My sons have a job to do most Sunday mornings. They’re ushers in the 8:30 a.m. worship service. And even though they are only eight and 10 years old, it’s a job they like and take quite seriously.

Why? “We actually get to do something,” says Jonas, my youngest, who sometimes passes the plate twice down the row by accident but still dutifully manages to get the collection into safe-keeping. “You don’t just sit there and then stand up for the songs. I like being an usher because I can help.”

Actively participating in worship has been a transformative experience for my boys. That kind of active involvement is part of what’s behind a new children’s ministry, called Worship 101, which started in January for 4-year-olds up to fifth graders.

The idea is to help children grow their faith by teaching them why we do what we do in worship, and encourage them to be part of it, explains Jan Miller, director of Children’s Ministries.

“We are so good at giving our kids information through stories of the Bible,” she says, but with Worship 101, “rather than information, we’re thinking about formation.”

And so, on Sunday mornings, children meet for their regular Sunday School lesson, and then after 45 minutes, they break into three age-based groups for Worship 101.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3
I’ve called myself a Christian now for some time. I still have doubts—like anybody I suppose—but sometimes I feel like these unanswered questions really bog me down and get in the way of what I know should be the ‘good news.’ I want my faith to be something my family and friends can see, but the more I learn, the more lost I feel sometimes. How can I lead or be an example when I myself don’t know?

Ah, this is, actually, an easy question to answer! In fact, I offer my response with considerable confidence that it addresses your situation exactly. How can I know that? Because it’s the universal Christian condition. Let me break it down into three brief reflections.

First, the fact that you have questions is a vital sign that the Lord is at work in your life—and that’s very good news! Your feelings disclose doubts and questions, indeed, but it’s only when you acknowledge this that you can take action.

The fact that you can sense a disconnect between what you think you believe and what you “feel” at any given time suggests that the Holy Spirit is prompting you to address this. This is what the “journey of discipleship” is all about.

Secondly, every serious Christian I know has doubts and uncertainties. I know I do. And here’s where I’d like to take you back with me all the way to the Summer of 1976 when I taught Greek at Princeton Seminary.

I remember feeling dubious about teaching at all, largely since I was younger than many of my students. When I first fielded a question I didn’t know, I was ready to quit. It really threw me. I spoke with Dr. Cullen Story, the director of Biblical languages, and he sat down with me and offered some of the best advice I’ve ever been given.

“Look, Jim,” he said, as he drew a circle on a napkin, adding many question marks within it, “here’s the field of all the unanswered questions you’re going to have as a young teacher of Greek grammar. Many of them will only surface when a student’s question uncovers your lack of understanding. But questions needn’t worry you. Simply tell your students that you’re going to look into that and will get back to them. Then go to work. Your goal is to take each question seriously, do your research into finding the best response, and eventually erase that question from your field of the unknown. Over time, many years perhaps, your field of “unanswered questions” will diminish considerably.”

I believe this is exactly what happens within Christian discipleship. There are many doubts and questions that arise as we grow deeper in our faith. Don’t be put off by these. Don’t be daunted by them. Just take them as they come, value them, hold them, ponder them. Let the questions (or doubts!) lead you into the deeper waters of mature faith.

In this—and every—season, engage your Christian friends, talk to your mentors, search the Scriptures, pray the Psalms.

Finally, the Bible itself is filled with saints who carry questions with them. Moses had doubts about God’s call on his life and the directive to send him back to Egypt. Jonah doubted that God could possibly want him to go to Ninevah. After the crucifixion, every disciple must have doubted their decision to affirm Jesus as the Messiah. Thomas certainly did.

The Psalms are littered with real-time questions—uncertainties, doubts. That’s where I’d start. Pray the Psalms, one a day. Don’t just read them; pray them. Climb into the questions of the saints; recognize them as God-given friends. Doubts indicate questions, and questions always invite response. A response is that which defines an active, living faith.

The best way to lead by example is to acknowledge our limitations, and drive forward with a deep faith that in Jesus Christ, the answers will come—one day!

—Dr. Jim Miller, co-pastor
“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.”
(1 Peter 4:10)

Recently from February 1-March 8, the Children’s Ministries at FPC held a book drive, collecting 777 books for the children at Emerson Elementary School, First Church’s partner school.

This open classroom school educates children residing near downtown and in the Tulsa shelter. Many of these students and their families face significant socioeconomic challenges.

The donated books will be distributed in April to help the students practice their reading skills over the summer. “So many of the kids don’t have books at home. They also do not see their parents reading as models,” shared Susan Foust, the Emerson library media specialist and site tech. “When we combine these books with the other books that we have been collecting, this will provide five to six books per child. The kids will be so thrilled.”

Although the book drive is now complete, more volunteer opportunities abound at Emerson, even for those who have just one free evening or a lunch hour each week.

**Enjoy Lunch with a Friend**

The weekly Emerson Lunch Buddy mentoring program was established to provide positive adult relationships with students and as a motivation to further their academic success. There are currently 35 volunteers, including many First Church members, who meet weekly with students over their lunch hour. Mentors provide the consistent, positive adult interaction that these students crave. It’s a significant start, but with more than 50 Emerson students waiting for adult mentors, the need is great.

Tom Hillis, First Church volunteer mentor, says he hopes that First Church members will lead in this important program, “Most people assume that these kids don’t really want to have an adult visit them, but they really do. They love it. Kids routinely ask me if I can find them a lunch buddy. They are...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

They learn about baptism, the Order of Worship, the Lord’s Prayer, the liturgical calendar and other concepts central to Presbyterian worship. They might make a craft or play a game related to the lesson. They also learn hymns and practice songs for leading worship.

With the music, “what we really care about is their understanding of singing praise to the Lord,” says Julianne Hand, who developed the Worship 101 curriculum as the new Children’s Worship Arts Leader.

Worship 101 also prepares children to participate in First Church worship services in other ways, including reading scripture or leading prayers. “We want to embed children in the worship service. That’s one of our big goals – to embed them at every chance we can get so that they are participating and are not bystanders,” Hand says.

In teaching the littlest children, Hand uses songs and pictures to help them understand concepts as complicated as the liturgical calendar. Sitting in a circle with a group of 4-year-olds on a recent Sunday, she guided them through Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, then asked them to explain what “Ordinary Times” represent in the church calendar.

“It’s a growing time!” a little girl in a polka-dot hair bow chirped excitedly. “Yes,” Hand answered, “Ordinary Times are when we are focusing on our lives and how we relate to Jesus.”

Hand – mom to Jacob, 8, Noah, 6, and Samuel, 3 – has a musical theater degree and created and led the music program at Kirk of the Hills Preschool before coming to First Church. Two other staff members, Carol Tipton and Lindsay Duncan, also help with Worship 101.

The program also relies on a group of volunteers. More volunteers are needed, especially to serve as substitutes.

Miller says that Worship 101 ultimately aims to help children understand that they have a role as part of the worshipping body of Christ.

“Being an acolyte is great,” she says. “But there so many other things that children can do, so that it’s not just our words that say, ‘You are a part of the body of Christ.’ We are actually showing them they are important.”

As First Church children learn about why we have acolytes and why we have a time of confession and other aspects of worship, Miller sees the potential to increase understanding in other ways.

“We’re thinking the kids are going to be able to teach their parents some things, too.”

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Patience, gentleness, trust and love in Valladolid, Mexico

LAURIE WINSLOW

As a small band of First Church members recently witnessed during the Chosen IMA mission trip to Valladolid, Mexico, God is at work in the world through both his servants and those who are served.

In February, the team returned from the International Medical Assistance (IMA) mission trip, which relies on medical and non-medical volunteers to provide surgical and medical services.

On this particular mission trip, Dr. Tommy Kern was part of the “village people” team that traveled daily by bus—loaded with medicine and supplies—to a village in order to provide a free clinic.

The team saw an array of medical problems in patients who ranged in age from about 6 months to 89 years old.

The high mineral level in Valladolid’s water leads to a very high incidence of kidney and gall stones. “Also, there are a lot of problems with parasites or worms. This saps much of the food nutrition from the children, which leads to a high incidence of infections, malnutrition and developmental issues,” Dr. Kern says.

“We also saw a lot of arthritis and joint problems, as you would expect from a population that is doing difficult physical manual labor in jungle conditions 8-12 hours per day.”

Usually, when they arrived early, up to 50 patients would already be waiting patiently. That enduring patience was one of the things that made such an impact on Elaine Stook, who was eager to share where she saw the Lord at work during the mission trip.

“If there was anything that served as a wonderful reminder, it was the patience shown by those who we were privileged to serve. Perhaps a metaphor…waiting for the promise.”

Elaine, who was also part of the village team, says she felt immediately at home surrounded by a welcoming and gentle community in each place they visited.

“The team talked a lot about the love of God and Jesus during the trip, says Dr. Kern, who was on his second IMA mission trip after his first visit in 2012.

He says he saw Christ at work in the looks shared between patients and medical volunteers.

“They couldn’t understand at all what I was saying or doing, but they put their trust in me with the medications—and even more amazing, with the surgeons who would put them to sleep and do surgery. There was one village when an older lady in her 70’s greeted us all with love and a kiss on the cheek. I enjoyed my time and hope to go back soon.”

The most impactful thing he experienced centered on a 3-year-old child who had gained only 2.2 pounds since birth.

“He had been told by other doctors that they couldn’t find anything wrong, but they wouldn’t refer him either. We were able to get help from the mayor of Valladolid, and we are working on transferring him to Cancun or Medina where he might be able to receive the proper care,” Kern says.
Ostensibly, the process of Confirmation in the Presbyterian Church “seeks to provide youth with a foundational understanding of our faith, tradition, and Presbyterian practices,” (pcusa.org) but in practice, it entails much more. This year I have been privileged to walk alongside our eighth-graders as a Confirmation life-group leader while they learn and ask questions, sift through information and grasp hold of complex truths, all the while coming closer to affirming their faith in a personal, concrete way before Session and the congregation.

Rev. James Estes describes Confirmation as “a place for getting practical answers to questions of faith. It allows middle school students to bring the real challenges of faith to a community committed to daily participation in God’s life and mission on the earth.”

He describes how together, the Confirmation class addresses questions such as: “What’s the difference between being a follower of Christ and just paying lip service to a religious institution? Jesus is full of grace, but the Bible seems to be full of commands, so if I’m not saved by works, what’s with all the rules? What’s wrong with having a ‘personal relationship with Jesus’ but never worshipping with other Christians? How do words like sin and idolatry connect to my life in the 21st century? If God is good and loving, why is there so much suffering in the world?”

As they approach the end of the school year, when they will affirm faith in Jesus Christ and step forward into membership at FPC, this year’s Confirmands are writing their own personal statements of faith.

Jackson Seibert, who is now the associate director of middle school ministries, participated in the program when he was an eighth-grader. “As a young Christian, Confirmation was a crucial part of my growth,” he says, “It caused me to take my life experience, knowledge, doubt and relationship with Christ and decide for myself that Jesus would have Lordship over my life!”

As our students have wrestled with each week’s material—from the creeds to the Trinity to the history of the Church—we hope they have begun to arrive at a similar conclusion.

Says Confirmand Caroline Woodard, “Confirmation has led me closer to my friends and drawn me closer to God and made some things clearer to me. It’s made me want to read the Bible more.”

Similarly, as he drafted his own statement of faith during the Confirmation Spring Retreat in early March, another Confirmand wrote, “Jesus is our ruler—ruler and king of everything. To think that the highest king knows me personally, my story, everything about me, it’s remarkable. To also think that He is my savior, He died for me, the most powerful leader suffered consequences I should suffer, but I don’t have to because he did it for me.”

These two offer just a small taste of what our students are coming to embrace as individuals as they journey through Confirmation.

“My hope and prayer,” continues Jackson, “is that every student who comes through Confirmation would be able to come to know the life-changing love, grace and mercy of Christ Jesus in the midst of doubt, uncertainty and the abrasive culture that we live in.”
very receptive to any adult attention.”

Hillis estimates he is away from the office an hour and fifteen minutes once a week. Although the time spent with his mentee is short, it’s precious.

“The school encourages us to eat with the students and then we have free time to read or play games. My lunch buddy likes to read action adventures. We each pick a character and take turns reading their sections.”

Hillis proudly notes that his lunch buddy’s reading has improved. The student has moved out of a remedial class and is reading at his grade level. He adds that another mentee has blossomed from a shy, introverted child to Emerson’s student of the month.

Hillis hopes to reach more students by identifying additional mentors in April and May. “We want to get mentors plugged in this spring so we can start the new school year with established relationships,” he says.

First Church members interested in the mentor program can shadow during a lunch session. To volunteer or to schedule a shadowing session, contact the church office or school coordinator, Heidi Mayer at mayerhe@tulsaschools.org. Volunteers must also complete an application and background check through the church office.

**Silent Auction and Bingo Night**

Can’t commit to lunch? Ten volunteers and dozens of party patrons are needed to support the annual bingo and silent auction fundraiser on Friday April 10 from 6-8 p.m. in the Emerson cafeteria and library.

Foust, who is the auction coordinator, says the event is the major fundraiser for the year and will raise money for much needed playground equipment as well as the Science, Tech, Engineering and Math Initiative (STEM).

“With last year’s funds, we purchased science kits, science books, licenses for software on computer coding and learning sites, STEM Teacher training, USB digital microscopes and a Girl’s STEM Night at school,” says Foust. “We’d like to have some science museum field trips this year, as well as an after school LEGO robotics club.”

The fundraising event is coordinated by Emerson staff so volunteer support is crucial.

“In my experience with other PTA groups,” says First Church volunteer, Cindy Devore, “the parents were the driving force. At Emerson, the staff and teachers pour their hearts and dollars into the kids.”

**Volunteers are needed from 6-8 p.m. to serve dinner and manage the auction tables. In addition, donations are needed for the silent auction including baskets, gift cards and bingo prizes. Key auction donations include gifts of services from private business owners including orthodontic care, car repair, house cleaning and lawn care services.**

“The biggest challenge is getting families in poverty to see the point of this fundraiser when they have no money,” says Foust, “but they do end up seeing that if everyone just donates a little, the school benefits in a big way. This bit of money gives a chance to these kids and equals out the playing field.”

Dinner tickets for a baked potato bar sponsored by Elote cost $5 for adults and $3 for children. Bingo cards are $1 or 12 for $10. Party admission is free.

To donate to the auction, contact Susan Foust at fouststu@tulsaschools.org. Checks can be made out to the Emerson PTA with “STEM” in the note. Credit card donations can be made through the PTA’s Square account. A tax receipt can be provided. The school’s federal tax ID number is 73-0995-498. To volunteer or for more information, contact Cindy Devore at 918-630-2636 or cindy_devore@hotmail.com.

Learn more about other volunteer opportunities at firstchurchtulsa.org/emerson.

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First Church’s Faith Partners Team consists of a small group of trained lay people who work together with the clergy to provide alcohol and other drug addiction awareness, education and recovery support to children, youth, adults and families in the congregation.

Team members identify and keep current information on community resources and assist the clergy in making confidential and appropriate referrals. They also provide a community of support for people in early recovery, engage others in conversation and cultivate a climate of openness and understanding around addiction issues. Ultimately, they build bridges of understanding between the faith community and community resources like Twelve Step programs.

Faith Partners, a non-profit 501c3, was founded in 1995 by religious leaders seeking ways to mobilize faith communities’ resources to address alcohol and drug issues. In 2004, after years of development, the Faith Partners Congregational Team approach was elevated to a national audience after a religious leaders’ summit and major outreach efforts. The program also received endorsement from the United Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church USA.

Today the Faith Partners Congregational Team Model is used in hundreds of congregations in twenty-three states with nineteen different faith traditions.

On January 30-31, nine members of the First Church Faith Partners team attended two days of team training. The team was formed early last year to establish a ministry for those afflicted with addictions of all kinds. The January training was part two of a three part training series.

There is still opportunity for service by joining the Faith Partners Team here at First Church. Participation can involve a wide variety of skills and talents; you don’t have to be an expert or experienced with addiction. For more information, contact Steve McCormack 918-294-0576 or stevemccormack@windstream.net.

If you are actively addicted, in recovery or love someone who is, you are not alone. There is help. To reach a caring person who is ready to listen anonymously, please call 918-227-1954.
**My evening at the Bernsen**

**ERIC BAIRD, CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP LEADER**

On a cold and icy night on March 13, my wife and I exited the elevator onto the fourth floor of the Bernsen Center to discover an environment that was quite the opposite of the cold bleakness outside. We were warmly welcomed by volunteers and patrons alike of the Evenings at the Bernsen concert series, an outreach ministry of First Presbyterian Church.

We were invited to join a couple at one of the front tables, and as we happily chatted with them, I observed similar scenes playing out around us throughout the large room. The conversations spilled over from table to table throughout the large diverse crowd, all creating a real sense of family and familiarity.

Soon the lights dimmed and the simple, elegantly set stage came into focus, ready for the Tulsa Opera Studio Artists. The talented pianist, Valerie Pool, entered to polite applause and sat at the beautiful Steinway and began to play. Suddenly, there were a few mumbled lines and random baritone notes from offstage; through the curtain burst the hilarious and very gifted Tim Petty in the midst of a great deal of comedic frustration in his aria from “The Marriage of Figaro,” by Mozart.

His brilliant solo was followed by the powerful soprano vocals of Elizabeth Kelsay, whose dynamic range could go from light and pleasant to nearly glass shattering power and pitch! Third was the fantastically gifted Ashley Cutright; a mezzo-soprano whose voice perfectly matched the emotionally complex pieces she chose.

The evening was a lovely variety of music—comic, tender and tragic—sung as solos or in duet or trio. Their operatic favorites were accessible enough to be enjoyed by Opera lovers and Bugs Bunny fans alike, covering a broad range of composers and content.

The Broadway pieces were fun and familiar and a great way to end the evening. The artists were entrancing in their abilities and engaging in their performance, with the ladies even walking through the crowd during a couple of pieces, further enhancing the familial environment.

I told my wife the experience felt like my three very talented friends had stopped by the house to sing just for us. All the artists commented to me how much they enjoyed the venue, being able to interact with the crowd, and how great it was to be so warmly received. Overall, it was a wonderful experience and I highly recommend the Evenings at Bernsen as a great night out for anyone!

The next and final concert of the season will take place on May 1 in the Great Hall of the Bernsen Center. Hark back to an era of ceiling fans, ice cream socials and Sunday concerts in the park, as Evenings at Bernsen welcomes back Kansas City’s own “Turpin Tyme Ragsters.”

Concerts begin at 7:30 p.m. with doors 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 or learn more at firstchurchtulsa.org/eab. Don’t miss out on the fun!

### New Members - February 2015

- **LAURA BLACK**
- **LAURIE BRUMBAUGH**
- **MICHAEL “MIKE” BRUMBAUGH**
- **KEITH CAMPBELL**
- **DARLYN SLATER**

**Questions?**

To learn more about membership at FPC, contact Patricia Hall, 918-301-1028, or phall@firstchurchtulsa.org.

**Next Inquirers’ Class: April 2015.**
Calendar of Events

APRIL 10: **8 DATES** A presentation on parenting at 6:15 p.m. in Miller Library followed by a time for dinner out. This month we learn how to develop strategies on setting and enforcing boundaries. Childcare from 6-9:15 p.m. by reservation only ($2).

APRIL 10: **EMERSON AUCTION AND BINGO NIGHT** Support our friends at Emerson Elementary School from 6-8 p.m. for their spring fundraiser. (*See page 3.*)

APRIL 11: **AMASS EXODUS** Our monthly gathering for high schoolers from 7-9 p.m. in the Powerhouse. Fearlessly discuss what following Christ looks like today with powerful worship and organized fun!

APRIL 12: **RESOUNDING JOY SUNDAY** Barry Epperley and Ron Pearson lead extended singing in the sanctuary at 11 a.m.

APRIL 15: **PASTOR’S STUDY - “PILGRIM’S REGRESS”** Dr. Jim Miller begins his new Pastor’s Study of “The Pilgrim’s Regress” by C.S. Lewis on Wednesdays at 11:30 a.m. in E104 with optional lunch by reservation (call 918-301-1019). The study will also be held Sundays at 9:30 a.m. in Stephenson Hall starting April 19.

APRIL 15: **INQUIRER’S CLASS** Learn about membership at FPC, who we are and what we believe as part of Wednesday Night Downtown from 6:30-8 p.m. April 15-May 6, OR come to the weekend session on April 25, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. and April 26, 9:15-10:30 a.m. Contact Patricia Hall 918-301-1028 phall@firstchurchtulsa.org.

APRIL 15: **WEDNESDAY NIGHT DOWNTOWN AND AWANA** Join us for our weekly Wednesday night programming with an optional dinner at 5:45 p.m. Awana for kids and adult classes (including Alpha) take place from 6:30-8 p.m. Learn more and register for dinner online or by calling Gretchen at 918-301-1019.

APRIL 19: **CHANCEL CHOIR CONCERT** Sunday, April 19 at 5 p.m. in the sanctuary. The program will feature highlight’s from Handel’s “Messiah,” with orchestra—inspiring music from the world’s greatest oratorio.

APRIL 25: **PETRA KIDS MINISTRIES ANNUAL BANQUET (NEW DATE)** 5 p.m. Stephenson Hall. Dinner, live music, and auctions benefiting children in Uganda (petrakidsministries.com).

APRIL 25: **RED CROSS TRAINING** The FPC Local Mission Committee invites you to a Red Cross training class including CPR training in E104 from 9 a.m.-noon.

MARCH 1: **EAB PRESENTS THE TURPINTYME RAGSTERS** Join in the fun of this Kansas City 7-piece ragtime band! Tickets $10 adults, $5 students, and children 12 and under free. (*See page 7.*)

MAY 1-2: **RELATIONSHIP REMODELING WORKSHOP** No matter your age or whether you’re single or married, this two-day event will provide you with the right tools to build healthy relationships of all types, including those with family members, neighbors, co-workers and others. The Rev. Ted Hutchinson and his wife Jane (parents of First Church Associate Pastor Dan Hutchinson) will lead this insightful and informative workshop at FPC.

JUNE 1-5: **VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL** 9 a.m.-noon at Camp Loughridge. $10 for VBS (elementary) and $25 for VBS (4th-5th grade). Register by May 11 online at firstchurchtulsa.org/vbs.

JUNE 22-26: **KANAKUK KAMPOUT** FPC will host an outreach-oriented day “kamp.” Kampers and volunteers needed.

Learn more about these events and more happening in the life of FPC, online at www.firstchurchtulsa.org

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**NEXT SUNDAY, APRIL 12:**

**AFTER THE CROSS**

**BIG QUESTIONS & UNEXPECTED ANSWERS**

Join us for a special sermon series on what happens after the cross, exploring the lives of the early apostles, the role of the church today and how we are called to live.

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15:**

Got questions about life?

The Alpha course is returning to First Church as part of Wednesday Night Downtown. The class is at 6:30 p.m. in Stephenson Hall, with optional dinner at 5:45 by reservation online or by calling 918-301-1019. Dinner is $6 for adults and $3 for children. Sign up today!

**VISITORS’ MEALS ARE COMPLIMENTARY.**

firstchurchtulsa.org/alpha