



The Link

WINTER 2016

Telling the Stories God is Writing at Little Falls Church

We
joyfully
PROCLAIM
the love
of God in
Jesus Christ,
GROW
in His truth,
and
SHARE
His Gospel
with our
neighbors.

*We are not
trophies of grace
to be placed on
the mantel for
display.
We are to
become
conduits of grace
placed in
the messy world
of relationships
to serve
the forgiving,
freeing, healing
purposes of God.*

– Scotty Smith

A Sidewalk & the Community

Dr. Matt Merrill, Pastor

Many of you have noticed the new sidewalk on the Ohio Street side of the church building. Arlington County Schools built this sidewalk for us. It is the most recent sign of our ongoing partnership with the schools.

When I arrived at Little Falls in 2005, Nottingham was undergoing renovations. When the construction was finished and the students and faculty returned, I could see that reaching Nottingham would be an important part in the church reengaging with the neighborhood. After all, the Gospel is for everyone and as Christ's church, we are His delivery system for the Gospel. So, we began looking for ways to serve the school and these families.

It was on a snow day in 2008 that we brought large coolers of hot chocolate for the sledders behind the school. Mary Beth Pelosky, Nottingham's principal, greeted us and thanked us for serving her families. The next day at a faculty meeting, she shared the story of our caring for the community. One of the teachers asked, "What church are you talking about?" because in the five years she had taught at Nottingham, the church hadn't done anything that caught her attention. Because of the importance of the Gospel, it is imperative that we find ways to engage.

During that year, I learned that Yorktown High School was the emergency shelter for Nottingham. This seemed like a long way for elementary children to walk. So we invited Nottingham to use the church as its shelter. They were overjoyed to make this change. Just last month "Mr. K", the assistant principal, stopped by to say thank you. But, really it is our pleasure to be able to rub shoulders with him and demonstrate the Gospel in our deeds and also in our words.

In the wake of Jennifer Lawson's accidental death, we engaged with the school system to offer any help we could to make parking and pedestrian safety better. For over a year the school studied many

possibilities before coming back and asking if parents could occasionally park in our back parking lot. "Of course" was our answer. While studying the logistics, they offered to install the sidewalk to make pedestrian traffic on the church's property safer.

I love that we are seen as "helpful" to the school community. Often serving people is a great way to begin to invest and invite, because it leads people to question the motivation behind our service - which is the Gospel. And hey, free sidewalk!

*But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile,
and pray to the Lord on its behalf,
for in its welfare you will find your welfare.
~ Jeremiah 29:7*



The All Church Retreat – Skycroft – November 2015

The All Church Retreat – An Exercise in Community

Norris Cochran, Elder

Our culture is not defined by community. Friendships are vitally important to most people, but the majority of residents of northern Virginia do not think of themselves as members of a community first. We are members of a family, of a profession, of social groups and friend circles, but we tend not to principally associate ourselves as members of a collection of persons in fellowship with shared relationships and goals.

At this year's Skycroft retreat in November, members and friends of Little Falls, if even for just a bit, were able to, as one Little Falls middle-schooler put it, "Live in a community as it should be."

Life at the retreat was varied, and opportunities to connect and worship were plentiful. Music, song, lessons, corporate prayer and small group sharing opened the door to meaningful engagement with God and one another. Physical activities such as Ashley Templer's Pilates course, playing corn hole, multi-generational flag football, nature hikes and kickball got our blood pumping and faces smiling. Shared meals and s'mores over a bonfire warmed hearts and filled bellies.

Hearing from attendees of the retreat you start to get a grainy picture of what Jesus had in mind when He summed up the law of God in this way, "*And He said to him, 'You shall love the Lord*

your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.'"
– Matthew 22:37-40.

Here are just some of the reflections on the weekend from those in attendance:

- "I LOVE the Little Falls retreat! It affords me the opportunity to get away from the hustle and





bustle of daily life to spend quality time with Jesus and my church family.”

- “The experience of prayer time on Saturday night reconfirmed how much Little Falls is a community of FAITH.”
- “I really appreciated the interaction across different generations.”
- “The prayer time on Saturday evening was very special as we prayed together in a large group of over 50 people; it felt so intimate.”
- “Being at the retreat, I feel more a part of the church community.”
- “We were all together really getting to know each other. Life is usually not like that in Arlington.”
- “We were able to share our stories with people we usually only say hello to in passing.”
- “The intergenerational mix is sensational! We got to play lots of games together and share a lot of laughs.”

As with any retreat the harder part is how to take the lessons, the energy, and even the feelings of the experience back home to have lasting effects. It is hard to replicate the intensity of a retreat without the dedicated time and the change of scenery. But there are open doors in Little Falls to do so, and to go farther. Starting with the foundation of regular worship, Sunday service affords the opportunity to celebrate God together, to reflect on the same message and share commitments and confessions. Gatherings after the service allow relationships to be established and strengthened. Wednesday Night Refill offers an opportunity for fellowship over a meal and in praise and song. Act III and Kaleo youth group gatherings offer opportunities to grow together specific to a stage of life. Small groups with other members help facilitate deep bonds that can last a lifetime. Service opportunities during and outside of the worship service allow friends and families to support others in gratitude to God while growing closer to one another. Prayer partners open a window into the hearts and needs of others and build a shared sense of purpose. This community is not meant to be contained within the church’s doors. The mission of Little Falls – to joyfully proclaim the love of God in Jesus Christ, grow in His truth, and share His Gospel with our neighbors – is to be ever hungry



to broaden our community, to be a people open and inviting to all.

God has given Little Falls a bountiful purpose and means to build on our experiences at the retreat and connect with others *to live in a community as it should be.*

Church Family News

New Members

Vanessa Rocha
Maureen Robinson
Dan & Liz Stigall
Andrea Stauffer

Marriages

Sam Rodeheaver & Nan Jiang

Baptisms

Jenna Schimenti
Ryan Schimenti
Jacob Kent Dorsey

Promoted to Glory

Walter Birch
Carolyn Davis
Natalie Parkman



Why Pray? – Community with the King

Sarah Pullen, Church Administrative Assistant

There's been a seismic shift in my life over last three years and it all started because my housemate, Erica, and I decided to try something. "Let's see what would happen if" ... these words can be the genesis of genius, or can spawn something worthy of SportsCenter's "Not Top Ten". But we decided to "see what would happen if" we started praying together 20 minutes every weekday morning.

Prayer was difficult for me because of many internal and external obstacles – chief among them: lack of discipline and distraction. If I were being honest, I would have described prayer as boring and abstract. And even as a longtime Christ-follower, there was the niggling notion that perhaps prayer didn't really even work. Although I wouldn't have consciously vocalized it as ineffective, the little amount of time I spent praying was, at the very least, evidence that I didn't believe it was worth my time.

Life didn't change dramatically all at once, but looking back, I now better understand what one of my high school mentors said: Faith is something you don't see growing until you look back and see how far you've come. While indiscipline and distraction might always be challenges for me, we saw God respond to our prayer experiment. He increased our appetite for prayer and expanded our hearts through some of these spiritual truths:

Two-thirds of the trinity is praying on your behalf. Jesus is praying all the time. Not just during His time on earth, but He is STILL praying today...and He's praying for us. He is at the right hand of God and "ever lives to make intercession for [us]" (Hebrews 7:25). He's leaning over from His throne to whisper into the Father's ear about you, right now. And everything He has to say is good. Jesus is interceding *for* us, but the Holy Spirit is interceding *through* our prayers, but this assumes that we are praying. It is a partnership. "The Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us...according to the will of God." (Romans 8:26, 27)

There's a lot God wants to do, but some of it He is waiting until you join Him. Jesus tells Peter in Matthew 16:19 that "whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." When we agree with God's will through our prayers, He will unleash the power of heaven to accomplish it on earth. Right before Jesus speaks of binding and loosing, He tells Peter "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." These are not literal keys, (although perhaps that's why some think Peter is at the pearly gates) but rather, Jesus is telling Peter that the key to accessing all the power of heaven is through prayer. When you pray, heaven has your back.

"... Lord
teach us
to pray."
~ from
John 1:11

Relationship with God isn't a side effect of prayer; it is His main goal. Prayer isn't a cosmic holy box to check but rather an invitation to draw closer to the Lord. Getting to know God through His word but leaving out prayer is like spending time with a friend but only at the pool; never visiting her house, meeting her family or interacting with her in a different setting. Without prayer, I was missing a whole avenue of knowing God more intimately.

Prayer makes things easier. I can't believe how many times this thought has occurred to me after receiving an answer to prayer. It still startles me how much God answers our prayers, if only we will offer them. He *wants* to be sought and known for the loving and capable Father that He is. In retrospect, I did a lot more work than I had to because I seldom asked for God's help. Dennis Rainey says: "When I'm praying the least, I'm absorbing the responsibility myself the most. I don't possess the ability to fix things in life like I should, but there is One worthy I can take these things to." And even if God doesn't answer my prayers in ways I can see yet, He still offers His peace (Philippians 4:7). Sometimes the peace He gives was what I needed more than the answer itself.

Erica and I didn't come up with a new or genius idea that day three years ago, but God met our offering and responded with more than we could have hoped. It's impossible to enumerate all the things the Lord has answered through our morning prayers alone. In a song called "King of My Heart," musicians John Mark and Sarah McMillan wrote: "When the night is holding on to me/ God is holding on." I don't know a place I've felt that more profoundly than in prayer.

Two short books I recommend are: "Let Us Pray" by Watchman Nee (available in the Little Falls library) and "Praying in the Spirit" by Arthur Wallis.

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

*... the answer is not the great thing - HE is!
God is infinitely more important than His advice or His gifts;
indeed, He Himself is
the GREATEST gift.*

- Frank Laubach



The
LIGHT
shines
in the
darkness,
and
the darkness
has not
overcome
it.

- John 1:5

Little Falls Presbyterian Church



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