



First Presbyterian Church
1000 Penn Street
Fort Worth, TX 76102

**PERIODICALS
POSTMASTER:**
Send address changes to
The Penn Street Letter,
1000 Penn Street
Fort Worth, TX 76102

Church Office
Ph: 817.335.1231
Fax: 817.335.5663

WWW.FPCFW.ORG

THE
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LETTER

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DECEMBER 2017 | Volume 16, Number 12

The official monthly newsletter of First Presbyterian Church, Fort Worth

FPC INTRODUCES NEW DIRECTOR OF MUSIC/ORGANIST



We are excited to announce that **Ahreum Han Congdon** has accepted the position as Director of Music/Organist.

Ahreum (pronounced ah-room) is currently the Principal Organist, Assistant Music Director, and Artist in Residence at First Presbyterian, Davenport, Iowa. Prior to this, she was the organist at Saint

Andrew's Episcopal Church in Stamford, Connecticut; the Marquand Chapel Organist at Yale Divinity School; and has served on the music staff of three other Presbyterian churches.

Han Congdon has a Bachelor of Music in Organ Performance from Westminster Choir College, a Diploma in Organ Performance from Curtis Institute of Music, and a Masters of Music in Organ from Yale School of Music/Institute of Sacred Music. She is pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts in Organ at the University of Iowa, for which she has completed all but the final dissertation. She is comfortable with a variety of music: classical, African American Spirituals, World Music, Taize, and hymnody.

As the Director of Music/Organist, Ahreum will play the organ at worship services, supervise FPC's two music associates, and envision and oversee the entire music department. Michael Waschevski will continue to conduct the Chancel and Fellowship Choirs. Ahreum will accompany the Chancel Choir and Messengers Youth Choir. Han Congdon will start at FPC on Tuesday, January 16. She is married to Todd and they have two young boys.

The Search Committee has looked for exactly the right candidate and is joyful over the perfect match in the congregation's needs and Ahreum's remarkable abilities. The Committee included Carol Adcock, Mary Margaret Floyd, Ken Garlington, Stephanie Sheppard, Jeff Stark, and Michael Waschevski and Karl Travis, staff.

ADVENT DEVOTIONS

Week One Scripture: Isaiah 64:1-9, Psalms 80:1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37

We enter this season with scriptural doorposts signaling entries into devotion and thought. While Isaiah and the Psalmist yearn to experience more of God, each also voices trepidation: God is a source of both awe and fear. Paul's experience of grace leads him to boldly trust God's love. Strangely the Mark reading presents Christ prophesying his future return as apocalyptic and urges the faithful to be on guard and to stay awake. Three of the four readings express an almost fearful awareness that the Holy God is indeed UNPREDICTABLE.

Unpredictable enough to choose to try out being human.

Advent invites you to WAKE UP and respond: How do you personally feel about God's choice to do this? God so loves this world that God chooses to enter humanity and look outward experiencing human skin, sight, feelings, birth and death. Shouldn't we consider how enormous this is? Yet, many of us are like three of the writers—the deep mystery of God is overwhelming; so we, with gratitude, count on mercy. (And, sadly, we stay busy trying not to think too much about all of this.)

Will we go beyond seasonal nostalgia to the Christ-demanded action: WAKE UP? Will we choose to pay attention to how THE HOLY enfolds us unendingly? Can we lay down the cluttered noise of our lives and enter this season with our own renewed holy awareness? The Living Christ asks this.

Read the rest of our weekly Advent devotions online at fpcfw.org/adventdevotions or pick up a copy outside of each worship space Sundays, December 3, 10, 17, and 24.

Offered by the Spiritual Formation Committee

YOU CAN BE A HOLIDAY HELPER AT FPC

ROOM IN THE INN

The winter season begins Monday, December 4 in the Gym. Each Monday, we welcome 14 homeless men for an evening of hospitality and respite. Volunteer to play games, eat dinner, engage in conversation, and greet our guests. Serve from 5-7 p.m. (or anytime in between). Please contact Deneice Allen in the church office at dallen@fpcfw.org or 817.335.1231 in advance.

FIRST HAND FOOD PANTRY

Pack/hand out groceries on December 18, 27 and January 3 from 9:30-1:30, or any time in between, at Community Crossroads, 1516 Hemphill.

MOBILE FOOD PANTRY

Pack and distribute groceries on December 20, 8:30-10:30 at Broadway Baptist.

For both above pantries, contact Dori Davis, ddavis@fpcfw.org.

SAMARITAN HOUSE MEALS

Serve a meal to 40 residents at Samaritan House on Hemphill Street on Tuesday, December 5 from 5-7 p.m. (FPC serves the first Tuesday of each month.) This mission creates a supportive community providing housing and resources for positive change in the lives of persons living with HIV/AIDS and other special needs. Contact Robyn Michalove at robym@fpcfw.org.

THE ADVENT ISSUE

In this issue, learn about the many ways to remember, reflect, and celebrate at FPC during the season of Advent that begins Sunday, December 3.

THE ADVENT ISSUE

This issue includes the many ways to observe the season of Advent at FPC, beginning Sunday, December 3.



PASTORS' LETTER



Dear friends,

You might recall my suggestion in a recent sermon that "gratitude is the bedrock of all religious faith." I believe this to be true, way deep, down in my bones.

In fact, among my favorite scripture in all of scripture are these few verses from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you (1 Thessalonians 5.16-18)."

Be thankful. God's will.

That's an unexpected combo. God's will is notoriously tricky to identify, and even when we're certain that we've found it, it can be even trickier to obey. Choosing gratitude isn't for wimps or Pollyannas. Choosing gratitude is a moment-by-moment, day-by-day-spiritual discipline that requires intention and rewards us with a new outlook.

Among our ongoing national conversation about what it means to be an American, I take it as elemental that we belong to a tribe which encourages gratitude. You know the story, how the pilgrims eked out a meager existence at Plymouth Rock in 1621. You've seen the Thanksgiving posters on grade school bulletin boards: buckled hats, white frocks, and cornucopias, all in their place around a feast table shared with native people. There is actually great debate about the "first" thanksgiving. Some say it happened two years earlier, in 1619. Some say the first Thanksgiving wasn't celebrated by English Puritans at all, but rather by the Spanish, here in Texas, in 1598. Still others argue that indeed the Spanish celebrated the first Thanksgiving but believe it to have been observed in Florida, in 1565.

I love the conflict. English or Spanish? 17th century or earlier? Massachusetts, Texas, or Florida? I'm not sure it matters, really, because there is a something deeper than turkey and buckles on display. No matter its starting place, America's Thanksgiving emerged from people far away from what they had known, living a marginal, subsistence existence, finding things for which to be thankful despite the difficulty of it all. It was a pilgrim impulse, and I use the word pilgrim in its dictionary sense: "a person who journeys, especially a long distance, to some sacred place as an act of religious devotion."

ORDER CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS

Live poinsettias will be placed in worship spaces December 17-31. Order one to honor or remember a loved one. Cost is \$17.50 per plant and must be ordered by December 15. Please make checks out to First Presbyterian Church with "Poinsettias" in the memo. You may pick up your plant December 31; those not picked up will be taken to our homebound members.

Given in Honor / Memory (please circle one) of:

Given by: _____

Give thanks. God's will. Oh my.

The Christian faith is a journey of sorts, a moving from somewhere to somewhere else. Living like we believe it is a dynamic movement, a progressive (and at times regressive) exercise, by no means stagnant, never complete. As Fort Worth native Townes Van Zandt said it years ago, in "To Live is to Fly;"

*Days, up and down they come
like rain on a conga drum;
forget most, remember some,
but don't turn none away.
Everything is not enough
and nothin' is too much to bear.
Where you been is good and gone
all you keep is the getting there.*

All we keep is getting there. And getting there is all the richer when we pause to give thanks along the way.

Pilgrims. Traveling a long distance to a sacred place. Us. You and me. Together.

I'm certain that our lists of blessings share a few items, but our lists are also as unique as we are. This year, as you skooch your chair to the Thanksgiving table, I pray for a lump in your throat, an emotional reminder of all for which you have to be thankful.

Giving thanks is, after all, God's will for us, and God understands our needs better than we do.

See you in church,

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JOYS & CONCERNS

Following are the joys and concerns shared as of November 15, 2017 (due to printing deadlines). To respect the privacy of those listed, names are included only when the individuals grant their permission.

Our loving sympathy to...

Ed and Mary Alice Harry on the death of his cousin, Susan Harry, who died November 6 in Florida.

Family and friends of **Pat Babcock**, who died on October 22.

Our loving thoughts and prayers are with...

Merilys Corning, Marilyn Wilson, Rush Hart, Donald Deshauters, and Lisa Priddy, who are recovering from surgery or injury. **Vera Kendall, Dwight Mason, Phyllis Propes, Emma Coley, Marjorie Lewis, Rev. Floyd Kinser, Dorothy Kinser, Indi Butler, Nona Cobden, David Nation, Corinna Nation, Lisa Shiner, Jacquitta White, Marge Shiner, Elizabeth Bean, Frances Blake, Gene James, Carolyn Lischio, Mac McCoy, Nancy Nelson, Ed Martin, and Dalia Scott**, who are dealing with illness or undergoing treatment. **Jane Watson**, who is on hospice.

Our caring prayers for extended family include...

Jim Corning (brother of **Bruce Corning**), Don Laminack (brother of **Vance Laminack**), Warren Brown (son-in-law of **Betty Tefft**), Bess Hunt (mother of **Martha Zaborowski**), Evan Wilson (grandson of **Henrietta Bailey**), Glenda Burger (sister of **Vance Laminack**), Janet Laminack (cousin of **Julie Sphar and Vance Laminack**), John DeMore (son-in-law of **June Sprott**), Lisa Koenig (niece of **Clark Williams**), Kathy Kline (**Maxine Kruse's** daughter), Marty Kinard (**Larry and Bettye Kinard's** daughter-in-law), Mark Bryant (**Joanne Sarsgard's** son), and Susan Chenault (**Frances Chenault's** daughter).

Prayers for peace in our world, for the safety of Nathan Gunter (**Russell and Vivian Norment's** nephew) who is stationed in Korea. Also for the safety of **Diego A. Saldivar**, who is serving in the US Navy; Diego is the son of **Becky and Rene Saldivar**.

Our congratulations and best wishes to...

Margaret "Maggie" and David Bellinger on the birth of a son, Oxford "Ox" Pine Bellinger, on October 16. He joins big brother Henry. Proud grandmother is **Nancy Pine**.

Mark and **Allison Turner** on the birth of a son, Reaves Earl Turner, on October 22. Proud grandparents are **Larry and Cynthia Reaves**.

SUBMISSIONS

Submissions for the January 2018 issue of the newsletter are due Wednesday, December 20. Please send to Teresa Tysinger at ttysinger@fpcfw.org or bring by the church office.

YEAR-END GIVING

Please keep the following guidelines in mind when planning your year-end giving to First Presbyterian.

You must deliver or mail (and postmark) checks on or by December 31, 2017, to claim a charitable contribution deduction for 2017. Although checks in the offering on the first Sunday in 2018 can be recorded to fulfill a 2017 pledge to the church, they will not qualify for an IRS charitable contribution deduction for 2017, even if the check is predated to 2017 or actually written in 2017. However, checks that are written, mailed, and postmarked in 2017 will be deductible, even though they were not received by the church until 2018. To ensure the deductibility of your church contributions under current IRS guidelines, please do not file your 2017 income tax return until you have received a written acknowledgement of your contributions from the church. Some of your contributions may not be tax deductible if you file your return before receiving a written acknowledgement of your contributions.

Note about Online Gifts: Online gifts will be credited according to the date and time the online gift is submitted.

If you have questions about the above, please feel free to contact Church Administrator, Dana Fickling at ext. 227.

2018 PLEDGES



If you have not yet turned in your pledge card, following Generosity Sunday on October 29, you may do so in the following ways:

ONLINE: Visit fpcfw.org/give and submit the form.

BY MAIL: Complete the pledge card you received in the mail and return it using the provided envelope. Extra cards are available in the Narthex outside the Sanctuary and at the Welcome Desk outside the Great Hall.

AT CHURCH: Bring your completed pledge card to church on Sunday and place in the offering plate at worship or drop by the church during regular business hours (M-F, 8:30 a.m. - 5 p.m.)

Christmas Cantata

Choirs Lead 11 a.m. Worship on December 17

The Chancel and Fellowship Choirs, accompanied by brass quintet and organ, will offer Daniel Pinkham's *Christmas Cantata* as part of the sermon in the 11 a.m. service on December 17. The piece is in three movements and interprets the mystery of the incarnation.

First published in 1958, the cantata reveals Pinkham's love of both mediaeval plainsong and Renaissance dance meter. Inspired by the Venetian composer, Giovanni Gabrieli (1554?-1612?), Pinkham weaves together the choir and brass/organ with great effect as almost a double choir. The shifting rhythms, so characteristic of the Renaissance, are set in harmonies that are both familiar and provocative. Interpreting the mystery of God with us in flesh (incarnation), the music invites us to experience comfort and familiarity in rhythm and harmony even as we also experience unexpected turns of phrase and harmonies reflecting incarnation as God continuing to break into our lives.

In addition to the sung presentation of the sermon, the Rev. Karl Travis will offer spoken meditation on the text and music as music and sermon become one.

"A Taste of Christmas"

Sunday, December 17

We'd love to have some of your favorite cookies to share with the congregation this holiday season as part of the Fellowship Committee's "A Taste of Christmas" event on Sunday, December 17. Just bake a dozen or more of your favorite cookies, deliver them to the church December 14 or 15 or bring them with you Sunday, December 17. The Fellowship Committee will collect all of the cookies and share them with the congregation following each worship service. Please let us know if you would like to participate in sharing a little "taste of Christmas" by baking cookies to share. Sign up at fpcf.org/cookies or call Eric Varnon at 817.335.1231.

Advent Taizé Worship

Sunday, December 17 at 6:30 p.m.

Join us for this monthly worship service in the manner of the Taizé community in France, specifically celebrating the Advent season and Christmas. Includes prayer, simple music, and scripture.

2018 Men's Retreat

January 20-21, 2018

Registration is now open for the 2018 Men's Retreat, coming up January 20-21 in Grapevine, at fpcf.org/mensretreat. We will discuss what we mean when we say "church" with retreat speaker and Presbyterian seminarian Paul Hooker. Register today!

Walk to the Nativity this Advent Season

Sunday, December 17 from 5:30-7 p.m.

Follow the star to the manger! After being assigned to a docent with a group of 10-15 others, you will walk a path lit by luminaries and stop along the way to visit Mary and Joseph journeying to Bethlehem, the Innkeeper, and the Holy Family. Live animals will complete this beautiful nativity experience. Finish with hot chocolate and cookies outside of the Great Hall. Please park in the lots across from the Sanctuary and Great Hall. Come to the tent in front of the Sanctuary doors where you will meet your docent. This free event is open to all; bring your family and friends!



Young Adults Celebrate!

December 17: Christmas Gathering

All college students, FPC Youth Alumni, and Young Adults are invited to attend this Christmas Gathering on Sunday, December 17 from 12:15 to 1:30 p.m. in the Youth Center. The festive event will include food, fellowship, and a "White Elephant" gift exchange. No need to RSVP!

December 19: Cook-Out & S'mores

Join other young adults at 7 p.m. just outside the Great Hall around an open fire (pit) under the city-scape, roasting marshmallows and eating burgers and hotdogs. No need to RSVP!

Youth Progressive Dinner

Sunday, December 22 at 5:45 p.m.

When one Christmas dinner just isn't enough, there's the Youth Progressive Christmas Dinner! All youth in middle and high school are invited to this annual festive FPC youth group event on Sunday, December 22. Be on the bus by 5:45 p.m. at the church. We will depart promptly at 6 p.m. to enjoy appetizers, dinner, and dessert at the homes of different church members. Questions? Contact Josh at josh@fpcf.org.

December Church Brunch Has Festive Flare!

Sunday, December 3 at 11 a.m. and 12 p.m.

Join the FPC community for a festive brunch in the Great Hall at either 11 a.m. or 12 p.m. The menu will include holiday favorites. Cost is \$7 per person, \$25 family maximum. Look forward, too, to some festive fun. Don't miss it! This month's brunch is hosted by the Congregational Care Committee.

Candlelight Labyrinth

Sunday, December 3 from 6-7:30 p.m.

Observe Advent at a candlelight labyrinth walk at FPC's outdoor labyrinth. Each of us becomes a pilgrim journeying to the center as the light fades to darkness. Then, we await together the advent of the Light of the World. Members of the Labyrinth Guild will be on hand to assist you. Come and go as you please.

Advent Midday Prayers

Wednesdays, December 6, 13, and 20

These 30-minute services (12-12:30 p.m.) held in the Chapel include scripture, music, prayer, and reflections by clergy on the spiritual impact of Advent as a season preparing us to celebrate Emmanuel - God with us.

Beacons' Christmas Party

Wednesday December 6 at 5 p.m.

Beacons (adults 55+) are invited to bring a side dish or a dessert. FPC's own Chef Katie will provide the main dish. The program will be Christmas music and singing. RSVPs are not needed.

Party for the Blind

Thursday, December 7 at 6 p.m.

This inter-generational mission event, organized by the Youth Committee, welcomes people who are blind or visually impaired and those who work directly with the blind or visually impaired from Tarrant County to celebrate the Christmas season with dinner, fellowship, entertainment, and more. Church members are needed to volunteer to drive guests to and from the party, and youth and families are needed to help serve the meal. If you can help as a driver, please call Jayne McFarland at 817.335.1231.

Christmas Toy Store

Saturday, December 9 from 8:30 a.m. - 3 p.m.

The annual Christmas Toy Store for families with children 5th grade and younger is coming up! Parents sign up (for a small fee) and shop at the store. The store offers the parents both dignity and choice in selecting gifts for their children. Here's how to help: **SHOP.** Did you pick a star to shop? Please bring your unwrapped gifts back to the manger scene receptacle by December 3. **GIVE.** Give gift cards and check donations (memo line: Christmas Toy Store 2017); other church members can shop for you. **VOLUNTEER.** Help set up the store on Friday, December 8 or at the store on Saturday, December 9 in shifts. We especially need Spanish speakers on Saturday! Call the church office.

Young Adult Gathering

Saturday, December 9 from 4-7 p.m.

The season is a good time to get together and celebrate friends and family. The Young Adult Winter Gathering gives us a chance to enjoy dinner and create something that is uniquely ours for the holiday season. The evening includes dinner, art, and childcare. Cost is \$20 per person and includes a festive painting project. Register at fpcf.org/ya-wintergathering by November 29.

Youth Christmas Parties

Sunday, December 10

Youth Group meetings on Sunday, December 10 will celebrate Christmas with parties at their regularly scheduled times (middle school at 4:30, all-youth dinner at 5:30 p.m., and high school at 6 p.m.). This will be the last regular youth group meeting of the year.

Westminster Christmas Party

Tuesday, December 12

Members of the Westminster Class are reminded of their Christmas party on Tuesday, December 12 at 6 p.m. at the Colonial Country Club.

Women's Retreat Deadline

Register by December 15

The Women's Retreat will be February 10-11, 2018 at Camp Crucis in Granbury and will cover the theme "Finding Calm in the Chaos." No registrations will be taken after December 15. Register at fpcf.org/womensretreat or pick up a brochure at church.

See pages 4-5 for a DECEMBER ADVENT & CHRISTMAS Calendar



DECEMBER ADVENT & CHRISTMAS CALENDAR



SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

The month of December is one busting at the seams with opportunities for connection, celebration, and worship at First Presbyterian Church. From once-a-year special services part of your family traditions to new and fun parties with church friends, there's something for everyone. But don't let this full calendar add to the season easily overwhelmed with to-do's and checklists. We hope FPC will be a place for respite, reflection, and renewal this season. A time to remember the familiar yet powerful story of God's love for us in the gift of Jesus' birth. We can't wait to celebrate with you. Details on these events and more can be found on the other pages of this newsletter.

<p>3 First Sunday of Advent All-Church Brunch, 11 a.m. / 12 p.m. Candlelight Labyrinth, 6-7:30 p.m.</p>	4	5	<p>6 Midday Prayer Service, 12 p.m. Beacons' Christmas Party, 5 p.m.</p>	<p>7 Christmas Party for the Blind, 6 p.m.</p>	8	<p>9 Christmas Toy Store, 8:30 a.m. Young Adult Winter Gathering, 4 p.m.</p>
<p>10 Second Sunday of Advent Youth Christmas Parties: Middle School, 4:30 p.m. High School, 6 p.m.</p>	11	<p>12 Presbyterian Women Celebration of Christmas, 10:30 a.m. Westminster Christmas Party, 6 p.m. EEC Christmas Program, 6 p.m.</p>	<p>13 Midday Prayer Service, 12 p.m.</p>	14	15	16
<p>17 Third Sunday of Advent Taste of Christmas, All Morning Choir Christmas Cantata, 11 a.m. YA Christmas Gathering, 12:15 p.m. Walking Nativity Event, 5:30 p.m. Advent Taize Service, 6:30 p.m.</p>	18	<p>19 Young Adult Cookout & S'mores, 7 p.m.</p>	<p>20 Midday Prayer Service, 12 p.m.</p>	<p>21 EEC Day School Begins Winter Break (Childcare Still Open)</p>	<p>22 Young Group Progressive Christmas Dinner, 5:45 p.m.</p>	23
<p>24 Christmas Eve Morning Worship, 10 a.m. Family Service, 5 p.m. Candlelight Service, 7 p.m. Communion & Candlelight Service, 9 p.m.</p>	<p>25 Christmas Day <i>Merry Christmas!</i> Church Offices and Early Education Center Closed</p>	<p>26 Church Offices and Early Education Center Closed</p>	27	28	<p>29 Youth Group Departs for Ski Trip</p>	30

31
Regular Morning Worship at 8, 9, and 11 a.m.



WORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES
Sunday, December 24

- 10 a.m. Combined Morning Worship in Sanctuary
- 5 p.m. Service for families with children (Great Hall)
- 7 p.m. Service with candlelight (Sanctuary)
- 9 p.m. Service with communion & candlelight (Sanctuary)

A NOTE FOR PARENTS
While children are happily welcome at any of our worship services, childcare will be provided during these services on Christmas Eve.