some songs between sets, and his dad told him he couldn't sing, either, and never to come back again. It turned out this encounter with Bill's dad did not hurt the career of Rudy Vallee, who later became a singing sensation, a band-leader and movie star.

At Safe Haven, Bill helping others the way he had been taught as a young boy. In 2002, Fairfax County honored him with the honorary title of "Lord Fairfax" for his efforts for the homeless. "God filled Bill LaLiberte with purpose and resolve and through this we have all been blessed," said Rev. Chesson in her eulogy.

Dottie Gilmore was also born in Maine—in Bangor—on Feb. 6, 1920. A trained bookkeeper, she married Milt Gilmore, an

Army Air Corps pilot, in 1943. They moved to the Washington area, and became active members of First Christian Church in the 1950s. As head of the facilities committee, he oversaw construction of the baptistery and installation of the red carpet.

Dottie was highly involved with the Christian Women's Fellowship. Their two sons remember helping their mom fill the communion cups on Sundays. She and her husband built a summer home in her beloved Maine.

Rev. Chesson noted that Dottie broke into a broad smile and gave a thumbs up when the minister mentioned that she was going to baptize several young members of the church. Later, Rev. Chesson realized why. It was her connection to the baptistery. "The baptistery felt like it was part of her," Rev. Chesson said.

Her husband was in communications for AT&T and C&P telephone. Dottie was self-reliant and strong, witty and resourceful. She worked as a bookkeeper for two companies and also at a retail store during the Christmas season. She loved to sew for her grandchildren.

And, like Bill LaLiberte, she possessed a keen wit. Describing the North Carolina (where she married) and Texas climates, Dottie said, "It was so hot the tumbleweed would snag your hose."