The power of a praying congregation

KELLY BROWN

Every day, Paula Peterson prays for someone.

Prayer requests come to her in offering plates and emails, phone calls and notes left at church. She prays for travelers and people too sick to leave their beds. She prays for soldiers on the battlefield and pastors in the pulpit. She prays for people she knows but more often, those she doesn’t.

Sometimes when she bows to pray, she only has a name and the trust that God knows that person’s deepest need.

“I’ve believed in the power of prayer all of my life,” Peterson says. “It just strengthens your own faith to take someone else’s needs to the Lord.”

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Helping to serve the spiritual needs of hospitalized First Church members

STEPHANIE FARRIS

Visit a Tulsa hospital and you’ll likely bump into a First Church volunteer chaplain. These volunteers visit hospitalized church members, tending to their spiritual needs.

“I think of the volunteer chaplain program as an opportunity to serve as an extension of God; his hands and feet,” says Hannah Robson, the volunteer chaplain coordinator. “Volunteer chaplains hope to share the Word and the love of Jesus with each person they visit.”

The program is important because spiritual needs can often be overlooked when medical needs become the focus during hospitalization. And, Robson notes, many patients are uncomfortable discussing their spiritual concerns with family members. Volunteer chaplains speak with each person about their spiritual needs, without judgment and pray with them, if they are willing.

Robson has served as a volunteer chaplain for more than ten years and says that chaplains receive as much, if not more, than the patients they visit.

“Our visits are sacred moments,” says Robson. “It’s rewarding to see someone light up when you visit.”

Volunteers like Robson make visits approximately two times per month. During an assigned volunteer week, Robson receives a list...
Peterson leads the Guild of Intercessors, a First Presbyterian Church ministry that began in 1945. About 75 people serve as intercessors, honoring a daily commitment to pray for the names they receive on a weekly prayer request list.

Some of these prayerful people are homebound; others offer their prayers as they can, on lunch breaks or at their desks. Peterson knows intercessors who even take their prayer lists on vacation with them.

Peterson considers it a blessing and a privilege to pray for those who may be too sick or distraught to utter a prayer themselves. She prays every morning with her husband, Mark.

“I don’t think anybody understands how powerful prayer really is. I’ve seen so many answers and I’ve seen God move in such miraculous ways,” Peterson says. “Some people pray and they don’t expect an answer. I believe something is going to happen when I pray because God promised me that.”

The church offers an invitation to prayer in virtually every corner. Pews hold note cards for prayer requests, which can be dropped in the offering plate or a prayer request box in the Narthex. If you are interested in a quiet place to pray, there are a couple of dedicated prayer spaces: The Guild has a quiet room on the first floor in Room 119 and Room 204 is a prayer room.

Another church ministry called the Prayer Room offers daily prayers that focus on every member of First Church. Every year, each Prayer Room is assigned eight member families, whom they pray for by name on a daily basis, says Gretchen Bashforth.

“They may or may not know the people for whom they are praying, and they usually do not know of specific prayer needs,” she says. “This is more of a quiet spiritual practice of lifting our church family up in prayer every day of the year.”

In preparation for Easter, the church annually holds a non-stop prayer vigil that begins on Maundy Thursday and continues through Easter morning.

Kathleen Muller takes part in the vigil every year, opting for a 30-minute prayer time that falls late at night or early in the morning – a quiet time that helps her focus.

“My experience in the prayer vigil is that it is the best way for me to prepare interiorly and in a spiritual way to receive Easter,” she says. “It is intentionally setting aside time to be present to God around what Easter means.”

Muller also leads an eight-month study called Spiritual Exercises, which focuses intently on prayer and learning through prayer how to have a deeper relationship with the Lord.

The exercises, based on the writings of 16th-Century theologian Ignatius Loyola, involve daily focused prayer and guided practices aimed at self-awareness, discerning God’s call in your life and ultimately living into God’s greater glory.

Some people are gifted in intercessory prayer, like the Guild members. Others may be inclined toward a contemplative path as in silent prayer. The Ignatian Exercises involve praying with Scripture in particular ways, and the goal – besides developing this lively ongoing relationship with the risen Jesus – is to respond to his invitation to a deeper commitment in our life of faith.

Our example for the necessity and power of prayer, she says, comes in Jesus when he went off to pray just before the unfolding of events that ultimately brought his death and resurrection. “That’s what gave him strength to do what he needed to do, and it empowered him and restored him, Muller says. “That’s true for us as well.”

The Spiritual Exercises class begins in September. For details, please contact Kathleen Muller at kamul@cox.net. Want to join the prayer ministry of the Guild of Intercessors? Contact Paula Peterson at 918-296-5548. Or become a Pray-er? Contact Gretchen Bashforth at 918-301-1019 or gbashforth@firstchurchtulsa.org.
Daily disciplines enhance the spiritual journey, lead to growth

DUFF POINTS

HOW THE LENTEN GUIDE CAME TO BE
As our congregation enters the Lenten season, many of us are benefitting from the devotional guide that the church made available, A Lenten Invitation: Watch and Pray. A group of four friends, Ken Cox, Brad Morrow, Steve Wilson, and Dr. Jim Miller offered to write this guide as a way for fellow brothers and sisters in Christ to explore spiritual practices together much as they had done over the past year.

In the fall of 2012, elder Kathleen Muller facilitated five spiritual formation groups who committed to a 32 week journey of prayer (meditation and contemplation), scripture reading, journaling, and weekly conversations. The groups used the book, The Ignatian Adventure, Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius in Daily Life, by Kevin O’Brien because it provided daily exercises that followed Jesus Christ’s life, ministry, death and resurrection as a framework for study. In his book, O’Brien explains that Ignatius of Loyola gave the church spiritual exercises because he believed they could “help other people draw closer to God and discern God’s call in their lives much as they had helped him”.

A PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF ADOPTING SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES
Over the past several years, I had adopted spiritual practices into the rhythm of my week. However, after the Cast Your Nets Retreat that First Church offered in the fall of 2012, I was prompted to go deeper. I decided to commit to the Ignatian practices alongside my good friend, Laurie Winslow, and with Kathleen Muller as our mentor and leader. It was a beautiful experience of coming to know, trust and love the Lord more fully. Scriptures whispered wisdom to me. Conversations with Kathleen and Laurie revealed new “ah ha” moments about being in relationship with Christ. Prayer provided peace and insight and renewal each and every day.

And the journaling? Well, it added a whole new creative avenue for stepping into the Word. Here’s one example entry:

Week of Prayer #23 – Day 4. Read John 13:1-17, Jesus Washes His Disciples’ Feet
Oh what a sight it must have been to see Jesus kneeling beside his disciples and washing their feet. I can imagine him tenderly caring for his friends that evening – washing their feet in a basin then drying them with a towel. Jesus’ touch is strong, yet gentle. His hands are weathered and calloused as the hard working hands of a carpenter; yet they are also the soothing hands of a healer.

His hands, the Master’s beloved hands – Jesus laid them upon people as he blessed them. These are the palms that had been lifted up to heaven as he shared benedictions. These are the hands that hugged his mother, lifted children onto his lap, and broke bread for the 5,000. These are the Savior’s hands that are pierced for our transgressions.

In the upper room that night, Jesus taught the apostles how to care for each other and how to care for those beyond their circle.

He coached his friends to have servant hearts and humble hands, “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you”. Lord, help me to be a courageous messenger and servant on your behalf; give me a new heart and humble, loving hands like yours.

ADJUSTING THE PATTERN OF YOUR DAY
Adopting a daily discipline can seem like a major feat given the demands of family, work, volunteer activities and other obligations. Here are a few reminders to keep in mind:

- Set aside 15-30 minutes each day at the same time of day.
- Find a special place you can set apart for your quiet time.
- Ask family members to honor your commitment and assist you in keeping it.
- If you miss one day, don’t worry. Simply re-engage the routine the next day.

One of my friends awakens well before the rest of her family so that she can have alone time with God. She sits at her kitchen table every morning with her Bible, her journal, and a steaming cup of coffee. I’ve often thought what a faithful example she is setting for her two sons as they tumble out of bed and come looking for their morning cereal. A fellow colleague of mine escapes during the lunch hour and goes to a secluded spot in the church for his devotional time. A long time Bible study friend has a favorite chair in her living room that serves as her holy ground for daily spiritual practices. The most important thing is finding a daily pattern that works well for you.

The Lenten and Easter seasons are the perfect time to adopt new spiritual practices and set a regular prayer and scripture reading routine. For resources or to join a Bible Study or learn more about the Spiritual Exercises, contact the church office.
CONTRIBUTING WRITER: SUSAN FOUST, LIBRARY MEDIA SPECIALIST & AUCTION COORDINATOR AT EMERSON

FPC education partner, Emerson Elementary, opened their doors in 1913 on a site just north of today’s school grounds. To mark this year long celebration, Emerson is planning a benefit event to help raise funds for class field trips. First Presbyterian is invited to their Centennial Jubilee – Silent Auction and dinner on May 2nd from 6pm to 8 pm at Emerson Elementary.

In 1913 Emerson started as a white neighborhood school serving the homes on ‘the hill’, north of downtown. Post war, Emerson served a blended community. When the U.S. Courts ordered desegregation in the early 1970’s Emerson was already naturally integrated with the neighborhood surrounding the school. Emerson served as a model school on how desegregation worked and was visited by delegates from all over the U.S. and internationally.

In 1976 Emerson became Tulsa’s first magnet elementary school, opening to students from throughout the city. In 1977-78 the new Emerson building was opened and there was a wait list to experience the magnet school that emphasized fine arts and individual instruction with an innovative design of open classrooms. Emerson’s unique offerings included a piano laboratory, a potter’s wheel and instruction in dance and drama. They also had a miniature television studio and horticulture program with a greenhouse.

In the late 1990’s Emerson transitioned back to a neighborhood school. Buses pick up children from local shelters including DVIS, Laura Dester Shelter, John 3:16 and Day Center for the Homeless. During this time magnet school money was pulled from Emerson to other schools. Emerson however was determined to keep going and found grant money and started to build corporate partners. Emerson partners help to support weak spots with mentoring to students and helping with the purchase of educational items that otherwise would be purchased by teachers as an out of pocket expense. Three years ago Emerson was under consideration to be one of among fourteen schools to close. With the voices of many alumni and community leaders, Emerson’s doors remained open.

Emerson today is an open concept/classroom school where teachers can stay in touch and have a caring community feeling. Usually with an urban school there is a high turnover of teachers. Not at Emerson. Some teachers have been teaching at Emerson for over 20 years and many of their children have attended Emerson.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP WITH EMERSON’S CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION:

• Attend the Silent Auction and Dinner on May 2nd from 6-8 at Emerson. Dinner is $10 for ages 12 and up and $5.00 for 11 and under. Tickets are available at the door and on-line at http://emerson.tulsaschools.org/ via Paypal. Funds raised will be used for educational field trips.

CINDY JOHNSON

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• Donate items for silent auction baskets
• Volunteer to help serve dinner (by Libby Auld of Elote, one of Emerson’s graduates) or help with the auction.
• Please email Cindy DeVore at cindy_devore@hotmail.com if you can assist with volunteering or basket donations or call Cindy at 918-630-2636. ■

Making a Difference

If you are like me before I became a lunch buddy, you might not know Emerson exists even though it is five minutes from our church.

I have discovered that to know Emerson is to love Emerson. Its students and staff face tremendous challenges. Every child I have met has a story to tell that will break your heart. Drug addicted parents, imprisoned parents, boys without fathers. Many children are living below the poverty line.

Emerson has recently been labeled a low performing school but if you attend any of these events you will see it as anything but that. It is a vibrant, safe place with heroic teachers and staff working every day against monumental odds. They need our help.

As a lunch buddy I often wonder if I am making a difference. Do I know for a fact that I am? No, I don’t, but I do believe I am called by God to try. Won’t you try too?

-Ken Cox
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

from the church office of hospitalized members at north or south Tulsa-area hospitals. Her hospital visits always begin in the same way — with prayer. Robson prays that her words will be pleasing to God and helpful to the patient. Her visits normally last about 10 to 15 minutes as she talks with patients about their concerns and prays with them. Following the visit, she prepares a report for the pastors.

Other volunteer chaplains include: Pam Farris, Carol Mitchell, Janie Long, Patricia Hall, Co Edwards, Duff Points, Bill Wiles, Dave Tomassi, Sheri Allen, Paula Peterson, and Mark Peterson. The minister liaison is Elaine Cervini.

Robson says that the best volunteer chaplains are good listeners. New volunteers shadow more experienced volunteer chaplains until they become comfortable making visits alone and all volunteers undergo training from pastors twice a year. To learn more about this important program, contact the church office.

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New Members - February 2014

SHANE & FRAN BEVEL, GRAHAM
SAM COLLINS
MATTHEW CRADDOCK
EDITH FAVELL
DICK HANNA & DEEANN PAISLEY
NANCY HASWELL
CYNTHIA HILL-MERIWETHER
MIKE HOPKINS & LINDA BARRY-HOPKINS
GEORGE KAKOMA
GABRIEL KAKOMA
MARSHA ROSE KIMBREL
EILEEN LEONARD
RANDY & ANN MADSEN
DAVID & CATHIE MCINTOSH
CHARLES MOUNTFORD
KELVIN NJOKI
NANCY STRIMEL
BRAD & KATY SWAN
FARRELL UMHOLTZ, JR.
LAURA WENTRCEK
VICKY WILCOXEN

Questions? Check out the Inquirers’ Class!

Are you interested in learning more about membership and the life and history of our church and the Presbyterian tradition? The next Inquirers’ Class will be offered Sundays, April 27, May 4, 11 and 18 in room 206 (across from Miller Library), 9:15 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

If interested, please contact Patricia Hall, 918-301-1028, phall@firstchurchtulsa.org
Since 2009, First Presbyterian Church has given 129 shallow wells to villages throughout Malawi, Zambia and Tanzania through Marion Medical Mission. These wells have been providing clean, safe drinking water to thousands of villagers, but there are still countless more who have no access to clean drinking water ever day.

Women and children bear the primary responsibility for getting water in most households. It can take several hours each day just going to and from the nearest water supply that is not even safe to drink. They have no option but to drink from lakes and streams polluted with animal and human waste and parasites. Not only is this water unsafe to drink, but this time-consuming chore takes away from hours that could be used for an income-generating job, caring for family, or attending school.

While water troubles may be hard to imagine for those of us blessed to live in the United States, each year, members of First Presbyterian Church get to help raise awareness of this serious issue and try to help!

For the two weeks of April 6-19, the church invites all members of the congregation to participate in the H2O Project. For the two weeks before Easter, everyone is encouraged to give up all special beverages besides water. Participants keep track of the beverages they decline, and instead of for their coffee, sodas, milk etc., they donate that money to the H2O Project. Everyone is given a wristband to help remind them of their fast, and a business card beverage tracker to help them keep track of their progress. Don’t worry about tracking the exact dollar amount for each beverage; most people just apply a $1 average per drink.

It can challenging to give up special beverages for two weeks, but many people who have participated come away with a deeper appreciation for the blessings of the safe and easy access to water. It is so easy to take it for granted! Some participants also make it a spiritual practice to pray for those who need safe water every time they give up a beverage.

“I spent the first week telling everyone how miserable I was. The second week was easier. I missed coffee a little less,” explained First Church member Kelly Brown, ”I started to think about water and what I would do if I didn’t have it. Now, THAT would be sacrifice! And that, of course, was the point… The money we gave after two weeks was enough to provide five people with clean water to last them a lifetime. A lifetime”.

For those who aren’t quite ready to make the leap to giving up special beverages entirely, the H2O Project can still be an enlightening experience. Some participants choose to still drink coffee, sodas, etc., but they keep track of each beverage, and donate accordingly at the end of the week. One “self-admitted caffeine addict” shared that “this option still helps me to be mindful of my availability to clean water and make a difference for those who are not as fortunate.”

All donations will be used to dig shallow wells in Malawi, Zambia or Tanzania by the Marion Medical Mission. For just $400.00, we can provide an African village of approximately 150 people with a sustainable source of safe drinking water. This is a self-help program.

• Marion Medical Mission partner with the African communities at the grassroots level.
• People from the village dig the well, make the brick and provide sand and stone.
• Marion Medical Mission supplies only what the villages cannot.
• The shallow well is inexpensive, technologically appropriate and can be built in the most remote areas.
• It is easy to repair and even the extreme poor can afford to maintain it.
• Everything is purchased, manufactured, maintained and administered in Africa by Africans.

“I’m going to do it again,” shared Brown, “I would encourage everyone to participate in this project. I would suggest you actually give up what you are normally purchasing – not because misery loves company – but because even a small sacrifice can be illuminating to how we are blessed and how we can be a blessing others.”
Celebrating Easter with young children

As the parents of young children, my husband and I find that Easter can be confusing. In a culture that is promoting bunnies, candy and eggs, it is very easy to let this be the focus of our Easter morning celebration. How do I explain that Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead? With the inevitable questions about death and the fear that comes with it, I’m not sure how to best share the true message of Easter in our home.

First off, don’t panic! It’s easy to worry about not having the ‘right’ answer or that you will ‘mess up.’ Don’t. Take time to clarify what they are really asking (is this about Jesus’ death, is this about their own fear of death) and what they are feeling, and then speak openly to their question. One of the most important things that you can do is simply to take your kids seriously; take their questions seriously and engage them in their curiosity.

Second, tell the truth. Authors Henry Cloud and John Townsend write in their book Raising Great Kids, “Reality is a place where things do not always go as we would like…We were created for Eden, not a fallen world. So our children still wish for things to be perfect and ideal. Learning to accept both good and bad enables your children to have a firm grounding in reality and to create a life that will help them pursue what’s left of Eden without giving up along the way. If you empathize with your children’s loss, hurt, or failure, they can face the reality of the loss and then grieve and let go of whatever was valued and gone. Those who mourn get comforted and then they are able to go on. (Matthew 5:4)”

In the excerpt above from The Bible in Pictures for Little Eyes, Kenneth Taylor invites kids to imagine what it would be like hanging with nails in their hands. It is horrible. It makes you sad. It might make you mad. It is reality. We don’t need to water it down. Tell the truth. Jesus died a very horrible death. He didn’t “go to sleep” (well then, can we go wake him up?) or “go away” (when is he coming back?) or “pass on” (to where?) and we didn’t “lose him” (how do you lose someone??). Jesus died. He died because he loves us. We have done things that separate us from God, things that deserve punishment. But God loves us so much that Jesus decided to come and face our punishment. It hurt, but he did it because he loves us.

But remember that when you tell the truth, tell the whole truth. Death is an enemy but it is an enemy that doesn’t win (like Voldemort in the Harry Potter books or the Witch in The Chronicles of Narnia). Jesus doesn’t stay dead. This is what we celebrate on Easter. The story doesn’t end with death. It ends with life. And it ends with a promise. Jesus said that he would come back to life and he did, and Jesus says that even after we die we will live again with him, and we can trust God to keep His promise. It is a happy ending!

My final encouragement is to tell the story simply and honestly. Invite their questions and point them towards what is true: Jesus died, Jesus rose again, and Jesus loves them.

—Rev. Daniel Hutchinson

RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

Raising Great Kids, by Henry Cloud and John Townsend
It’s OK to Cry, by H. Norman Wright
The Bible In Pictures for Little Eyes, by Kenneth Taylor
Easter Bunny, Are You For Real?, by Harold Myra
Calendar of Events

APRIL 1: FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH SCHOLARSHIP DEADLINE

APRIL 1: NEW PRECEPT BIBLE STUDY BEGINS
9:30 a.m. in the Kirkland Library.
Join us as we dive into *Lord, I Need Answers*. This book is designed to take you daily through the essentials for spiritual growth. The work is done within the book itself and the study will last 4 weeks. The book, *Lord, I Need Answers* by Kay Arthur and David Arthur will be available for purchase at the Book Corner for $13. To be a part of this group or to learn more, please contact Denise Rounds at 918-301-1039 or denisedrounds@gmail.com.

APRIL 6: EXODUS PARFAIT FUNDRAISER IN ATRIUM

APRIL 6, 13, 20, 27: HOW CREATION REVEALS GOD’S GREATNESS
The Cornerstone class invites you to join them in April to hear Jerry McCoy, physics professor at the University of Tulsa. He will be teaching, “How Creation Reveals God’s Greatness.” The 4 week class will consider the size, age, and building blocks of the universe and what they say about our God. We’ll look at the laws that govern creation as well as how everything works together in this complex architecture of life. The group will also engage in dynamic group discussion on topics such as reconciling faith and science. The Cornerstone class meets every Sunday at 9:30 a.m. in Room E102. For more information contact Ricky Jones (918-607-5987 or ricky@tannerbaitshop.com).

APRIL 11: 8 DATES - LET’S TALK TECHNOLOGY
What parents need to know about how technology is impacting our kids (and our homes) in both positive and negative ways. Facilitated by Shannon Bair. Room 104, 6:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. *Child-care provided by reservation only. Reservations needed by the Tuesday before. Call Lauren at 918.301.1009.

APRIL 13: PALM SUNDAY

APRIL 17 MAUNDY THURSDAY WORSHIP AT 7:30 P.M. WITH LIVING LAST SUPPER

APRIL 17-20 EASTER PRAYER VIGIL

APRIL 18: GOOD FRIDAY WORSHIP IN KERR CHAPEL AT NOON

APRIL 19: SPRING FESTIVAL
APRIL 19 from 11-1PM
Camp Loughridge
EASTER ACTIVITY AT 11:10AM
GRADED EGG HUNT AT 11:30AM
Bring your baskets and a picnic lunch!
Cookies and drinks provided!

APRIL 20: EASTER WORSHIP AT 6:30 (CAMP LOUGHRIDGE); 8:00; 8:30; 11:00

APRIL 26: DAY OF CARE

MAY 10: YOUTH VARIETY SHOW