

# The Link

SPRING 2015

*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.

YOU  
are the Lord,  
You alone.  
You have made  
heaven,  
the heaven of  
heavens, with all  
their host, the earth  
and all that is on it,  
the seas and all that  
is in them; and  
You  
preserve all of them;  
and the host of  
heaven worships  
YOU.  
– Nehemiah 9:6

## Intimacy in Worship

*Dr. Matt Merrill, Pastor*

One of the big goals for 2015 is to work toward seeing the 11:00 a.m. service thriving again. It is a service with a long history and I believe a bright future. While participation and energy at this service have been declining, I believe that we will see a revival, Lord willing. After months of study, listening and prayer, the Session identified four barriers that are keeping us from thriving in terms of attendance, energy and visitor retention:

### **The service is mainly missing the younger generations.**

While the 9:30 service has people of every age attending, the 11:00 service is mainly missing families with youth and children in the home. We have also noticed that singles and couples without children are attending less frequently.

### **The service feels impersonal.**

Many people have told us that people sit so far from one another that attending worship can be a lonely experience. People can't hear one another sing or pray, which leads to less participation.

### **The service feels "too formal" or "stuffy" to many people.**

This is not a rejection of hymns or liturgy, but rather is a reflection on how we go about these things.

### **Our "traditional" branding is not a positive.**

The label of "traditional" is not very descriptive. With the majority of churches implementing "contemporary" worship, this branding feels reactionary.

None of these barriers is insurmountable, but to get around, over or through them will require imagination, risk, openness and trust for all of us. Of these barriers, the one I believe we can solve the quickest is that of the service being too impersonal.

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We are not an impersonal church; we are a friendly church with rich relationships. Unfortunately, the 11:00 service doesn't currently reflect this truth. The solution is for people to sit close to one another and actively "spur one another along to love and good deeds."

The scriptures tell us to address "**one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart" (Ephesians 5:19). This means that in worship, we are not only singing to God; it is our responsibility to sing the truth of God to one another. It might be the passion of your singing or the fervency of your prayers that inspire the person next to you to take their next step of faith. I know that many of you have inspired me by your prayers and passionate singing to the Lord.

As you prepare to come to either service, please look for someone with whom to sit. Make it your goal to let God use your worship to inspire them. It may just be the act of being physically near them that will help them experience God's presence.

## CHURCH FAMILY NEWS

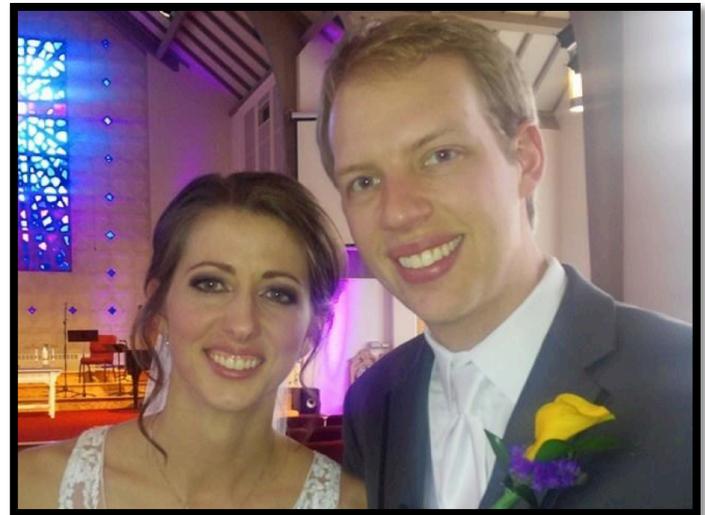
### Baptisms

Lizzie Dorsey  
Lucas William Donahoe  
Karis Frazer Lugo



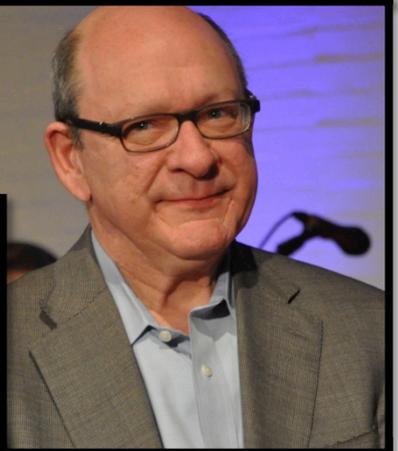
### United in Marriage

Taylor Sill to Ashley Knight



**New Members**

Cathy Brady  
Jenny Bone  
Cheryl Cochran  
Jerry & Lizzie Dorsey  
Karen & Bill Harned  
Chris & Katie Lugo  
Bernie Toon  
Paul Zukunft & Fran DeNinno



**Promoted to Glory**  
Bill Edgar  
Alda Gay

## Why Join a Small Group?

Kelly Pulsifer, Elder

Thanks to the new small group format and formation, more than 50 of us have joined recently created groups. The benefits of fellowship, study and support demonstrate the good gifts from God that our church family has to share with one another.

The reasons to join are simple and the benefits great. But when I took time to put it down in words, nothing came to mind besides the obvious: small groups help us grow both in faith and relationship with fellow Christians. Life got in the way of examining what this means to me personally until I spent time thinking about it in connection with a real problem I was grappling with.

Our small groups are reading Tullian Tchividjian's book Jesus + Nothing = Everything. My group was on Chapters 3 and 4, focusing on "Nothing". The passage that stood out to me in Chapter 3 read: "your pain right now could be God prying open your life and heart in order to remove a gift of his that you've been holding onto more dearly than him." Over tea we discussed this idea and wrestled with what that gift could be. My personal realization: relationships. Upon further thought, I came to understand that I particularly hold dear to my heart an ability to please those I care about and make easy the difficulties those people are suffering. Although this, like any other blessing from God, is a good gift, I must remember not to hold it so close to my heart that my faith becomes Christianity + pleasant relationships. My focus should always be on faith and not on creating an idol out of the gifts God has given to me. Praise God for the insight, as it was very timely.

*"The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists of listening to them.*

*Just as love of God begins with listening to His word, so the beginning of love for our brothers and sisters is learning to listen to them."*

–

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Life Together*

I shared with my group that I had to deliver some news to a loved one that might not be entirely welcome – news that could be disappointing at best, and potentially devastating. I was struggling with how and when to deliver the news. I admitted that I had been putting it off for fear that my loved one wouldn't be receptive to hearing it, and that I wouldn't have the right words to say. I later realized I hadn't prayed about this one thing that had been on my mind for days. But discussing this with my group opened the door to articulating my anxiety to God. I prayed that my loved one would be receptive to hearing what I had to say, and that I would have the right words to say. I prayed that the news would be merely disappointing and that my loved one would have peace and strength in dealing with it. Much to my delight, the conversation went better than expected. Although the final outcome is as yet unresolved, my loved one has a good attitude to work through the difficulty, and I have the right focus to be supportive.

Praise God for the group where I could share my anxiety. Praise God for the message in Tchividjian's book, for opening my heart to hear it, and for its practical application. Praise God for holding us in his hand as we grow in faith and grow to better know and support each other. Praise God for Little Falls' small group ministry.

## Youth News

Chris Lugo, Youth Director

Recently we had two retreats for our teens that really impacted several of them.

### Breakaway 2015:

This past February we went on a senior high retreat with The Falls Church Anglican called Breakaway. We spent four days in the snowy and windy valley in Goshen, VA. There we heard great preaching about God's unending, unbending, unconditional love for us. We also got to experience great worship from the band Melodime and fun fellowship. Most of the weekend was spent growing with our senior high kids playing a variety of games, having meals and quiet times together.



### DiscipleNow 2015:

Every March our junior high teens participate in a weekend retreat called DNow (short for DiscipleNow). The goal of the weekend is for the kids to learn more about Jesus and to grow with each other in community. They split up into two groups by gender, then head to a home of someone in our church where they are taught by an adult leader.



This year they studied: "What Does it Really Mean to be a Follower of Jesus Christ?" They tackled this topic in four separate sessions: the *call to follow*, what does it *mean to follow*, the *cost of following*, and being *empowered to follow*.

The retreat ended with a laser tag trip and catered lunch from Chick-fil-A.

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?

Luke 9:23

## The Boy Next Door

*Eric Yoder*

Kent Hamaker was literally in on the ground floor of the founding of Little Falls and the church has been deeply intertwined with his life, and he with the church's life, for decades.

Kent's father was an architect who was involved in the design and construction of the building. Kent was part of the youth group, led by founding pastor Frank Erwin, and attending summer youth camps in the 50s.

That foundation in faith stayed with him through Roanoke College and then three years in the Navy, where he became the Protestant lay leader on his ship at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. During that time he married Peggy, whom he had first met in college. When they returned to Northern Virginia they lived in Falls Church and Burke where they attended churches before moving back to Arlington and Little Falls in the early 80s.

In the years since, he has been involved with the church in just about every possible way—deacon, elder, trustee, a member of renovation and pastor nominating committees, in addition to small groups, men's groups, Bible study and more. "In looking back I can certainly appreciate how coming to the services, being involved, have all done a lot to help develop my faith and undergird my faith," he said.

Living just a block from the church, one of his favorite daily reminders of his faith is hearing the chimes. "It helps engender that sense that you've got a religious community about you that is sending a message out to the larger community. It gives that kind of Normal Rockwell atmosphere of a peaceful community," he said.



## On the Way

Grace Merrill, Link Editor

As a mom of small children, I know a lot about interruptions. At times I cannot even get two minutes in the restroom without someone barging in. I spend much of my day running to this or that task – picking up children at school, grocery shopping, trying to respond to emails, putting away laundry, unloading the dishwasher, helping kids with homework, putting shoes on squirmy toddlers, etc. These tasks on my "to do" list are rarely completed without interruption. Some interruptions I find pleasant (like running into a friend in the grocery store) and some I find frustrating (like when I am trying to cook dinner and must keep putting it aside to mediate heated sibling disputes about "Candyland" or remind people that the sofa is not a trampoline).

In a Bible study I attend regularly, we have been studying the book of Mark. One of the things pointed out by the commentators that has stuck with me throughout the study is how often Jesus was “interrupted” and how He reacted. Our Savior was frequently “on the way” to a different town or task with His disciples when someone approached Him with a need or question. Some of these interruptions seem (to me) to be more “important” than others. For example, healing a blind beggar on his way into Jerusalem (Mark 10:46) vs. responding to James and John’s request for special treatment (Mark 10:35-45). Sometimes He was even on his way to take care of one “interruption” when He paused to take care of another. In Mark 5:21-43, Jesus heals the bleeding woman in the crowd while on His way to care for Jarius’ dying daughter.

What is striking is how Jesus responded to *each* of them with patience, grace and intentionality. He never seemed to be in a hurry. He never dismissed them. He used each of these opportunities to bring Glory to His Father and further His purposes.

Those words rarely describe my response to interruptions. I tend to try to hurry to a solution in order to get back to my original task or I become completely distracted and derailed from my purpose. Too often I am irritated and angry.

Jesus came here on a mission to love His Father’s people, teach us and redeem us. He was ultimately “on the way” to the cross the whole time He was here. If He had come and died right away, that would have been enough. Far more than we deserve. But while “on His way” to the cross, He took time to be with people, eat meals with them, listen to them, heal them, answer their short-sighted questions. Why? Because He loved them. He IS Love. (1 John 4:8) And that is what love does.

I am not nearly as loving in my response nor as focused on my ultimate purpose here – to love God and love people. I tend to see my agenda as my little “to do” list and I lose sight of the bigger picture. If I concentrate on being more patient and develop some better response strategies, that may improve things a little. But really what I need is more of Him and less of me in my heart, so that my “knee-jerk” response to life’s changing circumstances, challenges and inevitable interruptions is that of grace. This will not happen overnight. I suspect it will take a lifetime of prayer, practice, patience and the Holy Spirit’s work. Thankfully, He is patient and full of grace.

Scotty Smith (a pastor in Franklin, TN) has a blog where he posts a prayer each morning. I will leave you with a quote from a post of his a few weeks ago. I laughed when I read it because it was as if he took the words right out of my mouth!

*“Today, we will most likely experience difficult people and disappointing circumstances; challenging relationships and unplanned interruptions; personal limitations and repeat offenders. Father, it’s our desire to respond with mercy and grace, as opposed to reacting out of irritation and anger. So we look to you—we abandon ourselves to you, and the power of the gospel and the ministry of your Holy Spirit.” – Scotty Smith*

“‘We don’t have time!’ Jesus’ friends said.  
But Jesus always had time.”  
- from *“The Jesus Storybook Bible”* when Jesus, on His way to heal Jarius’ daughter, was stopped by the bleeding woman in the crowd.  
(from Luke 8)

Spring 2015

# Easter Egg Hunt

Holy Saturday



## Little Falls Presbyterian Church



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*We joyfully proclaim the love of God in Jesus Christ, grow in His truth, and share His Gospel with our neighbors.*