

The Link

FALL 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.

*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

Hope

Dr. Matt Merrill, Pastor

Usually presidential elections are a time of hope for our nation. Strong leaders present compelling visions of what America can and should be. This year's campaigns are full of character attacks, fear mongering and rumors. In the meantime, people are not satisfied with the current elected officials. Approval rankings are pretty low, while "negatives" are really high. It is not a picture of hope.

More than 50 years after Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s *I Have a Dream* speech, racial tensions are growing in America. Not only do many African Americans feel disenfranchised, but so do many Latinos, Asians and people of Middle Eastern descent. Stories of police shootings of African American men are almost weekly in the news. The fabric of society seems to be unraveling. We join the Psalmist in asking:

*I lift up my eyes to the hills.
From where does my help come?
- Psalm 121:1*

The answer is God. God is still on His throne. He is still in control – even though it may not feel like it. The resurrection power of Jesus is still just as potent. Jesus is still revealing His Kingdom. The answer is still right, true and good. God is the answer. But what does that mean for the situations that concern us?

This October, we are dedicating Refill Wednesdays to talking about the "Controversies in America" including racial relations, policing in African American communities, immigration and refugees as well as how to be a politically involved Christian. I hope you will join us as we search God's Word for wisdom about these issues.

Additionally, I am calling us to pray for whomever is elected president because, as of Inauguration Day, he or she will be your president. The

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Bible clearly calls us to pray for those in elected office. Let each of us dedicate ourselves to praying daily for the president-elect, even before we know who wins the election.

*First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.
~ 1 Timothy 2:1*

Serving Our Neighbors

Rachel Brand, Elder for Community Service

Throughout the Bible, God calls on us to show his love in the world by caring for those in need. For many years, Little Falls has answered that call by supporting charitable organizations here in Arlington and around the world. In the past, the church has made contributions to many different local organizations serving a variety of needs. The Session believes we can make a greater impact if we focus the church's financial contributions and volunteer engagement primarily on one cause. On October 2, Little Falls launched the church's new focus for community missions: "Feeding and sheltering the homeless and least fortunate in Arlington." We will implement this new focus in two ways: 1) by directing funds from the church's local missions budget, primarily to organizations working to reduce homelessness; and 2) by developing new volunteer opportunities for the congregation with those organizations.

Although Arlington is one of the wealthiest counties in the United States, many Arlingtonians – including families with small children – become homeless or hover on the edge of homelessness. Several organizations in Arlington are working to serve their needs. Doorways for Women and Families is an Arlington-based nonprofit providing direct services to local families struggling with homelessness, as well as victims of domestic and sexual violence. It operates two temporary shelters that accommodate families with children, transitions families to long-term housing, and provides comprehensive services to help individuals achieve their independence. Arlington Street People's Assistance Network (A-SPAN) operates Arlington County's shelter for homeless adults, works to transition the homeless into permanent, safe housing, feeds the homeless living on the streets, and provides a wide range of services to street people. Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC) is Arlington's only facility, providing weekly groceries to over 2,200 Arlingtonians, 35 percent of whom are children, and nearly 30 percent of whom are elderly.

Our goal is to make a bigger impact with the funds in our local mission budget by giving larger

contributions to a smaller number of organizations serving our mission focus, rather than spreading smaller and less impactful contributions across many organizations. We will direct most of those funds to organizations working to reduce poverty and homelessness, including Doorways, A-SPAN and AFAC (all of which Little Falls has already supported for many years). We will continue to reserve a small portion of the budget for organizations that are not within the mission focus but with whom the congregation has a close relationship, such as the Good News Jail and Prison Ministry, which spreads the gospel in the Arlington County jail, and My Friend Mayvis, an organization founded by LFPC member Deb Schueren to provide support to victims of domestic violence.

Perhaps even more important than providing financial support is engaging with these organizations personally. Giving of our time and talent – and not just treasure – can transform our hearts. We have spent time over the last several months visiting and engaging with local organizations in order to learn more about how we can support them. We have focused particularly on developing volunteer opportunities for children and youth, which are harder to find than opportunities for adults. For example, Jennifer Greenleaf and I toured the AFAC shelter over the summer and were thrilled to learn the variety of opportunities for members of the congregation of all ages to get involved.

At the services on October 2, we launched a new local missions calendar with opportunities every month of the year to give, volunteer, and learn more about our local missions partners. The first event on the calendar is an opportunity on October 13 for adults to serve the children housed in Doorways' shelters. Please see the calendar or contact Alison Burwell for details. The calendar is a work in progress, and we hope to add to it continually in response to the congregation's feedback.

We hope you will join us in this important work.

*For where your treasure is there your heart will be also.
– Matthew 6:21*

Financial Update

At the end of the third quarter, the church has a softer financial position than would be ideal. Overall, we have seen generosity continue to grow at Little Falls. However, both in January and this summer, giving was noticeably lighter than usual. This has caused us to use \$50,000 of our cash reserves, which represents the vast majority of our savings from other years. In September, giving picked up substantially. We need for this trend to continue. If most households gave 10 percent more than planned, it would make a huge difference. Also, if you are looking for an organization to give a special gift of \$5,000 or \$10,000, we would love for you to give it to Little Falls this year. Your giving will allow us to continue boldly doing the work God has called us to do.

VBC – Fish, Giggles and Grace

Tina Kreisher

Flying fish, open-mouthed whales and a turtle named Flash—ironically because of his speed. These are the memories still floating around after under-the-sea Vacation Bible Camp. There was a vibrant feel to the entire week that is hard to capture in words and not easy in images.

There were little boys following Jonah into the whale. Giggling girls entered Noah's Ark and learned it took 100 years to build. I'm not sure that timeline impressed them as much as it did this older woman who was shepherding them through the Bible stories. The children walked on water and threw paper rocks at Paul—and because of all that creativity—they will remember Paul, Noah, Jonah and Peter.

I was blessed with a great helper and eight preschoolers—six boys and two girls. The thing about children who have not been to school yet is that they don't know to follow the leader always and to sit quietly and listen. They are still such free spirits and so curious about their world. If you are five and you get to go outside, you get to run. If there is a whale in front of you, you want to go inside even though the story for the day is about Peter. And if it is quiet in the room, it must be time for you to talk, not listen to the story.

So I prayed for patience and understanding of what it is like to be a five-year-old and listening to an old lady grandmother. The children grew used to me and I learned to be better with them as the week progressed.

Each day had a theme for the children to learn: God knows me, God strengthens me, God hears me, God loves me and God sends me. As I asked the questions, the children were able to remember the answers. I felt a sense of well-being that those short words were getting through and God's will was working in them.

Then one day, there was a setback. One of the little boys had had it with the rules and was hiding in the whale, or grabbing another child, or making noises and generally being disruptive. I took him aside to tell him his behavior was unacceptable and that he would have to stay at my side.

I asked him if he remembered the theme of the day. He said, "God loves me."

"But," he continued. "He doesn't love me when I am being bad and not minding."

This was a teachable moment provided by God. I told him that God loves us even when we are not following all the rules—that we are all sinners at some time and we are so fortunate that Christ died to save us from our sins and to give us His grace. "Always remember God loves us no matter what we do, because He always forgives."

He brightened and said, "God does love me."

And, at that moment, God shared His love with me.

Whoever
welcomes
one of
these little
children in
my name
welcomes
me ...
-Mark 9:37



Church Family News



Membership in a local church means joining your imperfect self to many other imperfect selves to form an imperfect community that, through Jesus, embarks on a journey toward a better future together.

– Scott Sauls

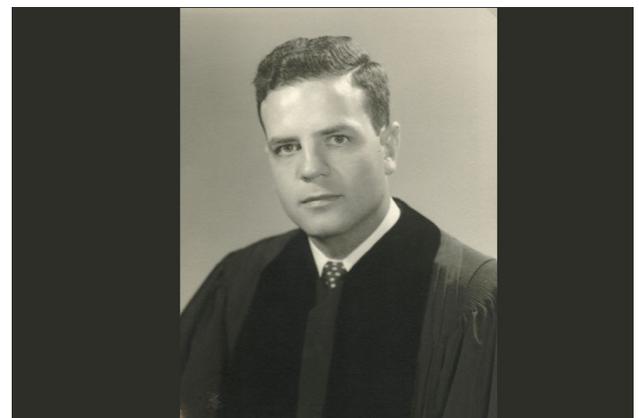
Births:
Elise Weller Dorsey
August 17

Baptisms:
Cameron Sursa
September 18

Promoted to Glory:
Frank Erwin
September 27

Ed Hicks
September 28

Frank Erwin was the founding pastor of Little Falls Presbyterian Church, serving from 1951 – 1967. In the summer of 1951, he began seeking out prospective members by knocking on doors as folks moved into the neighborhood. The church's dedication service was held November 25, 1951 (a month after opening its doors). That afternoon following the service, Frank married Katherine LoBianco. In 1959, he oversaw the installation of the new sanctuary (where we now worship). The "Christian Education Annex" was named for him upon dedication, Erwin Hall. On September 27, 2016, Frank Erwin completed his earthly journey. We are thankful for the huge gift he was to us at Little Falls.



Philadelphia

Chris Lugo, Youth Director

This past summer I had the pleasure of taking our senior high teens to Mission Fuge. Mission Fuge is a camp where youth groups come to serve communities and share the gospel. Our theme at the camp was Unashamed, taken from the Romans 1:16 passage that says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."

Most of our kids spent their days at parks in Philadelphia and set up games for local kids like basketball and soccer. The goal was to get to know the neighborhood kids, to learn their stories and to share the gospel. Many of our teens came back disappointed after their first few days because they felt like what they were doing wasn't working; this was in and of itself a good life lesson! As the week progressed, they had more stories of how they used what they knew to engage kids and tell them about Jesus. For example, one senior high teen used his love of magic tricks to talk to kids about Jesus. All of our teens got to know kids whose lives were drastically different than their own. The social track took the rest of our kids to North Philly. The most memorable places they visited were the home for kids with cerebral palsy, a women's shelter and senior centers. There they sat and talked with people who were hurting or lonely. As a chaperone for this track it even stretched me as I talked for an hour with a man who had no way to communicate with me.

I think our senior high kids left Philadelphia with a new perspective. Some had never shared the gospel before, and many had no idea what life outside of Arlington was really like. One of my favorite moments was, while we were gathered together as a church group, our teens began to talk out about how different life was in Arlington. How privileged they were and how they need to do more to help those who are in need. As one kid put it: "It showed me how privileged I am in Arlington, but also the need to share the gospel and get out of my comfort zone." My hope is that this mission trip provided them with some tools to help them see that serving those outside of their culture, socioeconomic status and spiritual understanding is a life-long journey and an important characteristic of the gospel.





Vacation Bible Camp ~ 2016



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