



First Presbyterian Church of Gulf Shores

NEWSLETTER



"Loving God, Growing in Faith, Sharing Christ's Love"

November 2011

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I subscribe to a daily spiritual quotation which comes to my email inbox. Recently, it asked the question, "What if the only things I had in my life today were the things I gave thanks for yesterday?" I started thinking about that. Would I have a home (did I give thanks for my home yesterday?). Would I have food, or a family, or an education today? Would I have running water and electricity? Would I have good roads to drive on, or something to drive? Would I have music, books or a warm shower? Would I have a computer or a cell phone or a bible? When was the last time I gave thanks for the police and fire protection? This could get extensive! This little exercise made me realize the vast number of things I take completely for granted every day.

Giving thanks, being grateful is very near the center of spirituality. Thankfulness is one of the indispensable spiritual practices. Gratitude orients our hearts in the proper direction. We are not our own Makers; we believe, as the Psalmist says, "It is He that has made us, and not we, ourselves" (Psalm 100). What can we take credit for? What do we have that we did not receive as a gift? "We are his people and the sheep of his pasture" which is why we are able to "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise."

What is the first thing you hear in the morning? I used to go into the kitchen and switch on the news as I made my morning tea. I decided to stop doing that. I don't want the first thing I hear to be the bad news. I will hear it all, eventually, but not first. I want the first thoughts I have to be thankfulness to God for all the good I am surrounded with; home, family, hot water, tea, life, the quiet of early morning, the prospect of a new day ahead. So now, the news waits in line behind the spiritual practice of thanksgiving.

Gratitude is the basis of our decisions about financial stewardship too. When we recognize that we are in God's hands, that he is the Source of everything we need, we come to understand that giving is actually "re-gifting" (in a positive sense). What we give is simply a portion of what we have been given.; "the Lord is good." (Psalm 100)

Grace and peace, *Pastor Steven*

At its stated meeting of October 25, 2011, the Session

- Reviewed the treasurer's report which reported unusual expenses for the month, including insurance and building maintenance expenses; total income for September \$12,095.43 and total expenses \$21,451.28.
- Heard that the damaged thermostats have been replaced as well as two heating/cooling units, also damaged by the lightning.
- Heard a better type of surge protector will be purchased and that a dumpster will replace our trash cans.
- Voted to call a congregational meeting November 6th to elect elders for the Class of 2014.
- Approved November 20th as Stewardship Sunday.
- Noted that we should urge our regular givers to pledge as it is difficult to plan the budget without firm estimates.
- We're happy to learn the nominees for elders for the Class of 2014 are Russell Gaston, Ellen Roberts, Craig Jackson, Gary Klussman, and Bob Roberts.
- Considered the possibility of using a program called "Grief Share" to provide support to our congregation and possibly the community.

Elder for the Month of November

The Elder for the month of November is Chris Roper (752-3499). You may contact Chris if the pastor is temporarily unavailable for any reason. This contact will be completely confidential.

Why Give to the church?

Every stewardship season I review why I give to the church. I would like to share these reasons with you.



I give because of my own spiritual need to take the would-be god Mammon off the throne so that God alone can be King in my life. The only way to knock Mammon off the control center throne that it keeps trying to claim is to subvert it by doing the exact opposite of what Mammon wants me to do. Mammon hoards, so I give. Mammon is fear-based: “maybe you don’t have enough yet, so hang on to what you’ve got.” I claim that “In God we Trust” - as my money says. Well, if I trust in God to provide “enough” then I have to prove it by refusing to listen to Mammon’s constant chatter of fear. Mammon always says things that are partly true (the best lies are always partly true). Mammon says “the future is uncertain”. True enough, but the future is in God’s hands, and therefore I will not fear. Mammon says, “Prices are rising.” True enough, but God is faithful, and so I will trust him. Mammon says, “Just this month, you need it.” True enough, I always can find reasons for “needing it” - I have a mortgage, a child in college, an adolescent at home, and auto-repair expenses. Yes, and next month I’ll have similar reasons, and the next month after that the same. But I will believe that God can and will provide for me this month, so I will reject Mammon’s temptation to withhold. There are a million little tricks Mammon tries to play with my heart and my mind. For the sake of my own spiritual life, for the sake of my faith in God who is the only and the true source of my security, I will give.

I value the church, so I give to make sure that I support it. I have been a member of a variety of churches in my life. None of them was perfect; all of them were comprised of humans like me. All of them nurtured my faith, week to week. All of them provided me with opportunities for worship and prayer, study and ways to serve. All of them fed me spiritually through the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. All of them provided me with a community of people who encouraged my faith, taught me in Sunday School, visited me in the hospital, and helped me through painful times. All of them gave me a way to celebrate Christmas and Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost. I was baptized in a church, as were my children, and someday the church will conduct my funeral service as a witness to the resurrection. I love the imperfect church because it is the church of Jesus Christ, my Lord. The church was his idea, and so I

value it. Of course, as with everything else I value, I prove it with my support.

I care about the ministries and missions that I support through giving to the church. I care about the people who are victims of disasters, so I am glad to be able to support them through my giving to the church which supports Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. I care about people who need decent housing, so I am happy to support Habitat for Humanity through my giving to the church. I care about the people who need the Christian Service Center's food pantry and "hand up" out of their crises. I am proud to be able to support, through the church, Presbyterian missionaries who are at work on my behalf all around the world. I have signed up to receive, every day, an email message with that day's page from the Mission Yearbook for Prayer and Study, so I can be aware of and pray for missionaries from Brazil to Burundi, and all points in between. The same could be said for all of the missions and ministries our church supports. I care about those ministries, and I support them through my giving to the church.

I support the church through my giving because I believe God expects me to, and I want to be obedient. God required the tithe, that is the first ten percent of income, from his people, Israel. They were harshly criticized by the prophets when they were lax and irresponsible about tithing. Read Malachi 3:8-12 - the language is really tough. Failure to tithe was called "*robbing God.*" That was the Old Testament; what about the New Testament? God still expects his people to give. In 2 Corinthians 9:6-7 we read,

"The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

God expects us to "*sow bountifully.*" It sounds to me as if a tithe would be the minimum of "*bountifully.*" I believe God expects me to tithe, so out of obedience, I do. As with every other way in which we have opportunities to obey God, I believe that blessings follow obedience. But that is not why we obey - to get blessed. We obey because God is God; the blessing is simply icing on the cake.

There are some ideas that are NOT reasons I support the church.

- ***I do not support the church because there is a budget to meet.*** Yes, there is a budget, but I would support the church with my tithe even if all of the budgeted expenses were covered by an enormous endowment, because of the four reasons I just gave. None of those reasons go away, even if the budget is flush. I don't tithe because we need to repair an air conditioning unit or pay the light bill. I may respond to a special request and give over and above my tithe if there is a special need, but with or without a need, I would still give to the church.

- ***I do not give to the church for tax reasons.*** I am happy to take every deduction I can take, but my taxes have nothing to do with the four reasons I listed above. If the government takes away the charitable deduction, I will simply have to learn to live with less. And yes, God will help me figure out how to do it. By the way, in many other countries, there never has been such a thing as a charitable tax deduction - there certainly was no such thing during the time of Jesus in or Paul in the days of the Roman Empire! Taxes have nothing significant to do with the motivation to give to the church.

- ***I do not give because the church is one of my charities.*** I do support some other charitable organizations (although, not much, compared to my church support). Charities are causes I believe in which I support with "expendable income." In other words, I support them when I believe I can afford to. That is almost the exact opposite of how and why I support the church. The church is not a charity holding out her hand for left-overs. The church gets the "first fruits" of my income - not the dregs from the bottom of the barrel. The church is God's church, Christ's bride, the body of Christ; Jesus died for the church, she is not one among many "good causes" but rather is the unique vehicle of God's grace in action in our world.

• ***I do not support the church because all my other needs and most of my other wants are taken care of.*** I still have bills to pay. I don't go out to eat or buy new clothes nearly as much as I feel tempted to. I don't have all the "stuff" that looks so fun in the commercials. I don't take all the trips I would love to take. Big deal. I am not suffering. In fact, I have things the Kings of England and France never dreamed of: heat and air-conditioning on demand; hot water on demand; ice cubes on demand; pure water at the tap; machines that wash my dishes and my clothes, and even dry them for me; I have fresh fruit and vegetables all year around; I have spices, nuts, even sugar and salt (in moderation). If I want to go somewhere, I don't saddle a horse, I get into a clean, dry temperature-controlled car - or plane! I have music anytime, any style I want, from all over the world, from all the world's best and all the world's popular composers, performers and musicians, and I have all of it in high quality stereo headphones. I have excellent doctors and safe and effective medicines. I even have a dentist who never lets me feel pain! No, I don't have "everything" I could want - but there is no such thing as having "everything" a person could want, is there? As scripture observes, "*They eye never has enough of seeing....*" (Eccl 1:8)

No Regrets

There are many things I have regretted spending my money on. There are the things that didn't work as they were advertised to, or that broke quickly, or became obsolete when the new model arrived. There were the things that were supposed to be fulfilling or thrilling or meaningful that turned out not to be. There were the things that were great while they lasted, but did not last too long compared to the price I paid. There were the things that I didn't really need and didn't end up using. There were the dumb mistakes, the impulse purchases, the "good money after bad" expenditures. There have been a lot of things I regret spending money on. But I have never regretted supporting the church. My stewardship has not always been what it should. There have been times of failure on my part. I regret them. But I have never regretted the times I have been responsible, faithful and obedient. I have never lacked anything essential. I have never gone hungry or homeless. I have been blessed.

Why Pledge?

There are quite a number of us who give regularly, even generously, year by year, who do not fill out a pledge card. We are so thankful for faithful people who are good stewards of the blessings God has given. But we wonder: why do so many not pledge?



The best reason to pledge is because you want to help this congregation to be wise and responsible as we plan our budget. When we have a good idea about what people plan to give, we can make good decisions about what we can afford. Otherwise, we are guessing.

Why would someone not pledge? We don't know, but we were thinking that perhaps some people think that if they use an offering envelope from a box with their name on it, it's the same as a pledge. But it's not. We only count pledges from the pledge-cards that are sent out with the annual stewardship letter and the time-and-talent surveys. So, perhaps some people have intended to pledge, but didn't know how it works. Now that you know, please fill out a pledge card this year, and bring it with you to Dedication Sunday on November 20th.

Perhaps the reason some people do not pledge is uncertainty about future income. That is understandable, but still it would help us to know what your best guess estimate is. Pledges are not like testimony given in a courtroom. The church understands that unforeseen circumstances arise and that sometimes changes need to be made. It says right on the pledge card, "This commitment may be increased or decreased due to changing circumstances." All one need do is call the church office and specify the change, and it's done. If you had to do that, then again, it would help us; perhaps we would have to make changes in response to your changes; it is much better to know early rather than to figure it out after the fact.

Some people in other faith-traditions have been told that all pledges are wrong because Jesus said, "do not swear... let your yes be yes and your no be no." Nevertheless, these same folks are normally able to sign mortgages, sign contracts, sign credit card receipts, all of which are pledges. Besides, Jesus was not restricting promises; he was forbidding the practice of deceitfulness on the basis of

fingers-crossed type of excuses, like “but I didn't swear by heaven, so it doesn't count.”

Pledging helps our church to be responsible with our budget. Help us, please, by filling out a pledge-card this year.

Music Ministry News



On Sunday, November 13, we will gather as a church family to honor our organist of 28 years, Barbara Ellard White, as she retires from these many years of dedicated service. A special tribute will take place during our 10:45 Traditional Service, along with music especially chosen by Barbara. A reception will immediately follow in the Fellowship Hall.

Barbara joined the First Presbyterian Church of Gulf Shores in 1983, and soon thereafter began playing the piano and organ. Her love of music and desire to serve our Lord have been keenly evident as she has been a vital part of our Music Ministry, both at the organ bench and in the Choir. She was ordained as an Elder in 1991, and began serving as an Adult Sunday School teacher in 1997. She also served as our church representative at Equipping the Saints for the Presbytery of South Alabama in 2009.

Outside her church life, Barbara has made a meaningful contribution to our community. After teaching school for fifteen years in her home state of Mississippi, Barbara taught fourth grade at Elberta Intermediate School for twenty-one years. She was the United Way representative for the school, and in addition to the rigors of the academic curriculum, Barbara brought much of the arts to her school. She will long be remembered for her formation and leadership of the flutophone ensemble, which performed both at the school and in the community. The group was known for their unique ability and professionalism under Mrs. White's direction. She was also instrumental in enabling students to acquire scholarships through her work with the Gulf Coast Arts Council, of which she has served on the Board of Directors. Although now formally retired from teaching, Barbara's love for children and concern for their well-being continues to compel her to champion their cause, and last year, she stepped

into the role of Co-Coordinator of the Pleasure Island Tutoring Program at our church.

In her free time, Barbara enjoys cooking and entertaining for friends and family, reading, and watching home movies, both old and new. But closest to her heart, she says, is the desire to help others and make them happy. Certainly, all would agree, this is a goal well fulfilled. We will always be grateful to have been among those blessed with Barbara's talents and love. Her unwavering devotion to First Presbyterian has been both inspirational and essential in the life of our church.

Pam Winstead
Minister of Music

From the Treasurer's Office

Our fiscal year will soon close. The installation of a *Quick-Books* accounting system has made it a busy one. Thanks to

Dale Dusenbery for providing the software and to Billy Adcock for the countless hours spent on installation. The system is still undergoing refinement, but is already providing meaningful reports to Session and Ministry Teams, and enhanced information

recovery.

Through September our income exceeded expenses by \$11,000. However, fourth quarter expenses are projected to exceed income by about that much. We **MIGHT** break even for the year. Income and expense will both be down from last year. We continue to lose good contributors, but efforts to reduce expense are bearing fruit. It's interesting to note that monthly income in January, February and March averaged \$10,000 more than April, May and June. God bless our *Winter Family*.

We are now engaged in preparing the budget for 2012, and it's a struggle. We expect 2012 income to be down somewhat from 2011, and further reductions in the budget will be necessary. The most perplexing thing about our budgeting process is the fact that our membership does not seem to take

pledging seriously. For 2011 we received only 43 pledges from 82 potential giving units, totaling \$130,000. Yet, it appears we will have income of nearly \$200,000 from pledges plus contributions.

We URGE you to make a pledge for 2012. It will not only help with financial planning, it will also save us time when entering data into the Quick-Books system. If unforeseen circumstances necessitate changing your pledge at a later date, we can handle that. We will issue numbered envelopes for 2012 only to those who make pledges. There will be plenty of generic offering envelopes in the pews. If you can't pledge but need a box of envelopes you may request them from Molly.

Church Foundation

Our church has established a foundation so that we can plan our estates so that we can be a help to this congregation after we have gone on to be with the Lord and have joined the "church triumphant" in heaven. Please pick up a brochure on the table at church, or call us for more information. The crazier the world gets, the more we could use your help to vouchsafe our future. We want your grandkids' generation to have a place to worship, serve and grow.



Toiletries for the Homeless

Many of you have brought to the church single-serving size shampoos, soaps, and toothpaste which we have been collecting for the homeless; thank you! Please keep them coming. We organize them into packets to make it easy to hand them out. The first batch (nearly 100 packets) was taken down to the Government Street Presbyterian Church in Mobile which has an extensive ministry, under the leadership of Sally Small's niece, Rev. Kathryn Threadgill, including meals and bible study. They plan to keep collecting toiletries for a big Christmas distribution. They plan to have about 250 homeless people who need these, so please continue to bring in supplies when you can.



First Presbyterian Tutoring Program



Tutoring sessions will begin on November 8, 2011. The tutors are anxious to being a new class of fourth and fifth graders. Students are helped with daily homework, practice in reading fluency, multiplication fact drill, and shared reading Library books. Students relax upon arrival and visit with their tutors. We are so fortunate to share transportation with the First Methodist Church. Barbara White and Sandra Kant are co-coordinators for this mission project .

Pledge up-date

Not quite sure where you stand on your pledge for the year? Check with Larry Rice or Billy Adcock for a quick update.



Arts and Craft Fair

We are organizing our first Arts & Crafts Fair and need vendors. If you or any of your friends have handmade items you would like to sell, contact Lorna Baker at LBAKER1317@aol.com or Jean Adcock at 974-3148 for more information.

Happy Birthday!

Olivia Lawrence
Christopher House
Linda Wallace
Jude Rice
Shirley McCausland
Sandy Moody Klussman



Please make sure the church office has your birthday month!

Presbyterian Women

For our December meeting we will be meeting with the Foley Presbyterian Women on Tuesday, December 6 at 10:00 am. The program will begin at 10:00, followed by a “tasting bee luncheon”. All women are invited. Please RSVP the First Presbyterian Church of Foley (943-8325) so they will know how many of us to expect. All women are invited to join us.



Lunch Bunch



Lunch Bunch will meet on Friday, November 18, at 11:30. Please watch your bulletins for the place. A sign up sheet is available in the Fellowship Hall, or call the church office (968-7720) for reservations. All women are invited to join us.

The Book Club



The Book Club will meet on Monday, November 14 at 9:30 a.m., at the home of Larry & Eula Patzer. The book for October is *The Ice Princess* by Ann Rice Sedon. All are invited.

AC/Heating units replaced

Many many thanks to all of our winter family who contributed so generously to our project last winter to build up a fund for replacing a heating/air conditioning unit. We have eleven of these, of various ages, and normally anticipate needing to replace about one every year. Because part of the unit sits outside, they are subject to a lot of salt in the air, being so near the Gulf, which probably speeds up corrosion. Well your generosity was a blessing in an unexpected way this year. We had a bad lightening storm that completely knocked out our thermostat control system and many of the programmable thermostats (one couple actually donated all of the money we needed to fix that! A huge blessing!). For a while we believe that was all the lightening damaged. But then we discovered that it had damaged the two units that heat or cool the sanctuary. Because of the fund that you built up, we had enough to replace both units with used units that should keep us feeling comfortable for a good number of years to come. Thank you all so much for how kind you are to our congregation. We thank the Lord for you frequently around here; may God bless you for blessing us all.



National Organ Donor Sunday, November 13th



This Sunday, November 13th is National Donor Sunday in which we distribute information about the need and benefits of being an organ and tissue donor. This is a very personal decision, but one that requires awareness and education. Please look over the materials we will make available and prayerfully consider whether you might be called to help give life to a person in need. Personally, I have a dear friend who waited years to finally receive a kidney; his had failed making regular dialysis necessary. Once he received his donated kidney, his life radically changed; he was able to return to his former life of work, ministry and service. What a blessing it is to be able to be the reason someone else is given new life!

CSC Monthly Activity for September 2011

The Center was open 21 days.



There were 196 client visits.

64 were new clients

132 clients were repeat for additional help

40 clients were given help with rent (\$16,907.00)

60 clients were given help with utilities (\$13,276.00)

10 clients received medical help (\$1,280.00)

13 clients received vehicular help (\$405.00)

15 clients received other help (\$165.00)

56 Referrals to the Holy Spirit Thrift Store, CSS, Mental health, Waterfront Mission, Community Services, Food Stamps

Food Pantry:

137 families were served. Family size ranged 1-7.

403 individuals were served.

Church Office

The Church Office will be closed Thursday and Friday, November 24 and 25 for Thanksgiving. We will re-open, Monday, November 28. Have a Happy Thanksgiving!



“Repair Baldwin” Organization is Launched

Baldwin County non-profit housing organizations, the Baldwin Homebuilders Association, Baldwin government and Baldwin churches have produced a unique Baldwin



Home Repair initiative. Its goal is to repair the homes of low-income residents around the county over the next several years. Repairing homes that low-income families cannot afford to repair is the most cost-effective way to alleviate housing needs. The Church plays a crucial role in this

initiative.

Encouraged and partially funded by the Baldwin County Commission, several nonprofit organizations formed a unique collaborative. Eastern Shore Affordable Housing, Habitat for Humanity, Ecumenical Ministries, Inc., Community Action, county churches, Baldwin Homebuilders Association, and the Baldwin Housing Alliance spent more than a year designing this ambitious, comprehensive, jointly-operated, county-wide home repair collaborative.

Repair Baldwin is a very significant initiative designed to repair the county's 4,000 houses that are owned by low-income elderly and others who legitimately haven't the capacity to repair their older homes. As it progresses, it will lead a strong coordinated movement of the hundreds and probably thousands of people and churches in Baldwin County who would love to do volunteer work a couple of times a year. It does NOT need financial support from churches, nor does it lay a heavy burden on their staff or

congregation. It needs mostly that churches become informed and bless the initiative, be a conduit to their interested members, and sign letters endorsing grant proposal requests when the entity writes them.

For further information contact Fr. Chris or Dan Hanson at Ecumenical Ministries, [251-767-0106](tel:251-767-0106) dhxtwo@yahoo.com.

Christmas Angels



We have received Christmas Angels from the Christian Service Center for children who may not have Christmas presents on Christmas morning without our help. Please help if you are able. You may bring your gift (unwrapped, with the angel you chose attached) to the Christian Service Center or to our church.

Spanish Fort is 50!

You are cordially invited to attend the 50th Anniversary Jubilee Celebration of the Spanish Fort Presbyterian Church, Saturday, November 19 and Sunday, November 20. Saturday there will be a community concert and picnic featuring the McPherson Family Bluegrass Band and Swinging with the Pops Baldwin Pops Big band from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. (please r.s.v.p. if you want to eat). Sunday Celebration Luncheon following the worship service, at 12:15, tickets are \$8.00, reservations required, call (251) 626-1242.



Game Day Breakfast A Huge Success

**submitted by
Jean Adcock**

Did you know that a few hard working men of our church recently hosted 104 hungry cheerleaders, football players and coaches from Gulf Shores High School? Dale Dusenbery and Chris Roper prepared 12 dozen scrambled eggs, tubs of biscuits, huge pans of grits, three spiral sliced



hams, and over 100 sausage patties. Billy Adcock set up enough tables and chairs to completely fill our Fellowship Hall, and when kids kept pouring in, ran to find more. Gary Klussman stopped in to help and was immediately put to work pouring milk and juice until the nine gallon jugs were all empty and we put out the quart of half-and-half for the last of the cereal. Billy had cut up platters of fruit, and we ran through three dozen cartons of yogurt. Everyone pitched in to clean up, with Dale washing all of the dishes, pots, and pans.

As Chairman of the Membership & Outreach Ministry Team, it was my pleasure to greet the team as they began to arrive at 6:15 AM. I was very impressed with the pleasant demeanor and good manners of our teens, especially considering the early hour. Teenagers are not known for being early risers! Many, many thanked me for having them to our church for breakfast. They all listened intently to Pastor Steven's devotion, and bowed their heads for prayer. They waited patiently until their tables were called to go through the lines. They moved over to welcome late comers to their already overfull tables. They made sure their tables were cleared, with trash in the bins and silverware in the tubs.

Our men have proven that they cannot only prepare breakfast for a couple dozen on a Saturday morning, but also prepare a congregational breakfast and then turn around and crank it up a notch to feed all of these teens! They truly used their hospitality skills to demonstrate Christian love as they reached out to our youth and welcomed them into our church home. It was a joy and a privilege to see so many begin their day with both physical and spiritual nourishment.

Our Christian Sympathy is extended to:

Mrs. Barbara Helms and family on the loss of Kenny Helms, Barbara's brother-in-law, on Friday, November 4. Please keep the Helms family in your prayers.

