The seasons have changed, and fall is officially upon us. Leaves cover the ground in bright hues of orange, brown and scarlet. The cool breezes that accompany our evening walks cause us to anticipate colder weather and snow flurries that are to come, both sure tell signs of the presence of the Christmas season.

Our voices might start to tingle as we think about the familiar carols we will soon be singing in celebration of our precious Jesus’ birth. We might have even let out a line or two before Thanksgiving — only to be scolded by someone who’s Christmas carol love might not be as ardent!

To satisfy my own excitement for the coming season I set out to discover what carols some of our pastors love most. Both James Estes and Daniel Hutchinson have a deep love for *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*. James appreciates this ominous tune and text because it “connects the birth of the son of God with the death of God” and provokes us to simultaneously experience the “joy and foreboding” that accompany both events.

Daniel describes the song as “stark, lilting...
As we enter this season of celebration, many will be hosting family and friends, and sometimes strangers, to join together for food and festivities. Being a good host requires attention to many details, making sure that bedrooms are readied with fresh sheets and towels and that your loved one’s favorite delicacy is prepared with care.

It is into this season of hosting and of being hosted that we sing each year, “let every heart prepare him room.” The question comes to us: what does it mean to host Him, whose birth we anticipate and whose promise we sing?

Home is a powerful idea. What is it that makes a place home? Isn’t it the presence of the ones who live there? Since moving to Tulsa, Lindsey and I have been renting a town home. And even though it’s not “our house,” in the sense that we don’t hold the deed to the property, it is nonetheless, our home. It’s where we gather with our children for dinner, where we read bedtime stories, where we laugh and sing, cry and embrace.

As Christians it is important that we realize that God’s desire is not only to be our Lord, the one who holds the deed, so to speak, but to be our Father. Jesus isn’t a landlord, receiving payments, fixing problems, and otherwise keeping at a distance. The good news is far better than that...

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God is not only our creator, but our Father. In the Garden of Eden, God would walk with Eve and Adam in the cool of the day. In Exodus when instructions are given for building the tabernacle, God instructs, “Let them build a sanctuary for me, that I may dwell among them.”

The heart of God is to be at home among his children. And yet, it is necessary for God’s people to make a place for God to “dwell among them.” This is a ministry of hospitality to the Lord — to make a place for Jesus in our homes and lives. Sharing hospitality with a guest is not difficult, but sometimes when it comes to preparing a place for Jesus, we don’t quite know what to do.

In welcoming guests, it’s always good to know what they enjoy, and Jesus is no different. The psalmist says to God, “you have no delight in sacrifice. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Psalm 51:16-17).

We can welcome Jesus into our lives and homes with humility and confession. It’s important that we confess our sins together in worship, but there is no rule saying you have to wait until Sunday. We welcome God into our lives by agreeing with God about the things that are seeking to destroy us. We can welcome Jesus into our lives by making a searching and fearless moral inventory, and then asking forgiveness and deliverance.

Like confession, thankfulness is something that is appropriate for being in God’s presence. Consider how the psalmist who calls us to “Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise” (Psalm 100:4). Or again, as the psalmist encourages us, “Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!” (Psalm 95:2).

This encouragement has two parts, really. The first is the power of gratitude to God. At our table we often pray simple prayers for little pray-ers. A typical Estes dinner prayer includes the phrase, “thank you Jesus for…” And then into the space Simeon, our two-year-old, will give the name of a family member or friend, of a teacher or stuffed animal. This is not a bad exercise for any of us. For what would you offer God thanks?

The second sense in which the Psalms encourage us is in urging us to sing. I encourage you to start making a list of favorite Advent or Christmas songs about Jesus. Sing them all through the season. Sing them with other people, with anyone who will sing with you. If you have family, sing them together. Pull up a YouTube video with lyrics on your tablet or television and sing the joy and thanksgiving of Advent and Christmas together. Teach your children and neighbors that songs of praise are meant not only for worship in the congregation, but also worship in the home. Sing, sing and sing again!

Finally, in the midst of confession and thanksgiving and amidst your singing, invite and expect Jesus to come. We don’t know of Jesus refusing to come anywhere he was invited. Have confidence, then, that when you invite Jesus to be at home with you, He will come. Keep your eyes and ears open because sometimes Jesus comes in unexpected ways. Jesus will come to you and yours bringing blessings and making messes. Hosting Him will at once give and cost you more than you could ever have hoped or imagined.

“Hosting God is filled with honor and pleasure, cost and mystery. He is subtle, and even sometimes silent. He can also be extremely obvious, aggressive and overtly purposeful. He is a guest with an agenda” (from Bill Johnson’s Hosting the Presence).

—Rev. James Estes, Associate Pastor

“Let every heart prepare Him room”
When members of the international ministry of First Presbyterian Church learned that one of their own had breast cancer, they were adamant that she not walk the road to recovery alone.

Through months of chemotherapy and radiation, members of the Tulsa International Fellowship (TIF) rallied around Purity Langat and her family. They delivered meals and helped with her two young children. Faith Wambugu even shaved her head as Langat faced her own hair loss. And TIF prayed and prayed and prayed — walking with Langat as she healed.

But this fall, TIF made the walk a literal one. On Sept. 26, about 50 men, women and children gathered at 6:30 a.m., shared breakfast and prayers, and then walked a little over three miles in the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure. Several members who had spent time training together ran the timed portion of the 5K run.

“It is just amazing, the overwhelming love that I feel,” says Langat, recalling all the members who walked beside her in matching orange t-shirts, calling attention to breast cancer and celebrating her recovery.

Langat was only 31 years old in 2011 when she learned she had breast cancer. In her native Kenya, breast cancer — or at least a diagnosis of cancer — is rare, she says.

“We have this thing that cancer does not belong to people like us,” she says. “Cancer was the last thing on my mind.”

She and her husband, Kip, attended another church at the time. But after a double mastectomy and facing months of treatment, Langat says she wanted to find a strong faith community that would surround them in prayer. They found that in TIF, where members were stunned to learn that someone so young could be stricken by this disease.

Faith Wambugu says when she learned of Langat’s diagnosis, “I just broke into tears. I prayed with her and told her, ‘You are not going to die. You are going to live so you can give your testimony.’”

As a nurse, Langat is in the business of healing. But when it came to her recovery, she learned through TIF member Grace Masaku to turn to Isaiah 53.

“By the stripes of Jesus, we are healed,” Langat says. “That was my everyday prayer. I really thank God for his healing and for his protection right now.”

After four years of being cancer-free, Langat approaches the anniversary of her diagnosis with a special reason to celebrate. She is expecting her third child in February.

The members of TIF have been encouraged by Langat’s recovery, Wambugu says, adding that “if God did it for our sister, He can answer any other prayer.”

And it is her prayer, that others from the larger First Presbyterian church will join the TIF ministry in supporting breast cancer survivors in the Race for the Cure next year.

Wambugu says that Langat’s positive attitude was instrumental in her healing and encouraged those who prayed with her. “I personally learned a great deal from Purity. She and her husband are great leaders, very wise and generous. It’s a family you want to hang around with or get to know closely. They are such a great blessing to the community.”

The members who turned out to support Langat in the Race for the Cure symbolized how a community of faith can walk together and support one another. Wambugu likens it to the early church when the needs of individual members were tended to by the church as a whole.

“It’s more than just a brother or a sister. You are united because of Christ, walking in the same shoes together,” she says. “You are not suffering what she is suffering, but you feel like you are in it together.”

About 50 men, women and children gathered on September 26 to join breast cancer survivor Purity Langat in Tulsa’s Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure.
UKirk college ministry update

LAUREL BAIRD, NEXT GEN. MINISTRY ASSISTANT

After graduating several dedicated UKirk members last year, the ministry was left in a unique place. While it is wonderful to serve a large audience, smaller numbers provide some amazing opportunities. The students and leaders have had a chance to really get to know one another and invest in each other’s lives.

ORU student Elizabeth DeVore shares that “UKirk is a place to gather with other college students around Tulsa and share in the happy and difficult times of our lives. In a year where numbers may be down, God is teaching us that our community, no matter how small, is still important.”

“God is teaching us to be flexible this year in UKirk,” says TU student Tyler Carter. “We saw many of our members last year graduate and have been adapting the program to our smaller group.”

Dan Hutchinson, the First Church Next Gen. Pastor, explains that the Fall Retreat was also a highlight for the semester. “It was a powerful time of growing together while our guest speaker, Robbie Castleman, made the Gospel of John come alive as we explored four people’s powerful encounters with Christ.”

Tyler echoed that this year’s Fall Retreat was one of his favorites as well, sharing that “our group was able to grow closer with one another and continue our own personal walks of faith.”

This semester, Thursday night Gateway Worship continues to be the highlight of many students’ UKirk experience. Gateway “is a consistent time of worship and fellowship that always lifts me up after a stressful day,” says Elizabeth.

UKirk intern, Courtanney Miller also loves the community worship each week. “It is a very personal time between God and me but also a very communal time as we seek God together and support one another.”

This next semester UKirk is looking forward to creating some “senior get togethers” that will connect college seniors with Christians from the professional world who can share how faith intersects daily life.

College is an easy time to get wrapped in the “bubble” of campus life, but the UKirk students recognize their need for growth and support in the “real world.”

Tyler is particularly excited about this idea, sharing that “the next steps following college are not clear for many of our students, but if we can learn how to approach them as disciples of Christ ... we will have the opportunity to be more prepared to approach the next steps as graduates.”

Through these critical personal connections, Tyler is able to see how UKirk has already “fostered the growth of Presbyterian young people that are eager to serve as church leaders in the community when we graduate.”

The UKirk team is so thankful for First Church members’ willingness to provide food and open their homes for lunches and their hearts to become second families.

As we look back on a successful semester, it’s incredible to see God at work through the power of personal relationships. Please join in prayer that God may continue to use this ministry to reach college students and bring them into closer relationship with Him.

Exodus seeking to find the way

High schoolers study their maps at the Exodus Fall Retreat. Students hiked to four different stations around New Life Ranch to participate in activities identifying distractions that come between them and Christ.

(Left to right) ORU student Elizabeth DeVore mans the UKirk booth at the TU activities fair alongside Intern Courtanney Miller and FPC Next Gen. Ministry Assistant Laurel Baird.
Mission Leaders Conference comes to FPC

HANNAH KEITH, MISSION MINISTRY ASSISTANT

In the world of physics, we say that when an object is at rest, such as a ball at the top of a hill, it has potential energy stored within itself — the potential to roll down the hill. Kinetic energy, the energy of motion, can only occur once something or someone gives the ball a little push to get started.

Most of us connected to First Presbyterian Church live in or around Tulsa, Oklahoma, where the population of the city and the surrounding areas is an estimated one million people. To put things into perspective, we have the potential to affect approximately one-fourth of Oklahoma’s population by reaching our city and our neighbors.

First Church itself is strategically located right in the downtown center of this metropolitan area. Add in the future potential of the 8:10 Building revenue for mission work, and we have a formula for incredible momentum. How do we initiate this chain reaction and introduce a catalyst to our ball sitting on the top of the hill?

Classic references to mission work in the Bible include Mark 16:15 (“Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel”), Matthew 28:19 (“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them …”), and Acts 1:8 (“And ye shall be witnesses of me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth”).

All of these scriptures refer to our assignment to take the Gospel into a lost and dying world. Consider the call to action, “Go ye,” and the location of the assignment, “into all the world.” Even if it may seem difficult at times to get from step 1 to step 2, putting ideas into action, mission into motion, the answer to pressing forward is simple obedience to God’s simple instructions.

This next week, we are blessed to be able to explore these questions at the Connecting Mission Leaders conference, hosted at First Church from Dec 3-Dec 5. Speakers include retired Princeton Seminary professor Dr. Darrell Guder as well as several global missionaries.

Over the course of three days, pastors and missionaries from all over the world will connect to encourage one another and explore how to maximize the impact of the missional church vision in their congregations. Next Sunday, Dr. Darrell Guder will share some highlights with the rest of First Church in worship.

If you would like to register for the conference, visit connectingmissionleaders.com or contact Hannah Keith (918-301-1039).

“Blessing Bags” for the homeless

ERIC BAIRD, WORSHIP LEADER

As we enter into the new winter season, the needs and challenges of daily living for the homeless in our city greatly increase. The idea behind “Blessing Bags” is to touch the lives of those in need in a very practical and personal way — to share the love of Christ.

Assembling the bags can be a fun project for the whole family as you think through what it means to love “the least of these” (Matthew 25:40), to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27) and what it means to be “blessed to be a blessing.”

My wife and I joined with First Church’s Niche young adult fellowship in making and distributing Blessing Bags last year. It was a great experience, and the people who received them seemed genuinely touched and grateful. We found it very useful just to keep a few in the car in easy reach whenever a need presented itself.

All you will need is a Gallon freezer/storage plastic bag, a few basic items and a written note of blessing.

Here are some recommendations for inexpensive basic products that can greatly help someone in need: emergency blankets, knit hat/gloves/socks, pocket poncho, hand-warmers; travel toothbrush and toothpaste, granola bars, and a pocket Bible.

Other suggestions include: soap, toilet-paper, Kleenex, bottle of water, bandages, non-perishable food items, flashlight or glowsticks, deodorant, sunscreen, chapstick, prepaid phone card, non-alcoholic anti-bacterial hand lotion, etc.

I highly suggest writing a note of encouragement expressing God’s love to include in each bag. If you need ideas for how to write a note of blessing, please ask any of the ministry staff here at First Church. This is a great outreach ministry that everyone can do at home with family or even just as a solo project. Enjoy sharing a little of the blessings the Lord has blessed us with!
and hauntingly beautiful.” It speaks “to the longing that each person feels for peace and wholeness and homecoming,” all three of which are satisfied in the birth and death of Christ.

Another favorite of Dan as well as Dr. Miller is the musically soaring *Oh, Holy Night*. Dan loves it (as any tenor would) because it suits his voice perfectly and “captures the excitement and expectation of Christ’s coming and the call to believers to be ready.”

Dr. Miller also loves that beautiful melody, especially when his son, David, sings it. The text captures his heart because “it tells the whole gospel in a way that speaks of the incarnation, speaks of sin and speaks of redemption.”

*See Amid the Winter Snow* is a carol that you might not have heard or sung, but it became a favorite of Ryan Moore during his caroling days as a child. I also quickly became a fan of it as he sung a snippet in his office (he cannot hold in his carol anticipation either!).

Keith Getty, who has recently become a household name here at First Church, has a perspective on Christmas music within the church walls that is an inspiring reminder.

In a recent “Sound Check” YouTube video produced by Lifeway Worship, he calls Christmas “a privileged time of year” because “there will probably be more people who are yet to believe coming into our churches than any other time of year.”

He goes on to say that “if there are so many people that come into our church that are unbelievers, we have to remember that our singing is our witness.”

So, let us make Christmas a time where we make an intentional effort to sing with all our hearts, soul and mind. As Getty puts it: “The Christmas carols sing [the Gospel] more poetically, more beautifully than any other; they articulate the Gospel story so well and people enjoy singing them.”

It’s no surprise that most of us enjoy singing Christmas carols, but how can we use our love for these treasures to bring the love of Jesus outside of our church gates?

Might I suggest gathering a group of fellow carol lovers to bless homes, hospitals, prisons or malls with good tidings of great joy! Several ministries at First Church like the Niche already have caroling traditions, and more are in the works for this December.

Carols have the ability to bring people together from any walk of life and they often transport us to a place of nostalgia. They are also an avenue for worship and declaration of the gospel. The combination of these characteristics creates an opportunity for evangelism and sharing joy.

Dr. Miller loves the idea of using Christmas carols as an outreach: “When you listen to the carols you hear the need for a Savior.”

If you would like to join in this outreach effort, Rev. Estes has many ideas that are “just awaiting a leader.” Happy caroling!
NOVEMBER 29: ADVENT BEGINS Celebrate the coming of our Lord through the season of Advent.

DECEMBER 3-5: CONNECTING MISSION LEADERS CONFERENCE Join with other mission leaders for a special conference hosted at First Church Thursday-Saturday, Dec. 3-5. For more information and to register, visit www.connectingmissionleaders.com or call 918-301-1039.

DECEMBER 3: UKIRK BLUEGRASS CHRISTMAS Join UKirk college ministry in their last Gateway worship service for the semester at 9 p.m. at TU’s Sharp Chapel.

DECEMBER 4: LET’S DANCE TOGETHER DINNER TIF hosts a fun evening of food, fellowship, music and dancing with guest emcee MC Njugush. Guest speaker Terry Buxton, Sr., senior pastor at Agape Bible Fellowship, will present on “Healthy Relationships.” Couples $25, singles $15. Reserve online at firstchurchtulsa.org.

DECEMBER 6: ADVENT WORKSHOP Christmas crafts for all ages from 1-3:30 p.m. in the PowerHouse. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Childcare is provided for pre-K and under at the church by reservation only. There will also be a special chili lunch following worship. $3 for adults and children 12 and under are free.

DECEMBER 16: CAROLS & COCOA WNDT dinner includes hot cocoa and carols from 5:30-6:30 p.m. all are welcome. Dinner reservations required by Dec. 14 at firstchurchtulsa.org/wndt or by calling 918-301-1019. Wear your Christmas pajamas!

DECEMBER 19: YOUTH CHRISTMAS PARTY FPC youth are invited to celebrate together from 5:30-8 p.m. in the PowerHouse.

DECEMBER 20: CHRISTMAS MUSIC SUNDAY The 11:00 a.m. contemporary and traditional services will combine in the Sanctuary for a special service of jubilant Christmas favorites! Bring your friends and family to experience the gospel message proclaimed in familiar song.

DECEMBER 24: CHRISTMAS EVE All services will be held in the Sanctuary at:
- 3:00 p.m. All is Calm: a quiet and beautiful service includes carols, a brief homily, and come-forward communion
- 5:00 p.m. Christmas for the Young at Heart: includes the youth and children’s Christmas program designed especially for young families
- 7:30 p.m. Candles and Carols: a service complete with music from the Chancel Choir ... come early!
- 10:30 p.m. Candles and Communion: an intimate service includes communion and music from a choir ensemble and concludes at midnight

DECEMBER 25: CHRISTMAS DAY A joyous celebration of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ in the intimate setting of the Kerr Chapel at 11 a.m.

DECEMBER 27: PANCAKE BREAKFAST & FESTIVAL SUNDAY Pancakes ($3 for adults) in the Atrium at 9:30 a.m. and one unified worship service in the Sanctuary at 11 a.m. No regular 9:30 a.m. Sunday School.

DECEMBER 31: NEW YEARS EVE Ring in the new year with a special evening of worship and fellowship hosted by TIF beginning at 9 p.m. in the Great Hall. Exodus and Pathfinders students will also be celebrating and will join together with TIF for midnight worship and communion.

JANUARY 6-26: THE JANUARY SERIES 15 weekday lunchtime lectures will be held on various exciting topics at 11:30 a.m. in Stephenson Hall. Learn more and reserve lunch online at firstchurchtulsa.org.

JANUARY 6: WEDNESDAY NIGHT DOWNTOWN PROGRAMMING RESUMES Evening programming for all ages resumes, including Awana for kids and POW! for middle schoolers. Sign up and reserve dinner online at firstchurchtulsa.org/wndt.

JANUARY 8: 8 DATES A presentation on parenting and a date night! Drop off your children in the Children’s Area at 6 p.m. and head to Miller Library for a presentation on parenting. Parents may then leave the church for a dinner out. Childcare reservations ($2) are required by Jan. 5 at firstchurchtulsa.org/8dates or by calling 918-301-1009.

JANUARY 22: EVENINGS AT THE BERNSEN - THREE FOR TONIGHT Music from Jana Jae, Barbara McAlister, and Donald Ryan, all international artists planted in our own backyard! EAB concerts begin at 7:30 p.m. in Great Hall with doors opening at 7 p.m. Tickets are $10 for adults, $5 for students, and children 12 and under are free. Contact Tom Marsh for ticket information at 918-388-4720.

JANUARY 23: CHRISTMAS EVE All services will be held in the Sanctuary at:
- 3:00 p.m. All is Calm: a quiet and beautiful service includes carols, a brief homily, and come-forward communion
- 5:00 p.m. Christmas for the Young at Heart: includes the youth and children’s Christmas program designed especially for young families
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LEARN MORE ABOUT THESE EVENTS AND MORE HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC, ONLINE AT FIRSTCHURCHTULSA.ORG.

Honor friends and family members this Christmas with gifts of hope that bless people with few resources of their own. Items needed by 14 different local, national and global organizations range from $1 to $100 and come with a card commemorating the gift.

Learn more and order online at firstchurchtulsa.org/giftback.

Visit the Gift Back market in the atrium today!
As 2015 comes to a close, the First Church leadership is prayerfully putting together the operating budget for 2016.

Currently, 297 families have pledged — 19% of our total church population of 1,575 families. Together they have offered $1,334,370.41 back to God.

It is our prayer that every member might give a gift, great or small, to the continuing work of transformation through worship, discipleship and mission around the world.

If you have not done so already, please mail in your “covenant of giving” card, or submit one on the First Church website at firstchurchtulsa.org/give.

The January Series

Free lunchtime lectures
Weekdays, January 6-26
11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. in Stephenson Hall
First Presbyterian Church of Tulsa

11 Monday
EBOO PATEL
Interfaith Leadership

12 Tuesday
BETHANY HALEY WILLIAMS
The Color of Grace: Healing and Hope for Child Survivors of War

13 Wednesday
DAVID BROOKS
The Road to Character

14 Thursday
JILL DOUGHERTY
Russia: Past, Present and Future

15 Friday
RON SUSKIND
Life, Animated: A Story of Sidekicks, Heroes and Autism

18 Monday
LEROY BARBER
in honor of Martin Luther King Jr.
Race, Stories and Justice: A Call for Diversity in Christian Missions

19 Tuesday
WILLIAM CLOSE
AND THE EARTH HARP COLLECTIVE

20 Wednesday
JERE L. KRAKOW
National Parks: America’s Greatest Treasure

21 Thursday
GABRIEL AND JEANETTE SALGUERO
How Latino Churches are Changing America

22 Friday
KURT VERBEEK
Reframing Justice: Models from Honduras

Optional lunch is available for $6
Reservations must be made online or by calling 918-301-1039 by noon the day before firstchurchtulsa.org/januarieseries